CASE STUDIES
EDITOR'S NOTE

With this issue The Midwestern Archivist offers the case study as a new feature. A case study describes and analyzes specific activities, generally based on the experiences of a single institution, dealing with a routine archival function or a special project or problem. It describes the project or activity and assesses the results in sufficient detail to allow for comparison to similar experiences elsewhere and thus helps form the basis for subsequent research on, and analysis of, related projects, programs, or problems.

As Francis Blouin affirmed in his article on the value of the case-study method in archival education (American Archivist, January 1978), the work of archivists consists of applying a relatively few general principles to specific situations. Case studies can provide an opportunity to observe this process in a variety of institutions. They can illuminate the means of analysis and decision-making about archival questions. Experienced archivists, as well as newcomers, can benefit from reports on the application of established principles and methods to specific settings.

This journal and others have published articles in the past which fit the criteria for a case study. However, by giving prominence to this particular format, the editorial board hopes to promote its refinement and its use as an educational tool. The two cases which follow originated as articles submitted during the time in which the editorial board was considering this new format. They offer an illuminating comparison of two survey and documentation projects in very different sets of circumstances. The board welcomes comments and suggestions on the case-study format as well as submissions of cases for future publication. Case-study guidelines are available from the board chair.
ESTABLISHING A VIETNAM WAR VETERANS ARCHIVES

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In January 1981, the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, entered into an agreement with the Vietnam War Veterans Archives and History Center of Santa Rosa, California. The Department agreed to become the repository for records collected by the Center, documenting the experience of individual soldiers during the Vietnam War. This article will consider the history of the project and the various strategies devised to survey and collect materials, examining the relationship between an archival repository and an advocacy group in collecting contemporary records.

The Department of Manuscripts and University Archives at Cornell University was established in 1942 as the Collection of Regional History to document everyday life in the region. In 1951, the focus was expanded by the formation of a university archives program. The extent of departmental holdings was increased further in the mid-1960’s when collecting efforts were expanded, particularly in the areas of agriculture, architecture, city and regional planning, medicine and health care services, and politics. In 1972, the Cornell Program in Oral History was merged with the archival program to form the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives. Holdings of the Department total over 25,000 cubic feet, and present storage facilities offer space for substantial collection growth. The staff of the Department includes four archivists, ten support staff, and student assistants.

The Vietnam War Veterans Archives and History Center, as the veterans’ project was ultimately called, was conceived and implemented by the efforts of two concerned individuals, one of whom was a veteran himself, under the auspices of a veterans’ group. Initially seen as a library, the Center’s development into an archival project and its association with an established repository was largely a response to requirements of federal funding agencies.

The project was initiated by members of Flower of the Dragon, a community-based veterans’ organization in northern California, formed in 1973 to conduct various counseling and small business development projects. The work with individual veterans and their families revealed that many veterans had items from their war days. Some were interested in having a place where these materials could be maintained and made available to people who wanted to know about the experiences of soldiers in Vietnam. In 1979, the group submitted to various foundations a “concept paper” for a Vietnam Veterans War Memorial Library. At that time, the goal of the project was the provision of public access to information on the experience of the indi-
indual veteran through "a broadly conceived collection of personal narratives ... the core of which will be oral histories. From the enlisted person to the general, the veteran will be provided the opportunity to articulate his or her own experience of the war, and a composite of these experiences will present a comprehensive overview of the war's military and social history." The plans included a major oral history project; the acquisition of a comprehensive collection of written personal accounts including letters, journals, and diaries as well as published works; and the purchase of a small reference collection.

During the course of 1979, a grant proposal was submitted to the Special Projects Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities for what had now become an archives project. As that proposal states, "Military reports, governmental documents, journalistic accounts and historical evaluations are the bulk of what information is currently available to us — and they are primarily summaries, spectator, and second-hand accounts.... Currently there is no major public archive which focuses on the Vietnam War or Vietnam veterans. Vietnam veterans have been reluctant to contribute to the collecting programs the military has initiated and ... universities seem to have only minor special collections of this nature." The original project had five major goals: 1) to plan and conduct a non-repository records survey of individual veterans and veterans' organizations, 2) to develop a core collection of oral history interviews, 3) to establish a national advisory board for the project, 4) to develop a variety of public education programs, and 5) to establish a formal relationship with an institution to serve as a repository for the collection. NEH reviewers were favorably impressed with the proposal in general, but felt that the project was too large and diffuse in scope. Under a planning grant of $17,496, awarded for a six-month period, project personnel visited several repositories and held discussions with veterans' organizations and other funding agencies. They confirmed both the lack of any major subject collections on the Vietnam veteran and the high level of interest and support for a project of this nature. Another result of these visits and discussions was a shift in focus away from developing an independent special library and towards a more clearly defined archival project. The role of Flower of the Dragon was to locate and collect records rather than to administer an archives or found a new repository. However, the oral history project and the development of public programs using primary resources were maintained as objectives.

The NEH Special Projects Division then awarded the project an additional $25,000 nine-month planning grant for March - November, 1980. During that period a National Advisory Board was established, and a one-day meeting was held in Washington. Members of the board included historians, journalists, and others involved in the study of the war or of veterans, as well as professional archivists. The group discussed the range of issues raised by the project. The members of the group agreed on the significance of veterans' records. One member stated, "We should collect anything and everything on the war." The need for a permanent repository was affirmed. There were discussions of funding needs, of the survey forms and methodology, and of the oral history program. A report of the meeting was compiled and distributed to participants.

Under this second planning grant, a pilot records survey was conducted in order to test survey forms and methods and to obtain information about
the nature of primary sources on the Vietnam War that were currently in private hands. For this pilot survey, questionnaires were mailed to a total of 40 organizations and individuals. The sample included current Vietnam veteran-related organizations, selected veterans, and other individuals with national reputations as activists in Vietnam veterans issues. Twenty-six organizations responded, half of them reporting that they had records. Responses were also received from six individuals, all of whom had materials. This survey showed that a wide variety of Vietnam War veterans records did exist and had not yet been given to any repository. Project personnel concluded that a mailed survey questionnaire could produce effective results.

During this time, an application was submitted to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) for a one-year project to conduct the non-repository records survey in order to locate Vietnam War veterans’ papers. An Archival Advisory Board, composed of archivists from the National Advisory Board, would help find a potential repository, compile a list of current and defunct Vietnam veteran organizations, and compile a list of individuals likely to own or have responsibility for Vietnam veterans’ papers. However, the primary goal of the project was to locate personal papers and organizational records currently in private hands through the use of the mailed survey questionnaire. The basis of the survey would consist of lists of organizations and individuals which were to be compiled, internal networks within the veteran community, and contacts available through supportive programs, as well as use of articles in major newspapers, national magazines, and veterans’ newsletters. Through these means, an estimated three thousand organizations and individuals could be directly surveyed by the project staff with a mailed questionnaire. The procedure ultimately chosen, however, was one using members of veterans’ networks to distribute large numbers of questionnaires in person or by including them in mailings sent by the organizations for other purposes.

In late October 1980, the NHPRC notified the Vietnam War Veterans Archives and History Center, as the project was now called, that it had been awarded a conditional grant of $37,000 for the survey project. Before funds would be released, the project staff had to secure a formal written commitment from an archival institution agreeing to become the repository for materials located by the survey. Through experience under the two planning grants, the staff was aware of the problems in obtaining an agreement with a repository before the survey results had been received. Project staff had previously visited a number of repositories but no decisions had been made. In November of 1980, Linda Curry, the project archivist, held a series of discussions with staff members at Cornell University. For a number of reasons, a cooperative relationship was attractive. Cornell has one of the largest Southeast Asia programs and library collections in the country. The archival program was strong, with adequate facilities and stable support. Faculty and staff showed a high degree of enthusiasm for the project, and the veteran community generally perceived Cornell as politically neutral. At Cornell, efforts were made through formal and informal meetings to ascertain the interests of faculty and other potential users in such a collection. The Library, because of its Southeast Asia collections, was primarily interested in records documenting events in Vietnam itself. Other faculty members seemed more concerned about the experience of veterans after the war.
After considerable internal discussion about the advisability of undertaking a new collecting program in cooperation with a relatively unknown group based a considerable distance away, the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives responded with a limited commitment. The Department would become the repository for the Vietnam War Veterans' Archives and History Center project under conditions which included accessioning records collected by the project, not exceeding a total of 150 cubic feet for the first year (an amount deemed to be manageable for accessioning and processing); appraising records to determine which documents should be retained and which should be returned to the donor; and providing permanent maintenance and reference service. The Vietnam Veterans Archives and History Center was to be responsible for collection development field work and the actual physical transfer of material. In December 1982, both participants would reassess the entire project and decide on the future of cooperative efforts based on the survey results, the quality and quantity of records accessioned, the research use potential of the records, and the resources necessary to maintain and service the collection. It was also stated that Cornell could not expand its commitment of resources without external support.

With Cornell’s commitment, NHPRC funds were made available for the records survey to begin. The first few months of the survey project were spent refining the final version of the survey form, an 8 1/2-by-14 inch double-sided questionnaire (Figure 1, Figure 2a. and 2b.). The questionnaire asked about the military background of veterans and the types and quantities of war-related materials that they held. Over forty-seven thousand questionnaires were ultimately distributed through offices that had agreed to pass them out to clients, employees, and/or members. The bulk of the questionnaires went to veterans' affairs offices at state and junior colleges across the country. Other large distributors included the Veterans Administration Vet Centers located in major cities and the National Task Force on Agent Orange. These networks were seen as complementary because veterans' offices tended to provide access to latter-period Vietnam veterans with no emphasis on combat experience, the Vet Centers provided access to combat veterans with no emphasis on time period, and the Agent Orange Task Force to early-period Vietnam veterans with an emphasis on combat experience. Additional questionnaires were distributed by other organizations including the Vietnam Veterans of America, The National Congress of Puerto Rican Veterans, and Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

During the summer of 1981, the project and Cornell prepared a brochure to describe the project to potential donors and to answer some of the basic questions they might have. During the same period, there were major organizational changes. Because of concern over governmental funding cuts to Flower of the Dragon, the staff of the Vietnam War Veterans Archives and History Center decided to change corporate affiliation to the Center for Veteran Studies, a national consortium of researchers on issues regarding the Vietnam veterans. The latter group was expected to be in a better position to sponsor fundraising efforts.

In September 1981 the Archival Advisory Board (which now included staff of the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives at Cornell) met during the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in
Dear Participant:

The enclosed survey questionnaire is being distributed by the Vietnam War Veterans History and Archives Center (VWHAC) as an independent effort to document the Vietnam War from the veterans' perspective. VWHAC is sponsored by Flower of the Dragon, a community-based veterans service organization; The Center for Veterans' Studies, a national consortium of researchers, clinicians and policy makers; and a National Advisory Board composed of Vietnam veteran activists, Vietnam War historians and writers, humanitarians, and archivists.

We are conducting this joint effort to ensure that the individual experiences of those who served is not overlooked when the Vietnam War is assessed or overshadowed by the mountains of official records which only tell part of the story.

The survey questionnaire is designed to locate materials that describe the first-hand experience of the war. We then will assist in the transferral of materials people are willing to donate either to Cornell University, which will act as home for the central collection, or to another place of the donor's choosing. Names will be kept confidential between us and the selected institution. There are also many other archival methods of ensuring our survey participants' privacy, so please let us know if you have any special concerns.

We tried to make the questionnaire as clear and non-time consuming as possible. Please feel free to attach another sheet if we have not given enough room for your answers or to include additional information not covered in the questionnaire. We want to reach as many people as possible, so if you don't have any materials yourself, but know someone who does, please pass it along to them or let us know who they are.

If you have any questions, please give us a call or write.

Your immediate response will be appreciated. A self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience. Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this important joint effort. Your participation will help to make the Vietnam War Veterans Archives a truly representative collection.

Sincerely,

Peter T. Cameron
Director

Linda Heath Curry
Administrator/Archivist

Figure 1

Berkeley. At this meeting, theoretical questions about the project and about the relationship between the Vietnam Veterans Archives and Cornell were discussed. One result was a decision to reduce further survey distribution and to concentrate on following up survey responses. The staff at Cornell prepared a set of donor instructions, a certificate-of-gift form, and a biographical information sheet, which were then reviewed and modified by the project staff in Santa Rosa and by the Advisory Board.
1. Name: _____________________________ 2. Phone Number: ( ) ________________

3. Current Address: ________________________________________________________________

4. Permanent Address: ______________________________________________________________

5. PLEASE CHECK each category which describes you personally:
   - Vietnam War Veteran
   - Vietnam Era Veteran
   - Career Military
   - Civilian in Vietnam (please explain):
   - Other (please explain):

6. Which state did you live in before entering the service?

7. PLEASE CHECK the branch of service you were in:
   - Army
   - Navy
   - Marines
   - Air Force
   - Coast Guard

8. What rank(s) did you hold in Vietnam? ____________________________________________

9. What was your job specialty or duties in Vietnam? _________________________________

10. What unit did you belong to in Vietnam? __________________________________________

11. Dates in service: From __________ To __________

12. Dates in Vietnam: From __________ To __________ [ ] Never in Vietnam

13. Were you in combat? [ ] Yes, for __________ months [ ] No

14. Were you drafted? [ ] Yes [ ] No

15. Which campaigns/operations, if any, were you in? _________________________________

16. What was your age in Vietnam? ________________

17. What ethnic group do you belong to? _____________________________________________

18. Do you have any letters that were written by you or someone else in Vietnam?  
   [ ] Yes, I have about __________ altogether. [ ] No

19. Do you have any letters describing the readjustment you or someone else experienced  
    after returning home from Vietnam? [ ] Yes, I have about __________ altogether. [ ] No

20. Which of the following items do you now have in your possession? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:
   - Diaries, Journals
   - Orders, Plans, Maps, Reports
   - Unit Histories, Handbooks
   - GI Underground Newsletters
   - Tape Recordings
   - Calling Cards
   - VC Papers, Vietnamese Books
   - Other (please describe): __________________________________________________________________

21. A. Do you have any photographs, slides or films taken in Vietnam? [ ] Yes, I have about  
     __________ photographs, __________ slides, and/or __________ films. [ ] No

22. B. If Yes, which of the following kinds of pictures do you have? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:
   - On Base, Routine Duties
   - Patrol/Maneuvers
   - Combat Action
   - Hospital/Wounded
   - S.E. Asian Cities/Countryside (where?): ___________________________________________
   - Other (please describe): __________________________________________________________________

NOTE: QUESTIONS 6-16 ARE DESIGNED TO TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR VIETNAM WAR EXPERIENCE.  
IF YOU ARE NOT A VIETNAM VETERAN, BUT RECEIVED MATERIALS FROM ONE, PLEASE TRY TO  
DESCRIBE HIS/HER EXPERIENCE IN THIS SECTION.

Figure 2a.
22. Which, if any, of the following kinds of unpublished writing do you have on the Vietnam War experience (besides diaries, journals or letters)? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:

- [ ] Fiction
- [ ] Non-Fiction
- [ ] Poetry
- [ ] Theater or Movie Script
- Other (please describe):

23. Which, if any, of the following kinds of original artwork do you have on the Vietnam War experience? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:

- [ ] Drawings
- [ ] Paintings
- [ ] Music
- [ ] Other (please describe):

24. Do you have any mementoes, uniforms, medals, or other artifacts from the Vietnam War?

[ ] Yes, I have ____________________________ [ ] No

25. Do you have any written or taped interviews, newspaper clippings, or magazine articles about your experience in Vietnam (or about the Vietnam veteran whose materials you have)?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

26. If all this material were put together, about how much space would it take?

- [ ] 1 shoebox or less
- [ ] 2-3 shoeboxes
- [ ] More than 1 file drawer (please specify ___ file drawers)

27. Have you already donated any of your materials to a library, archive, historical society, museum, or other repository?

[ ] Yes (please give the repository’s name, city & state):

28. Do you know of any (other) repositories that have collected Vietnam veterans materials?

[ ] Yes (please give their names, cities & states):

29A. Do you have any materials you would be willing to donate to the VIETNAM WAR VETERANS ARCHIVES (located at Cornell University)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Maybe [ ] No

8. If Maybe, please explain your situation:

29B. If No, is there anywhere else you would like to donate them? (please give repository’s name, city & address):

30. WHEN WE READ OVER YOUR ANSWERS TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WE STILL MAY NOT BE ABLE TO TELL IF YOU HAVE ANYTHING YOU THINK SHOULD GET SPECIAL ATTENTION FROM US. Which, if any, of your materials do you feel has special interest or importance (either to you personally or to other people who haven’t seen it yet)?

31. Would you be willing to personally distribute these survey questionnaires to people you know who have Vietnam War veterans materials?

[ ] Yes, I could pass out _______ questionnaires [ ] No, can’t help this way

32. PLEASE LIST the people, if any, to whom you would like us to mail a questionnaire.

[ ] Don’t know of any

Name: ________________________________
Street Address: ________________________ City: ______ State: ______
Name: ________________________________
Street Address: ________________________ City: ______ State: ______
Name: ________________________________
Street Address: ________________________ City: ______ State: ______
(Please attach an additional sheet, if necessary, to answer this or any other questions.)
By this time, responses were beginning to come in and selection criteria were necessary. The responses could be divided into three general categories: No materials/No donation, Yes materials/No donation, and Yes materials/Yes donation. A small proportion of individuals responded, about two percent of the total number of questionnaires sent to distributors. Because most of these questionnaires had been sent in bulk to distribution points, it is likely that most were never actually given to individuals. In view of this low rate of response, selection criteria could be simple. All respondents who listed a variety of materials and stated no serious reservations about donating materials were sent letters requesting donation. A number of forms indicated photographs only. Many of these veterans were willing to loan their photographs so that copies could be made. Because no funds were available for copying photographs, these forms were temporarily set aside. All responses were acknowledged and a sheet of suggestions for home care of various kinds of materials was sent to all respondents. During the last two months of the funding period, about 250 collections were requested for donation. At Cornell, a staff member accessioned and processed collections as they came in. Project procedures were also clarified. The Vietnam Veterans Archives and History Center provided the cover letter requesting donation of materials; other documents were on Cornell letterhead. Project staff answered general questions and any veteran-related questions; technical questions regarding Cornell's handling of materials and other specific donor arrangements were to be handled by Cornell staff.

NHPRC funding ended in January 1982, and efforts to find continuing sources of funding were unsuccessful. On January 20, the Vietnam Veterans Archives and History Center disbanded. A final report was prepared for the NHPRC, and all the project files were transferred to Cornell. At the time of the project's conclusion, the Archives had received twenty-five small collections (a total of about two cubic feet) of personal papers and other items. Of those collections, four were received as a direct result of the survey. Another two were sent in response to the earlier pilot survey. Most had been collected at Santa Rosa as a result of personal contacts by the project staff. Additional collections have been received since then, from the survey and from other publicity about the project, for a total of forty-four collections (about thirty-one cubic feet). Although collection development efforts have been limited, the project has been integrated into regular operations. The collection has received research use, notably by staff writers at the Boston Publishing Company, for their multi-volume work, The Vietnam Experience, and by WCNY-TV, Syracuse, for a PBS documentary, "Now Tell Us All About the War."

The results can be assessed on a number of levels. As a documentary project, the Vietnam War Veterans Archives acquired at least four major collections: the personal papers of a helicopter pilot; the records of Citizen Soldier, a veterans' anti-war and advocacy group; about 10,000 photographs, mainly official military pictures, collected by an Air Force officer; and, perhaps almost as significant, the survey responses themselves. The latter can serve as documents both recording attitudes about the war (A question that asked if any materials would be of special interest or importance was used by several respondents for lengthy comment on the war.) and showing the amount and kind of materials which people generated and kept.
As a survey project the results are most questionable. No sampling techniques were used. The initial limited survey idea was discarded for an attempt at saturating the population. The indirect approach seems to have produced a very low return, although it is not possible to estimate the actual number of questionnaires that found their way to individual veterans. The Agent Orange Task Force mailing, which was a direct mailing to individual members, received a considerably higher response rate — 12 percent as opposed to 2 percent for questionnaires sent to other organizations for distribution. The questionnaires that were returned indicated that veterans did have a wide variety of materials, including short-timer calendars, orders and maps, calling cards, diaries, letters, memorabilia, tape recordings, and especially, photographs, slides, and films. Also of interest were the number of people who reported having unpublished writings on their Vietnam War experiences.

From the number of positive responses, it is somewhat difficult to explain the very small percentage of respondents who actually donated material, and the small amount of material received from each donor. During initial negotiations about the project, the staff at Cornell overestimated the total quantity of papers to be expected. The "average" collection received was about a folder, less than 0.1 cubic feet. The volume restriction of 150 cubic feet placed on the whole collection was inappropriate. While the questionnaire response seemed to be proceeding at a rapid rate in September, by the end of the year it had slowed to a trickle.

Clearly, the final demise of the Vietnam War Veterans Archives and History Center played an important role. Not only has there been no active follow-up to the initial request letter, but respondents who attempted to contact the group in Santa Rosa would have been unable to do so. The characteristics of the veterans’ experience may have been a factor. Most veterans would have been living with their parents at the time of their entrance into the military and frequently do not have materials in their immediate possession. General perceptions of an archival program as containing only important documents — the "who would want my junk?" attitude — may have been a factor. But timing may be equally important. Vietnam veterans are relatively young; often they still want to retain their papers. One veteran who did donate papers was very concerned that his two-year-old son would be able to come and look at them "when he was old enough." Although the donation of photocopies of original material which the donor wishes to retain is acceptable, this alternative may not be readily apparent to veterans. One veteran who visited Cornell was adamant about his being present while an Archives staff member photocopied his diary. The fact that Cornell is not located in a large urban area may also have limited the number of collections. Local publicity seems to have had very little effect, although several volunteers from the community have offered to work with the collections.

The fear by project staff that veterans would be skeptical of any non-veterans or of the institutional setting has not materialized. There have been no significant problems with donors. Veterans have been very reasonable about placing restrictions on their collections. Restrictions generally have been placed on use, particularly on quotations using personal names, rather than on access. Because many veterans expressed the expectation that they
would write about their experiences in the future, retention of copyright has been common. Basically, the attitude has been one of wanting others to use their material, of wanting to share their experiences, rather than the reverse. These feelings were often of a personalized nature, without overt political objectives. Several donors asked that researchers be informed of their willingness to provide further information. Two donors have travelled to Cornell to meet with Archives staff and to explain their papers in detail. A volunteer project advisor, a Vietnam War-era veteran who recently compiled a bibliography of war-related materials, has provided valuable assistance.

This experiment in cooperation between an archival repository and an advocacy group provides an interesting model for the collection of contemporary material. The effectiveness of a political action group as an archival collecting mechanism is still unclear, because this project ended before completing serious collecting efforts. The major problem for the repository was the failure to assess adequately the stability of the organization and particularly the availability of funding. Cornell was not sufficiently aware of the project's previous lack of success in acquiring outside support or in developing adequate funding strategies. Clearly, federal funding agencies play a major role in shaping projects of this nature. The various changes from the memorial library idea through the records survey were primarily responses to the concerns of NEH and NHPRC. However, neither of these agencies could be a continuing source of funding.

The second most important problem for the repository resulted from the lack of direct contact with the project staff, and from differences in intellectual and methodological assumptions. Cornell became part of the project well after an advisory mechanism had been established. The role of the National Advisory Board, apart from its archival component, was never made clear. The relationship between the archives project and Flower of the Dragon itself was not sufficiently defined, a situation made even more confusing with the transfer of corporate affiliation to the Center for Veteran Studies. But perhaps most fundamental was the question of the role of each of the partners. A certain degree of competition between the project and the repository was probably inevitable. The premature ending of the project makes any firm conclusions impossible, but significant progress was being made. It seems likely that the division of expertise and difference of focus and approach would have ultimately proved a major strength of the cooperative effort. Joint ventures of this nature have considerable potential for reaching into areas beyond the usual scope of archival collecting, but project participants must have a common awareness of project goals and must adopt general guidelines concerning both policy and procedures to realize this potential.