As 2016 approaches, UWEC is beginning to prepare for its Centennial Celebration. Part of this process includes looking back on our history by harvesting the oral histories of UWEC alumni, birthing the Centennial Oral History Project. Through this project, we have gained insight into the lives of a multitude of students, including those that were involved in armed conflicts. Our project highlights the experiences of student veterans from two wars, WWII and Vietnam, illuminating how these global conflicts influenced both UWEC’s campus as a whole and its students.

**UWEC and WWII**

UWEC was home to a number of veterans coming home from their tenure during WWII. Thanks to the G.I Bill, these former soldiers were able to return to places like Eau Claire and obtain an education. When asked about the number of veterans at Eau Claire, one alumnus told us,

> “Yeah, it was getting quite a bit of play. I was on active duty during the war. Then I came home and enlisted in the Navy Reserve...When I came back here, some veterans had started at that same time. They started falling in and as more and more of them found jobs here, they decided maybe they’d better get an education.”

> “George Kumferman

> 1951

**UWEC and Vietnam**

Alumni remembering UWEC during Vietnam recall a tense atmosphere on campus. Interviewers heard stories of the draft, protests, and the dichotomy of opinions on campus. Compared to other campuses, such as Kent State in Ohio or UW-Madison, few UWEC Alumni remembered any acts of violence.

> “Well there was a problem because the students wanted to shut down the university and many of the college professors wanted them to do that too, but there were some of us, like me, I thought that wasn’t fair. And so one time, some of the students from both sides were meeting in a classroom and we talked about it and one student got up and wrote ‘It’s my right to do this and shut down this campus, I want peace.’ And so I got up and wrote down, ‘What about my rights to go to school?’ But nobody hit each other; there wasn’t any trouble.”

> “Jeanne Novacek

**Method and Outreach**

90 interviews have been collected by current students with diverse alumni, ranging from the class of 1929 to the class of 2012 and have been formally donated to the University Archives for the benefit of future students, faculty, and researchers. For more information and to hear the voices of some of UWEC’s past alumni, refer to the QR code in the lower right corner which will take you to the project website. Interview segments are also broadcast on WUEC on Sunday evenings.

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