

Name:	Colin Rafferty	Funding Period:	Summer 2015
Department:	English, Linguistics, and Communication	FUNDING FOR:	
Project Title:	Beyond the Wall: One Soldier's Story	Summer Stipend Expenses Only	<input type="checkbox"/> \$4000 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> \$4500
<input type="checkbox"/> IRB Required Date Submitted for review:		Project Expenses	\$ Max: \$500
		Course Release	<input type="checkbox"/> Fall <input type="checkbox"/> Spring
Project Summary (50-75 words):			
<p>The Faculty Research Grant will fund a crucial section of my current creative nonfiction project by allowing me to travel to Vietnam, where I will conduct research regarding the service and death of an American serviceman, whose name I chose at random from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. My project traces his life from his childhood to Vietnam, leading to his death. From one name out of 58,272, I will uncover a life and a death, and in doing so, craft a story that will live long after the personal memories of those who knew this man--and by extension, all Americans killed in Vietnam--have been erased.</p>			
Proposal Format:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Project Description ➤ Goals, Specific Objectives, and Project Significance ➤ Procedures and Methods ➤ Results ➤ Documentation ➤ Budget 			
Other information to include in Proposal:			
Simultaneous Application-Identify any internal/external grant support for project			
Previous Awards-List any previous grant/fellowships awarded during last 3 years. Include dates, amount received, nature of activity, and outcomes.			
Report-Specify contents of final report and date to be submitted.			
SIGNATURES:			
Applicant:		Date:	
Department Chair:		Date:	

Colin Rafferty
Associate Professor
English, Linguistics, and Communication
Faculty Research Grant Proposal

Beyond the Wall: One Soldier's Story

Project Description

In *The Things They Carried*, the most well-known work of writing to emerge from the American war in Vietnam, Tim O'Brien writes, "sometimes remembering will lead to a story, which makes it forever. That's what stories are for. Stories are for joining the past to the future...Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story."

I have spent the fall of 2015 on sabbatical, during which time I have researched and begun writing the initial draft of a creative nonfiction manuscript that follows a single soldier—a name chosen at random from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC—from his childhood to Vietnam, leading to his death. From one name out of over 58,000—a single name in letters just over a half-inch high—I have uncovered a life and a death, and in doing so, have begun crafting a story that will live long after the personal memories of those who knew this man have been erased. In my sabbatical semester and the upcoming spring semester, I have carefully uncovered the facts of the story, working my way through military reports and regional newspapers, reading self-published memoirs and regimental histories. This academic year includes travel to a wide variety of places: the National Park Service facility in Maryland where objects left at the Wall are catalogued and stored, a suburb of Detroit where the veteran who was with my chosen soldier when he died still lives, and to the Wall at night with a group of war widows. However, to realize my project to its fullest extent, I am applying for a grant so that I might travel to Vietnam to see where my soldier served, and where he died, a lonely place in Binh Dinh province called Hill 424.

At the University of Maryland, I teach and practice the writing of creative nonfiction, a genre that uses the tools of literature on the real world in order to create art in written form. This project, which offers an aesthetically considered rendering of the quest to recreate the narrative of a single soldier in the Vietnam War, will offer a needed supplement to the many existing history books about Vietnam and biographies of enlisted soldiers.

My project, by looking at one American soldier in Vietnam, expands my field by considering how public memory—the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—can be explored to find private lives.

The closest analogues to this project are Daniel Mendelsohn's 2006 book *The Lost: a Search For Six of Six Million*, in which Mendelsohn travels around the world to discover the fate of six relatives who died in the Holocaust, and Danielle Trussoni's *Falling Through the Earth*, her 2006 memoir about her father's experience in Vietnam. Donovan Webster's 1996 *Aftermath: the Remnants of War*, in which Webster visits the sites affected by combat to observe the long-term effects, also resembles my own project's travels. However, Webster does not focus on single individuals, and both Trussoni and Mendelsohn's books are about family members. My work offers a necessary corrective to the existing literature in that it contemplates our responsibility for preserving the contributions of individuals to our collective national identity.

Goals, Specific Objectives, and Project Significance

2015 marks the 40th anniversary of the end of American involvement in Vietnam and the 35th anniversary of Congress authorizing the construction of a memorial on three acres near the National Mall's reflecting pool. Soon, the generations that fought in World War II and Korea will pass on,

and the generation that fought in and protested against Vietnam will replace them. However, their memories will soon begin to vanish as well.

The overall goal I have set for myself with this project is to write a book that both humanizes and demystifies the ordinary soldier. By looking at one man, chosen randomly, as the draft chose so many young men, I hope to cause the reader to contemplate how our nation remembers. I am not interested in flag-waving jingoistic tracts, nor am I going to write a screed against the military-industrial complex. Instead, I want to write a book that embraces the complexity of American history in Vietnam—how ordinary men were sent into battles with no clear objectives, and how they ended up fighting for each other, often sacrificing themselves in the process.

The goal that the Faculty Research Grant will allow me to accomplish towards my larger goal is twofold. First, it will fund travel to Vietnam, as well as the travel within Vietnam to Binh Dinh province, a rural area. Second, the grant will allow me to use the information I gather during that trip to write what I anticipate will be the climatic chapters of my book—the chapters in which the brief second in which I randomly chose my soldier's name off the Wall result in me traveling thousands of miles across an ocean to find the boulder-strewn hill where he died.

This project will be my third full-length manuscript of creative nonfiction. My first, *Hallow This Ground*, a collection of essays centered on monuments and memorials, will be published by Break Away Books, an imprint of Indiana University Press, this February. My second, *Execute the Office*, a series of essays about the presidents of the United States, is in its fourth draft and will be complete by the end of this year; already two presses have expressed interest in it. This Vietnam project is the next step in my development as a writer: it combines my interests in public memory, memorials, and history with my aesthetic stance as an essayist dedicated to exploring the possibilities afforded by a genre of writing dedicated to illuminating the unconsidered subjects of the world.

This project has grown out of my own pedagogical interests; each semester, my students write researched essays in which they conduct academic research towards creative ends, digging up strange-but-true facts that lead to an illumination of a subject they have previously considered only lightly. Through using this assignment in English 312 (Creative Writing: Nonfiction), as well as other research-heavy courses such as English 313A (Travel and Nature Writing), I have found that students produce excellent writing when challenged to look outward.

I am undertaking another significant shift in this project; my previous two manuscripts have been collections of short essays, while this is a single sustained work. It is the natural progression and evolution in my writing, and I look forward to working on this project. I have a strong track record of completing and publishing works of nonfiction, and I anticipate not only completing and placing this manuscript, but also excerpting chapters from it as individual essays, to be published in literary magazines.

One of the elements of UMW's creative writing concentration that I'm most proud of is the fact that each member of the faculty is a working writer. Each one of us goes through the same struggle of figuring out how to put "words in the best order," as Samuel Taylor Coleridge said of prose, and we're able to bring our experiences to our classrooms to show our students how the process of writing, as well as the business of writing, is conducted. By helping to fund this project, the grant will allow me to develop as a writer of creative nonfiction, developing my research, drafting, and revising skills so that I can model these skills for my students more effectively.

In addition, this project ties in directly with a course I am developing, English 313: The Uses of History, in which students will read creative works that take on a historical event and write their own creative works inspired by their own research. The Assistant Chair of the English, Linguistics, and Communication Department has told me that there's a need for more Creative Writing courses of this sort (that is, beyond our standard fiction, poetry, and nonfiction offerings), and I look forward to developing this with the experience that this completed project can offer.

Goals and Objectives for Vietnam Travel

- Conduct research, including working in various archives to find necessary documentation.
- Travel to Vietnam to see sites where the soldier served and was killed
- Develop understanding of both the ordinary and extraordinary nature of the soldier's experience
- Write and revise chapters about Vietnam, resulting in full draft of manuscript

Project Plan

I began this project by selecting a name from the Wall, and during my sabbatical, I have done various forms of research, including requesting the public files on this soldier from the National Archives, assembling the basic narrative of his experience in Vietnam, and locating (and arranging interviews) with family and his fellow enlisted men. I have also read both general histories of Vietnam (to understand the geopolitical and historical background of the war) and specific histories of his regiment (to understand what his specific war experience was like)

In the remainder of my sabbatical and the spring of 2016, I will arrange research trips to St. Louis (where the National Archives keeps its military personnel files and where Michael Blassie, formerly Arlington Cemetery's Unknown Soldier of Vietnam, was reinterred); Detroit, where the veteran who was with the soldier when he was killed lives; and Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, the hometown of the soldier. In addition, I am planning two more trips that will depend upon my level of access; one to the National Park Service's Museum Resource Center in Landover, Maryland, where items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are catalogued and stored, and another to the Maya Lin Studio in New York City, where I hope to speak with the artist about her design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and its evolution.

Creative nonfiction is a tricky business. John Adams's dictum that "facts are stubborn things" guides the genre, and while we may hope that our research turns out a certain way, we can never be certain. Therefore, this plan will likely evolve, adapt, and change as the research progresses. My previous experience in working on manuscripts will play a large role in my ability to continue writing even as the situation around me changes.

Procedures and Methods

The creative process is too often shrouded in a ridiculous veil of secrecy and "magic." My creative process is a simple three-step process: research, write, revise. Of course, within those three steps are mistakes and dead ends, long digressions into tangentially related subjects, and thousand-word drafts that end up salvaged for a single sentence.

By the time the Faculty Research Grant allows me to travel to Vietnam, I hope to be as close to an expert as I can on the American involvement in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970. I have read and will continue to read dozens of texts from varying sources that break down both the global and local factors in play during that time of the war, in which generals adjudicated success by body counts and enlisted men wrote letters home about their dreams for the future—futures that many of them would not live to see. I will research both the official (the military records for Operations Southern Free Strike and Washington Green) and the personal (the veterans' recollections) so that I can develop this expertise.

However, travel itself is a kind of research. By traveling to Vietnam, by visiting the sites where my soldier served, I will gain valuable insight into his experience. The Civil War historian Shelby Foote advocated traveling to battlefields so that we might understand what the light looks like through the trees; that idea has formed the backbone of my research technique.

The writing element of the process is simple: from the pile of information that I accrue in the research phase, I sit down at my desk and write, usually in longhand, a first draft. I do my best to turn off my internal editor (and writing longhand does wonders for this, as it encourages moving forward) so that I might produce a first draft from which I can revise. Approximately 75% of my most recent manuscript was written in this way, and I am confident in my ability to write this book using this method.

Finally, I will revise these chapters, using the time afforded to me by the grant. For me, revision is a much more important part of the process than drafting, because—as *New Yorker* staff writer John McPhee states—if it's going to happen, it happens in the second draft. When I revise, I work with a hard printed copy of the manuscript from the original handwritten draft, adding and subtracting sentences with a pen. Later, I move those annotations into a new file, which means that between the first handwritten draft and the last printed version, I go through at least four revisions of the original text. It's a slow process, but in my experience, has resulted in a remarkable understanding of a project, and I look forward to applying it to this project.

A timeline for the portion of this project funded by the Faculty Research Grant follows below. I have no teaching responsibilities during this time, and have no logistical arrangements beyond what I have already done or can do on my own.

Timeline

Prior to Summer 2016

- Do initial research into Vietnam era, reading histories, memoirs
- Request public files from National Archives
- Draft anticipated chapter structure for manuscript
- Request meeting with archivist at NPS Museum Resource Center
- Request interview with Maya Lin
- Use public files from National Archives to find fellow platoon members
- Contact family members to set up interviews
- Travel to NPS Museum Resource Center
- Travel to soldier's hometown to conduct family interviews
- Conduct follow-up interviews with family
- Contact other interview subjects recommended by family
- Conduct other interviews with subjects recommended by family (via phone)
- Contact soldier's fellow platoon members to set up interviews
- Travel to NYC to interview Maya Lin (if possible)
- Prepare for Vietnam trip
 - Make schedule for trip
 - Arrange transportation to necessary sites
 - Arrange for translation services
- Travel to St. Louis to visit National Archives, Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery
- Travel to Arlington, Virginia, to see Tomb of Unknown Soldier

- Travel to Washington, DC, to see Vietnam section of National Museum of American History
- Return visit to soldier's hometown
- Initial drafts of all chapters not requiring visit to Vietnam

June 20-July 4, 2016

- Travel to Vietnam
- Visit Vietnam War-related sites within Saigon and Hanoi
- Travel to Binh Dinh province, including Hill 424
- Travel along Highway QL-21, which the soldier's unit was charged with protecting
- Travel to Cambodia, where the soldier's unit was sent after the Battle of Hill 424
- Interview Vietnamese veterans of the war (with translator's help)

July 5-August 15

- Draft all chapters related to trip to Vietnam
- Assemble manuscript into complete first draft form
- Develop plan for revision
- Make initial contacts with publishers

Results

The funding provided by the grant will result in approximately 100 pages of creative nonfiction, which I will divide into four or five stand-alone essays about Vietnam. I will submit these individual essays to various literary journals. These 100 pages will also become the climatic chapters of my book project, which I plan on submitting to publishers in the spring of 2017.

Documentation

This is a partial bibliography, to show the breadth of the sources with which I am working during this project, which includes everything from government reports to texts that suggest a potential model for my project.

Anderson, David L. and John Ernst, editors. *The War That Never Ends: New Perspectives on the Vietnam War*. Lexington: U of Kentucky, 2007.

Berry, Jerald. *My Gift to You: The Stories of Soldiers Who Died in Vietnam While Serving with the 3rd Battalion (Airborne), 506th Infantry (Currahees), 101st Airborne Division (Screaming Eagles)*. Libby, MT: Xlibris, 2010.

Cosmas, Graham A. *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal 1968-1973*. Washington: US Army, 2007.

Dickinson, Greg, ed. *Places of Public Memory the Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama, 2010.

Ebert, James R. *A Life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam, 1965-1972*. Novato: Presidio, 1993.

Giap, Vo Nguyen. *The South Vietnam People Will Win*. Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1965.

Gordon, David F. *Estimative Products on Vietnam, 1948-1975*. Washington: National Intelligence Council, 2005.

- Hagopian, Patrick. *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts, 2009.
- Hammond, William M. *The Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Era*. Washington: US Army, 1985.
- Hass, Kristin Ann. *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Berkeley: U of California, 1998.
- Hendrickson, Paul. *Sons of Mississippi: A Story of Race and Its Legacy*. New York: Knopf, 2003.
- Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- Hess, Gary R. *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009.
- Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. New York: Viking, 1983.
- Keegan, John. *The Face of War*. London: Pimlico, 1991.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. *Home From the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans*. New York: Other Press, 2005.
- Mendelsohn, Daniel. *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*. New York: Harper Collins, 2006.
- Olsen, James S. and Randy Roberts. *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam 1945-1995*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.
- Palmer, Laura. *Shrapnel in the Heart: Letters and Remembrances from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. New York: Vintage, 1987.
- Poole, Eric. *Company of Heroes: A Forgotten Medal of Honor and Bravo Company's War in Vietnam*. Oxford: Osprey, 2015.
- Sorley, Lewis. *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedies of America's Last Years in Vietnam*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999.
- Stephenson, Michael. *The Last Full Measure: How Soldiers Die in Battle*. New York: Crown, 2012.
- Trussoni, Danielle. *Falling through the Earth: A Memoir*. New York: Henry Holt, 2006.
- Webster, Donovan. *Aftermath: The Remnants of War*. New York: Vintage, 1996.
- Wildman, Sarah. *Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind*. New York: Riverhead, 2014.
- Wolff, Tobias. *In Pharaoh's Army: Memories of the Lost War*. New York: Knopf, 1994.

Budget

It's worth noting that amounts not related to airfare and lodging are estimates. I'm lucky enough to have a friend who lived in Vietnam for a few years, and who can serve as my inside source on setting things into place.

Airfare to Vietnam: \$1,913

Lodging within Vietnam: \$1,134 (based on rates within Ho Chi Minh City)

Per Diem within Vietnam: \$280 (\$20/day for 14 days)

Translator/Guide services: \$1000

Transport to/from Binh Minh Province: \$400

Total Requested: \$4,727

Simultaneous Application and Previous Awards

I have not applied to other sources of funding at this point for this project. However, I will apply during the next round of National Endowment for the Arts funding, which will take place in March of 2016, after these grants have been awarded. At this time, the Faculty Research Grant is the primary means by which I can realize my goal.

I was awarded a sabbatical for the fall semester of 2015 to conduct research for this project. Beyond that, I have received no other funding for this project. I was a Jepson Fellow during the 2012-2013 academic year, during which I completed the manuscript of *Hallow This Ground* and worked on a critical project on fake memoirs.

Report

I will submit a final report for this grant on September 1, 2016, at which point I will report on the progress of the initial drafts, include typed drafts of the chapters in progress, and provide a plan for the completion of the entire manuscript.