



Young Historians Journal

WWI Veteran Family Interview with Gov. Jim Guy Tucker, Jr. about the WWI experiences of his father Captain James “Jim” Guy Tucker, Sr. (spoke only one time, told only one story; son understanding the silence of father after his own experiences in Vietnam; father’s family background)

Interview by Alex Crawford, LR Central High School, Class of 2018, Butler Center Student Intern, 2017-2018

- For the WWI “We Heard Them Say” Project, I have now conducted a second interview of a person with family in the First World War. This new interview was conducted with former Arkansas Governor Jim Guy Tucker, Jr., regarding his father’s WWI service. How was this interview different than the first?

Although in some respects this interview is very much like the interview of Miss Claudia Smith – especially regarding how little both she and Mr. Tucker could relate about the day-to-day experiences of their family members – this interview also differed substantially in several areas. First, Jim Guy Tucker Sr.’s experiences, thoughts, and comments are written down in a diary he kept while overseas, and his service while under fire is documented, unlike David Huett, whose complete story is, and likely will remain, one lost in the mists of time and war.

Key Takeaway: No two stories are alike. Don’t assume otherwise or you may lose the opportunity to conduct an interesting interview. While Miss Smith’s tale was much less defined and full of unknowns, it remains nonetheless an interesting story.

- How did the better documentation of Jim Guy Tucker Sr.’s war experiences affect the story his son was able to relate?

Jim Guy Tucker Sr. never spoke of the war to his son, excepting one occasion, meaning that while the former Governor was able to explain, in some detail and depth, his father’s background, he knew little beyond that in terms of his experiences in WWI. While the additional documentation in the papers of Jim Guy Tucker Sr. helped with further depth, his father’s diary writings are short and to the point.

Key Takeaway: Some veterans don’t want to talk about their experiences. This may also translate to not wanting to write about them as well.

- Did the fact that you were interviewing the former governor of Arkansas have an impact on how you conducted the interview? How should somebody act around people of high status?

Though it can appear intimidating at times, I realized you shouldn't be too concerned by titles and status; no matter how famous somebody is, they're still people, too. Do what you can to put your interviewee at ease – smile, nod your head, and be interested in what they have to say. If you do that, and are willing to listen, then you can create a much friendlier environ for them and yourself.

Key Takeaway: Important people are people, too. Don't be too scared by them.

- Jim Guy Tucker Jr. also mentioned other stories, unrelated at times to his father's service, during the interview. How should that be handled? Should the person conducting the interview step in to "stick to the main topic"?

Not necessarily. Though Jim Guy Tucker Jr. covered some of his own wartime service in Vietnam during this interview, that doesn't mean that it wasn't pertaining to the interview. His own service while at war made him more able to realize why so few veterans are readily open about their service, gaining additional perspective. He effectively summed up his own views while giving a little insight into the probable mindset of a typical veteran of combat.

Key Takeaway: Unrelated stories may not be as unrelated as you originally think. When in doubt, let them talk; often, even if somebody wanders off-topic, they'll find their way back. Stepping in to redirect them risks breaking up their train of thought – and you might lose a valuable story in the process.

- On the tape of the interview, there are points where it is hard to hear Mr. Tucker or hard to understand what he is saying. This often appears in taped interviews; how should one handle it so that it doesn't take too much time and effort away from transcribing the tape?

During most interviews, there are going to be incidents where the interviewee might mumble or leave an incomplete thought hanging in the air before moving on, or pronounce a word that you might not have heard before. Generally, if you can't hear it the first time through, replaying that part of the tape until you can hear it is the best idea, but if it's still too hard to hear and/or it's taking too much time, either skip it and come back later, when you might have more context, or come back another time altogether and try listening to that part again another time. You might hear it better then. As a last resort, try inferring what the person was saying based on the part you did hear. Take this with a grain of salt, however, as sometimes what you think you hear and what they said are two different things altogether.

Key Takeaway: Problems are going to arise, but don't become discouraged. There are plenty of solutions, too.

--Alex Crawford, October 2017