

February 2, 2010




To Whom It May Concern,

As Director of the Grand Valley State University Veterans History Project, I am pleased to support WGUV's LZ Michigan initiative. The Veterans History Project, in partnership with the Library of Congress, conducts oral history interviews with veterans from across West Michigan and beyond, and archives them both at Grand Valley State University's library and with the Library of Congress. At GVSU, we have a digital archive feature interview videos and accompanying text files for over 400 interviews accessible over the internet (in the Project Archive at our website, www.gvsu.edu/vethistory). I have a small army of students, faculty and volunteers working with me on the project, which also features an outreach program in area schools, partnerships with area museums, libraries and historical societies, and specialized documentary film projects.

Our project covers all conflicts that American soldiers have been involved in from World War II onward. Over the past several years, we have focused primarily on catching up with veterans of World War II and Korea, who are now all in their eighties or older. At the same time, we are expanding our efforts to record the stories of Vietnam veterans, and the LZ Michigan initiative fits very well with our own plans and goals. In addition to serving on the advisory committee for LZ Michigan, I am hoping to work with WGUV and the event organizers to conduct a series of oral history interviews with Vietnam veterans prior to the event at Fifth Third Ballpark on July 3 to help promote the project and for use by the project organizers as they develop educational materials and programming in conjunction with it. I also hope to work with the event organizers to set up an interview studio at the ballpark on the day of the event, and to conduct interviews using a team of interviewers throughout the day.

Having interviewed and worked with many Vietnam veterans over the past several years, I applaud WGUV's plans to provide Vietnam veterans with a proper, if belated, homecoming. The veterans I have talked to hold widely varying views of the war and of their own roles in it, but one thing that nearly all of them share is a sense that most Americans, both then and now, have not really understood or appreciated what they went through. LZ Michigan can help to address that issue, and promises to be a very positive experience for the veterans, their families, and the community. I encourage everyone to support the project in whatever way they can, whether through donations, participation in interviews, or attendance at the July 3 event.

Sincerely,


Dr. James R. Smither, Director
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