

Good Morning, Mr /Ms Chairman members of the Committee! For the record my name is Raymond K. Read. I am a Vietnam veteran and have served over 35 years in the military an army infantry officer on Active duty and the Montana Army National Guard. I currently serve as the Museum Director of the Montana Military Museum and an officer of the the Fort William Henry Harrison Museum Foundation, a incorporated non-profit with the primary mission of telling Montana's military history.

I would like to introduce the other members and supporters of the Montana Veterans In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Oral History Project. Jodie Foley, Archivist and oral historian for the Montana Historical Society. Also here in support is Sergeant First Class Kermit Edmonds, a retired senior enlisted soldier and Desert Storm Veteran, Master Sergeant Charles Milo McLeod, a veteran of Vietnam, Desert Storm, who is currently serving in support of the War on Terrorism. Finally I am proud to have Command Sergeant Major Rhonda Scott,, who recently returned from form a year of service in Iraq. She serves as the Senior Non Commissioned Financiered of a Montana Army National Guard unit that served with distinction in Kuwait and Iraq.

As indicated the project is called Montana Veterans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Oral History Project. This is a partnership between the Montana Historical Society and the Montana Military Museum and the Fort William Henry Museum Foundation to provide a structured and appropriate venue to record the experiences of 30 or more Montana military personnel from all branches of the service who have served or are currently serving in in the many activities associated with operations that began with Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, the various peacekeeping operations former Soviet republics such Bosnia and now operations in Southwest Asia, specifically Afghanistan and Iraq.

This project is a continuation of earlier programs as the Montana Veterans in the the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Oral History Project and just recently the Korean War Veterans Oral History Project.

I totally support the recordation of military veterans experiences for purposes of placing them on the record for the purpose of current and future study. This program allows for the orderly collection of veterans stories to see how the veterans service influenced his or her postwar life and experiences.

Now I would like to turn this over to Command Sergeant Major Scott who will relate how her experiences over the last two years have done for her. SGM Scott.

  
Raymond Read

## ***MONTANA VETERANS IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT***

### ***APPLICATION NARRATIVE***

In June of 2004 the 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, Montana Division mobilized the largest contingent of Montana soldiers to active duty since WWII. 700 men, in airports in Missoula, Great Falls, Billings and Helena said goodbyes to tearful families and friends, and boarded military transport planes headed Fort Bliss, Texas. For many the ultimate destination was Iraq.

The men of the 163<sup>rd</sup> were only a portion of the nearly 3,000 Montana service men and women on active duty overseas at that time—most serving in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and South Africa.

The board members and volunteer staff of the Fort William Henry Harrison Military Museum believe the experiences of all these men and women are an important part of our state's modern military history. As a result we are initiating an oral history project to interview returning soldiers, who served in various military branches and campaigns, between 2001 and 2004. The interviews, to be conducted in the spring and summer of 2005, will provide a snapshot of Montana military service at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, reflecting the realities of modern warfare in a post 9/11 world.

The project will focus on Montanans who experienced military conflict through direct military service or life on the home front. The resulting recorded reflections will provide an invaluable resource for understanding Montanans and their role in implementing national military policy, as well as the impact military service has on the families of service men and women and the communities in which they live and work. Taken with existing museum collections the interviews will provide future generations the opportunity to compare and contrast Montana soldiers experiences in various fields of service over time—from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The goals for the *Montana Veterans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Oral History Project* include:

- Documenting the experiences of 30 men and women who served as front line soldiers, military support, in peacekeeping missions, with humanitarian aid, and on the home front as family members.
- Gathering information that can later be incorporated into existing and future museum exhibits.
- Sponsoring community-based discussion through interviews presented on local access television stations in 3 Montana communities. These interviews will include dialogs between past military veterans and the newest Montana veterans, providing insight into their shared experiences.
- Stimulating awareness amongst cultural, military, and historical groups concerning the immediate and long-term impacts of the military conflicts in the Middle East on Montana communities.

- Ensuring that Montana service men and women are represented in national level efforts to gather American Veterans stories through donation of copies of the interviews to the American Folklife Center Veterans History Project, at the Library of Congress.

Grant funds will be used specifically to pay travel expenses and wages for a Project Coordinator/Lead Interviewer to coordinate volunteers and conduct interviews across the state. Subordinate interviewers for the project will be unpaid volunteers.

The project will be a cooperative effort, drawing on the skills and expertise of the Fort Harrison Military Museum board members and volunteer staff, the Montana Historical Society staff, and the Montana Department of Military Affairs. This remarkable coalition will bring specialized skills to the project including expertise in military history, oral history interviewing techniques, and military protocol.

The Fort William Henry Harrison Military Museum board members and volunteer staff have dedicated thousands of hours to collecting, interpreting and preserving Montana's military history; establishing a museum with displays and artifacts dating from 1805 to present day. Their collective knowledge of Montana and military history will assist them in promoting the project. Specifically board members and volunteer staff will conduct research, survey prospective interviewees, assist in creating a project outline, conduct selected interviews, and distribute publicity for the project through public access television interviews and use of interview excerpts in future exhibits. The Montana Historical Society will provide staff expertise for project planning and publicity, knowledge of accepted ethical and legal standards for conducting oral history projects, as well as access to and technical assistance with recording equipment. The Montana Department of Military Affairs will serve as the contact liaison with returning soldiers and their families, and provide content expertise for interviewing.

The success of this project will be measured through a participant survey and interviewee review and approval of the final interview transcript.

The interviews created as a result of this cooperative effort will be used as a model for communities across the state interested in documenting Montana's 21<sup>st</sup> Century wartime experiences.