

For Middle and High School Students of History

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A Partner of HISTORY®

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Colonel (Retired) **William C. Haponski** was a commander during the Vietnam War and has published four books on the conflict, most recently *Autopsy of an Unwinnable War: Vietnam*, Casemate Publishers (March 2019)

In the Vietnam war I was an Army lieutenant colonel in deadly combat, and as a commander, I had no time to think about history.

Only years later, as a result of extensive research and reflection, did I come to understand much better why

North Vietnamese battalion commander Minh Ho and his men were trying so hard to kill me and my men at a particular spot and moment in time. The story of my command – my men, myself – I believe, is important as a reflection of the whole war: its high points of what appeared to be American successes, and its failures which were not so apparent at the time. We were hopeful of helping the South Vietnamese retain their national freedom but failed in our efforts. Our story is one which Americans would do well to understand, especially those who somehow have not yet discovered that young people have to die in wars caused by the failures, perversities, and evils of older people.

When I took command, the American-Vietnamese war had been building, then fiercely going on for a long time, but what I found was not an old war, rather one that seemed to have been instantly invented for us. Nothing had a history longer than a few days, mostly just a few hours. Everything was new. What did it matter that others had fought here before us? It should have mattered a lot to those at high levels of

government and military, but we were soldiers at low levels, and we had a war to fight. Maybe in some small way we were creating history but were too engaged in life and death matters to know we were doing so.

I had been a West Point cadet during the climactic stages of the preceding French-Vietnamese war, and I read about it. But being inserted into one's own war does not seem like a history-making event. It is an entry into the unknown. You either create everything around you or it is created for you. At my level I should have had a better understanding for what I was doing in terms of the larger construct, but I didn't. Instead, I quickly learned the specifics of what was going on around me and took my place in the action. Each event had to be dealt with in terms of the conditions of the moment, not something that had happened to the Vietnamese in fighting Chinese invasions of a thousand years ago, or to the French military twenty or so years earlier, or even to my armored cavalry task force before I took command. And if I as a

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commander with my briefings and my maps felt this immediacy, and my most urgent duty was to act and react to the circumstances of the moment while planning for the next, what was it like for my soldiers? They knew only they were about twelve kilometers from somewhere, they were firing at the enemy and getting fired at in return, it was hotter than hot and they were thirsty, the ants were biting them, and they were scared. Nothing mattered except to do their job, ensure their survival and that of their buddies. My guys who drove and rode these patched up armored vehicles and tanks in 1969 had no perceptible relationship to the guys who had driven and ridden them earlier. Troopers before us had died in some of these vehicles, their bodies removed, their gore washed out, and for the most part we were blissfully ignorant of it.

So it is only now, long after the war ended in 1975, that I have come to realize much of how we fit into the big picture. The story of my task force in large measure is the story of the war as a whole, its history. Everything we did related directly to the French before us, and we did not know it. We soldiers were fated, it seems, to be instruments by which our nation repeated France's mistakes.

Perhaps some—maybe most—history gets created by people who don't know they are creating it. Quite certainly Washington in crossing the Delaware wasn't thinking about creating history. Maybe he just had a job to do, and he was doing it? ■



Ashbrook Academy: Find Out More



A PROJECT BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



The Ashbrook Academy is a summer program designed for rising high school juniors and seniors who share a deep interest in American history and politics. Unlike other courses or programs that tend to erode young Americans proper pride in their country by emphasizing its historical failures, the Academy invites students to consider the American experiment as a historical triumph that demands serious study.

Participants are eligible to receive elective Political Science credit which can be used toward an undergraduate degree at Ashland or transferred to another institution. Students stay on Ashland University's campus and are taught by Ashbrook faculty.

Find more information on program fees, accommodations, and course of study online. Applications are open for all academies, and rolling admission ends on May 1st for the American History academies, and June 1st for the Political Economy Academy.

www.AshbrookAcademy.org

AMERICAN HISTORY ACADEMIES: JUNE 14-20, 2020

TELLING AMERICA'S STORY

This academy provides a perfect starting point for students interested in digging deeper into American History and government through the use of original documents.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE CIVIL WAR

Intended for graduates of "Telling American Story," this academy is for students with a deep interest in the Civil War era, will take students on an in-depth exploration of perhaps the most difficult era in American History, the Civil War.



POLITICAL ECONOMY ACADEMY: JULY 20-24, 2020

COMMERCE AND SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE FOUNDING ERA

This academy is intended to provide students with the opportunity to examine the important connections between politics and economics through a study of the Founding era. One of the key values of American citizenship is freedom.

What does freedom mean? The purpose of this seminar is to explore this question in light of two important publications in 1776: The Declaration of Independence and Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations.

Access to the NHC network, which includes chapters in 45 states and over 18,000 members, is a great benefit of joining the NHC. We encourage you to read about other chapters in your state or across the country and explore new opportunities! To explore specific sites click on the **bolded** text to be redirected!



Brown County High School (IN) took a trip to Indianapolis recently! After exploring the **Indiana Historical Society** and meeting with local authors at the museum's Holiday Author Fair, the members ate a traditional German dinner at the historic Rathskeller restaurant and watched the Butler Ballet's performance of The Nutcracker.



Hidden Valley High School (VA) dressed up in red, white, and blue and paid a visit to a local elementary school to celebrate Presidents' Day. Members broke into small groups with 4th graders to play a board game about the process of becoming president. Along the path to the presidency the kids had to complete challenges such as answering presidential trivia questions and drawing the American flag blindfolded.



Rainier Jr/Sr High School's (OR) History Bowl team which is competing again this year in the contest. **History Bowl** is a nationwide history quiz competition for middle and high school students in the U.S.



San Joaquin Memorial High School (CA) visited the **California Railroad Museum** (think Transcontinental Railroad) and **Sutter's Fort** (think California Gold Rush) in Sacramento. Here is a group photo in front of a railroad snow plow used to clear snow off the railroads in the Sierra Nevadas during the winter months.



Henry Clay HS (KY) in their "History Lab", where they have 2,000+ artifacts and are working on a database for teachers/others to access the artifacts!



Moline High School (IL) took a tour of Lincoln's Tomb, Lincoln's Home, and the **Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum** in Springfield!



Mason Creek Middle School (GA) with Mary Beth Tinker! Ms. Tinker is an American activist who became known for the 1969 Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent School District Supreme Court case. The Supreme Court ruled that Warren Harding Junior High School could not punish the 13 year old for wearing a black armband to school in support of a Vietnam War truce.

CHAPTER SPOTLIGHT

Members of the History Honor Society and students of Holocaust Studies here at Commack High School had the opportunity to be the guests at a United Nations' presentation of a discussion entitled, "Defending Human Rights and Justice For All: The Legacy of Anne Frank."

The students were greeted by the Under-Secretary General of Global Communications, Melissa Fleming. Ms Fleming emphasized how important it is to "Never Forget." Yet as she pointed out in her remarks, "many have not taken this seriously and the atrocities and the genocides continue to occur." Ms Fleming based much of her opening remarks on her work for the U.N through Refugees.org.

She has taken to heart the words of one young refugee who was forced to leave Syria and took with him his high school diploma, when he told Ms Fleming, "You can take away my home; you cannot take away my future!" This according to Ms Fleming should be just one of the many messages to take home today. There is more to a refuge than the mere clothes on their back. They have an innate story to tell. It is important to realize in the 21st century world that, "We should understand the humanness of being a refugee and once we recognize this learn from them," according to Fleming in her closing remarks.

Following Ms Fleming's opening remarks, we had the pleasure of listening to His Excellency Karl J.H. Van Oosterom, the Ambassador of the King of the Netherlands to the United Nations,

opening remarks. He began with a quotation from Thomas Jefferson, "Freedom cannot be taken for granted." This according to His Excellency was the message conveyed in Anne Frank's book. He regaled the audience with a personal story about a neighbor whose funeral he attended who was a World War II survivor. Van Oosterom remarked that when the town went to the cemetery for this man's burial there was no place to bury him. The reality of this message did not sink into the Ambassador until the Rabbi said to him, "You cannot understand what happened until you are presented by the reality. There

was no place to bury this man because there were no gravestones in the locked cemetery because there was no one to bury there since the end of the Second World War." Once the audience had a moment to reflect on the

enormity of these words, there was not a sound in the room of 200 students.

As the students had the opportunity to listen to these survivor stories, the last activity involved the application of the lessons learned today to the statement: "Too often, people here in the United States and around the world close their doors to refugees, saying they are different, not like us, dirty, dangerous, and they don't belong." This resulted in a very fascinating dialogue amongst several students who were able to articulate what it felt like to them to be in the same or similar situation of Anne Frank and others who found themselves victims of Hate.

* by Club Historian, **Ariana Aghili**

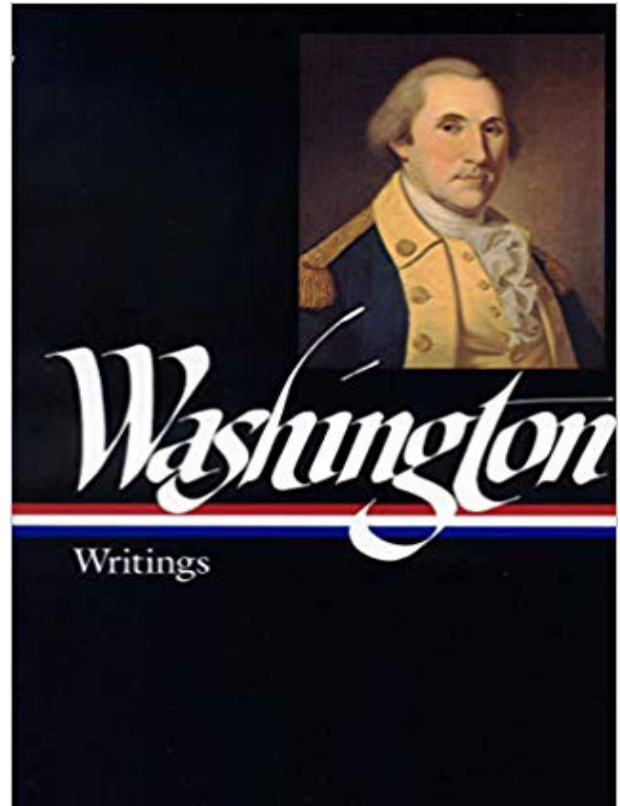


HISTORY STUDENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

This Spring the NHC and George Washington's Mount Vernon will again co-sponsor the "History Student of the Year" prize. Each chapter will choose a recipient for this award, and s/he will receive an autographed copy of a history book. This is the 16th year of the partnership between Mount Vernon and the NHC to sponsor this prestigious award.

The book prize this year will be an autographed hardcover copy of *George Washington: Writings* edited by John Rhodehamel.

Mount Vernon is the most popular historic estate in America. The estate, gardens and farm of Mount Vernon totaled some 8,000 acres in the 18th century. Today, roughly 500 acres have been preserved 16 miles south of Washington, DC, on the banks of the Potomac River. Visitors can see 20 structures and 50 acres of gardens as they existed in 1799, as well as the tombs of George and Martha Washington. Mount Vernon welcomes over 1,000,000 visitors each year.



LESSONS OF LEADERSHIP CONTEST

Profiles in Political Courage

* Guidelines:

Elected officials have always been called upon to make critically important decisions, ones that can determine the fate of their towns, cities, states and nations. With the next election in the not-so-distant future, the NHC and The HBE Foundation are pleased to present the 7th annual “Lessons of Leadership” contest, with a focus on political courage.

We invite middle and high school students from any school in the United States to select an elected official and describe how that person risked his or her career with a decision (passing a law, making a speech, advocating for change, running for office, etc.) that was at odds with public opinion. Using descriptive examples of the risks, consequences and rewards associated with his/her act of political courage, we seek to be inspired by the vision and boldness of these leaders. We strongly encourage students to think broadly about this topic, and figures can be ancient or modern, domestic (local, state, national) or foreign. Acts of political courage can range from a representative from one’s town or city to a world leader. Contest entries can be submitted in any of the three following formats:

* An essay of no less than 500 words and not more than 2,000 words, supplemented with a bibliography and endnotes. Entries may be submitted in either of the following forms: 1) Microsoft Word document or 2) PDF document.

* A documentary or PowerPoint presentation that reflects your ability to communicate your figure’s importance, and also helps you develop skills in using photographs, video, graphic presentations, etc. Documentaries should not exceed more than 10 minutes, and sources used should be credited through a bibliography.

* A website that reflects your ability to use website design software and computer technology to communicate how your historical figure influenced history. Your website should include a collection of web pages, interconnected with hyperlinks, that presents primary and secondary sources and interactive multimedia. Sources used should be credited through a bibliography.

All entries must be received by April 10, 2020 and can be emailed to Bob Nasson at **rnasson@nationalhistoryclub.org** (please type “Lessons of Leadership” in the subject line). Submissions will be judged by the NHC Advisory Board and winners will be announced at the end of April.

Awards:

First Place - \$1,500 (one prize)
Second Place - \$750 (two prizes)
Third Place - \$500 (four prizes)

NATIONAL HISTORY CLUB

The NHC would like to express our gratitude to the following people and organizations who make our important work possible...

John Abele	Smithsonian Institution
HISTORY®	Society of Architectural Historians
George Washington's Mount Vernon	The Concord Review
The HBE Foundation	The Churchill Centre
Agricultural History Society	The History List
American Association for State and Local History	Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund
American Civil War Museum	Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum
American Historical Association	Patrick Allitt (Professor, Emory)
Boyertown Museum of Historic Vehicles	Carter Bacon
Gilder Lehrman Institute	Peter Baldwin (Professor, UCLA)
HarperCollins Publishing	Rick & Barbara Berenson
History News Network	Will Fitzhugh
History 500	Joan & Rick Gier
Laurel Hill Cemetery	Bill Haponski
Museum of Florida History	Elizabeth Jones
National Council for History Education	William Jordan (Professor, Princeton)
National Vietnam War Museum	Frances & John Pepper
National World War I Museum	Gary Rowe
National World War II Museum	Henry Seng
Omohundro Institute of Early American History	Art Snyder
Organization of American Historians	Rick Sperry
Parkview High School (GA)	Steve Wheatley
Penguin Random House	Lisa Wingate

The National History Club is a 501(c)(3) organization that relies on grants and donations to support efforts. If you are passionate about history and would like to contribute to our mission of promoting history at the secondary level please contact **Robert Nasson** (rnasson@nationalhistoryclub.org).