

National Court Reporters Association and HLAA Join Forces to Preserve the Stories of Veterans with Hearing Loss

By April Weiner

The National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) and HLAA are both longtime members of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) Disability Advisory Council. NCRA is the national professional organization representing the court reporting and captioning profession, and as such, has worked with HLAA to shape captioning policy at the FCC and support HLAA's mission for many years.

In 2016, the National Court Reporters Foundation (NCRF), the charitable arm of NCRA, created the Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project, an initiative to interview veterans with hearing loss for the Library of Congress Veterans History Project (VHP). This new project presented another opportunity for NCRA to join forces with HLAA.

"When we created the Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project, naturally we wanted to partner with HLAA because we were already familiar with the work the organization has done to educate, provide support, and advocate on behalf of veterans, and all people, with hearing loss," said B. J. Shorak, deputy executive director of NCRF. "We were thrilled that HLAA felt the same way about our project!"

HLAA even offered to host a "VHP day" in which multiple veterans were interviewed, an offer NCRF gratefully accepted. Five veterans with varying degrees of hearing loss shared their stories at the launch of the Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project at HLAA's Bethesda, Maryland headquarters on February 18, 2017:

Fred Becchetti, who served in the Army Air Corps in World War II

Edward Connor, who served in the Air Force during World War II

David McWatters, who served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War

Charles Rupprecht, who served in the Navy during the Vietnam War

James Whitcraft, who served in the Air Force during the Persian Gulf War and other conflicts

(Rupprecht and Whitcraft were interviewed over the phone.)

Each veteran was interviewed by a volunteer while a court reporter took down the interview to transcribe for the VHP. For those who were interviewed on-site, there was another volunteer providing CART for the veteran.

"Veterans always thank the court reporters who capture and transcribe their stories at events like the Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project," said NCRA Immediate Past President Tiva Wood, FAPR, RDR, CMRS, a freelance court reporter based in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, who interviewed McWatters and Connor. "But truly, we are the ones who are thankful for being given the opportunity to honor them by ensuring that their stories become part of history forever through the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. Being able to capture and preserve the stories of our war heroes who are hard of hearing takes a combined effort of the skills of court reporters and captioners and highlights the important role they play in allowing this group of veterans to tell their stories."

NCRA members have been listening and taking down the stories of veterans since NCRF partnered with

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Retired Staff Sgt. and HLAA2017 keynote speaker Shilo Harris (front right), who received life-threatening injuries while serving in Iraq, is interviewed by retired Lt. Lynn Hinckley (front left). Cecilee G. Wilson (back right) provides CART while Amber Fraass (back left) transcribes.

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the Library of Congress in 2003 to have court reporters transcribe the stories from their collection of now more than 100,000 oral histories. In 2007, the VHP expanded the program by asking members of the public to preserve the stories of veterans who hadn't yet recorded their histories. NCRF members answered the call and have been interviewing veterans both one-on-one and at VHP day events ever since. To date, NCRF has submitted more than 4,100 transcripts to the VHP.

After creating the Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project, NCRF received an Innovation Grant from the American Society of Association Executives Foundation, enabling NCRF to extend the reach of the project by traveling to several organizations' annual meetings to interview veterans, including HLAA2017 in Salt Lake City in June.

At HLAA2017, NCRF interviewed seven veterans, including convention keynote speaker Staff Sgt. (Ret.) Shilo Harris, who lost both ears and sustained other serious injuries serving in the U.S. Army during Operation Iraqi Freedom; and HLAA Board of Trustees Chair Don Doherty, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps and lost his hearing in the Vietnam War.

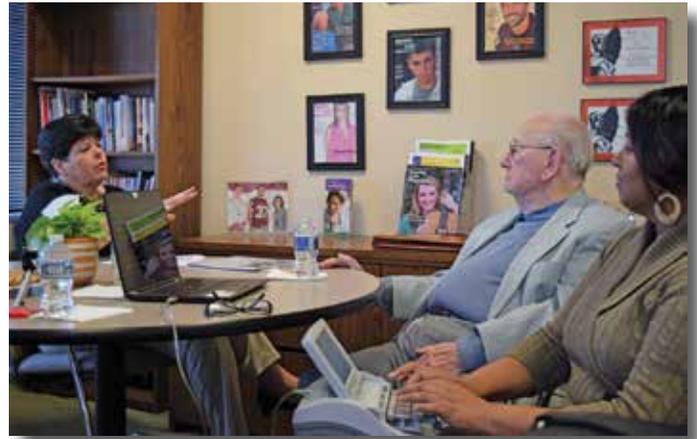
Other veterans interviewed during the convention included:

Mike Wehman, who served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War

Ron Tallman, who served in the U.S. Navy, including during the Vietnam and first Gulf Wars



HLAA Board of Trustees Chairperson and retired Marine Corps combat veteran Don Doherty (blue shirt) is interviewed by HLAA Board Member Patrick Holkins (white shirt). Phoebe Moorhead (left) provides CART while Amber Fraass (right) transcribes.



Tiva Wood (left) interviews Edward Connor while Michelle Houston provides CART.

Gerald "Jerry" Hutch, who served in the U.S. Air Force during the Cold War/pre-Vietnam era
Louis Shaup, who served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War
Randal "Randy" Nelson, who served in the U.S. Army during both Gulf Wars

In addition to sharing the realities of war for the VHP, the Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project sheds light on hearing loss, one of the most common service-related injuries due to constant exposure to loud noises in training and in combat. This project allows veterans to share their struggles with hearing loss, in the hopes of effecting change in the treatment, education, and prevention of hearing loss.

"If it isn't written down, it did not happen," said retired Lt. Lynn Hinckley, who served 26 years with the U.S. Army National Guard and volunteered to interview Harris and Nelson. "My personal takeaway is that stories are important and allow us to pass on our heritage. Personal stories are just that, personal; they carry a power that nothing else can match. This project provides an opportunity for non-veterans to get a feel for what military life is like. This is information that would have died with the veteran if not for this project."

The Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project is ongoing. If you are a veteran who would like to share your story for the VHP, NCRF can coordinate a local court reporter and captioner to take down the interview. To learn more about the Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project, or NCRF, please visit ncra.org/ncrf. **HLM**

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