

LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!

The Patriots Project crew is about to record your life.

In November, 2014, Hugh Lessig, Military Affairs Editor for the Daily Press, was the Veterans Day speaker. Lessig said that although veterans are often reluctant to talk about their experiences, they should do so, as when they do "their stories are a gift to everyone," resonating with people and families. Recognizing the wealth of stories waiting to be told at Patriots Colony, Lessig strongly encouraged Dave Lester, Hal Campbell and Dick Sklar to consider recording these stories. The ball was put in Dick Sklar's court and that night the Patriots Project was born.

The primary purpose of this committee is to record as many histories of Patriots Colony residents for their families and for use in programs at Patriots Colony and for the Special Collection Section at William & Mary. What started out as "war stories" has expanded to life reflections that include early years and retirement. Over and over writers, visiting speakers, pastors and others say that there is a virtual goldmine of stories to be found at Patriots Colony.

Of course the first step in any project is to form a committee. The original group included: Dave Lester, Larry Humes, Dudley Orr, Bob Schweizer, Liz Shwiller, Hal Campbell, Bob Gremp, Anne Nelson, Rod Bubeck, Miriam Lamb and chair – Dick Sklar. (Shwiller, Campbell and Nelson are no longer part of the group.) Other helpers over time have been Joy Hudgins, Bobbie Garver and Sue Waldeck.

Once the committee was formed, assigning various duties was the next order of business. Sklar made the initial contact with the Special Collection Section at William & Mary's Swem Library to solicit their help with our project. What William & Mary did for us was to provide a camera, sound booms, and a computer plus training in showing us how to operate them. In return, raw videos of the various interviews would be given to William & Mary for use by students and faculty as a resource about military members, their families, and other residents of Patriots Colony. The next step was to locate interviewers and they are Rod Bubeck for Navy residents, Dave Lester for Air Force, and Dick Sklar for Army members and others not in the military. The biographical information provided by the residents leads to questions asked by the interviewers.

Once the committee decides who and how many residents will be interviewed, Tom Russell, "the paper man," sends out a biographical sheet to be completed and a general information letter from the Committee Chair, along with a photo release form. When completed and returned to Russell, he forwards them to Dale Hruby. Hruby then reserves the room, contacts

the interviewers – Lester, Bubeck or Sklar – who will then notify the scheduled interviewees with the date and time, along with asking the questions at filming time.

Hruby also notifies the camera men – Bob Gremp and Dudley Orr – who will do the actual filming and make up an audience of three with the interviewer. Once the video is completed, a copy is sent to Larry Humes (a most excellent editor) who inserts photos and performs magic on the overall video. Raw copies are downloaded to a hard drive and then given to Sklar who delivers them to the Swem Library. A copy is also given to each interviewee.

One of the first documentaries was done by William & Mary, in Liz Shwiller's home, and was the awesome story of WWII resident, George Loving. This was followed by other WWII videos of Ellen Morton and Ruth Rowland, both widows and military members, and widows Dottie Friedman and Nancy Bull.

After three years of being the chairperson for the Patriots Project Committee, Sklar has turned it over to Lew Mabie. Although Mabie will be overseeing all areas of the committee, calling for meetings, sending out Patriots Project information letters and emails, Sklar will continue on the committee as an interviewer and William & Mary liaison.

Almost all interviewees commented that it was fun, surprising and yes, they all came away saying, "I forgot something." Sometimes, like for my video, Humes was able to insert a few comments and photos.

So far, 68 interviews have been done with more to come. When you receive the call, seriously consider recording your story for family, for friends and as a part of the collective history of those times. Mabie gave one of the best reasons for recording your history. He had always planned to get family information from his father and grandfather; but before he could do that, his father died young and his grandfather couldn't remember.

This mini view of your history can provide enjoyment for you, your family and others. You could be the next star in the spotlight.



Front row: Lew Mabie, Liz Shwiller, Dick Sklar.

Back row: Dudley Orr, Rod Bubeck, Larry Humes, Tom Russell, Bob Gremp, & Dave Lester. Not shown: present member Dale Hrubi; and past participants Hal Campbell, Ann Nelson, Joy Hudgins & Sue Waldeck.

- Joanne Dettmann -