

# HISTORY ALIVE

Quarterly Newsletter of The Rutgers Living History Society

Summer 2008

## President's Corner

### 2009 Ambrose Award Will Go to Acclaimed Filmmaker Ken Burns

Our sixth annual meeting was a huge success. Over 150 in attendance, plus the high school students of one of our “old” seminar students, Frank Wagenblast, '06. Rick Atkinson, this year's recipient of the Stephen E. Ambrose Oral History Award, gave an exceptional acceptance speech in which he honored our members whose stories he has used in his works. The meeting ended with the Rich Bencivenga, '07, play *Flight of the Iron Butterfly*, based on the story of Rich's grandfather's service in WWII. Very moving!!

For 2009, we will be honoring Ken Burns, so mark your calendars to attend on Friday, May 15, 2009. You'll be receiving more information as we go forward. Our program is continuing to expand, with more and more interviews being conducted, processed and posted to our website. As we have previously mentioned, we are including interviews from men and women from the Korean, Vietnam and Cold War eras and up to the present. Remember, we need your help—designate your annual contribution to the Rutgers Foundation to the Rutgers Oral History Archives.

Thank you.  
Bart Klion '48

Celebrated documentarian Ken Burns will be the 2009 recipient of the Stephen E. Ambrose Oral History Award.

“Ken Burns has a great talent for integrating personal perspectives, through interviews, into his cinematic examinations of American history, as exemplified in his classic films *Baseball* and *Jazz*, and most recently in his epic *The War*,” commented our VP of Awards & Honors Carl Burns, chairman of the nominating committee. “We also chose to honor him for his work—with PBS and the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project—in initiating a nationwide campaign to interview World War II veterans, war workers and other eyewitnesses to that pivotal event in our history.”

The Ambrose Award will be presented to Ken Burns on Friday, May 15, 2009, during the RLHS Annual Meeting.

## ROHA & Queens Guard Alumni Team Up To Collect Oral Histories

Since 1957, the Rutgers University Queens Guard Precision Rifle Drill Team has occupied a unique place in Rutgers' history. Now, the Queens Guard Alumni Association and ROHA have joined forces to document both the history of the team and the lives of its members.

The Queens Guard brought a number of National Drill Championship titles back to “the Banks” in the 1960s and 1970s. The Queens Guard also had the honor of performing in the Inaugural Parades for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and 16 international exhibitions from 1968 to 1988, including the prestigious Edinburgh Military Tattoo in Scotland. More information on the Queens Guard's history and activities can be found at their website: [www.queensguard-rutgers.org](http://www.queensguard-rutgers.org).

Queens Guard, continued on Page 3



RLHS President Bart Klion salutes 2008 Ambrose Award recipient Rick Atkinson.

## 2008 Annual Meeting Turns Out to be a Multi-Generational Event

For our oldest members, there were Rick Atkinson's books to revive long-forgotten memories. Then there was Atkinson himself—a talented man of another generation writing about ours. And finally, a still later age, richly peopled by interns and high school students.

Frank Wagenblast, a former ROHA seminar student, brought 26 of his students from the Arthur L. Johnson High School in Clark. They served our members as ushers and guides. Fifty students from Hillsborough High School joined us for Rich Bencivenga's *Flight Of the Iron Butterfly* (A real blockbuster!) and the dedication of the World War II Memorial Plaza.

Our interns, as usual, played starring roles in the Memorial section of the program when they read poignant quotes from the interview transcripts of our departed members, and they helped our 32 new members in attendance (82 were inducted in *absentia*) to the stage to receive their membership certificates.

Author Atkinson roused pride in all our generations when he cited the “priceless details” our interviews brought to his books and praised the “orderliness,” “accessibility” and “searchability” of the Rutgers Oral History Archives, as compared with other archives he consulted during his book research. He also endeared himself to our student interns by consenting to be interviewed by two of them during his 45-minute car ride back to the Metro Park to catch his train.

Photo Credit: Carl Burns

## History Alive

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## Tales You've Told

*Stories from our Rutgers Oral History Archives*

When V-J Day came, I was up with the Chinese guerrillas. About the 10th of August, I received a one-time message—the Japanese were about to surrender. I was ordered to proceed to Tsingtao, alone, unarmed. I was to take over the Japanese naval base with its 20,000 men until the Navy came in from the Pacific Fleet.

I spoke pretty good Chinese by now, I was 27, I'm in a Chinese uniform, with a Marine hat I always wore. I'm wondering how I'm going to get there. It's a long walk through Communist territory. That was what bothered me the most, because we had had a couple of misunderstandings with the Communists.

I went to the airfield and asked the Air Force there to drop me at a closer airfield. The commander said, "All right. We'll drop you there, but my plane will go in wheels down. They'll swing around and they will take right off. You jump out of the airplane." I said, "Fair enough." They dropped me and I was picked up by the Chinese immediately. I was chit-chatting and joking with them, and I was the first American they had seen there.

There was a Japanese lieutenant at the railroad station. By this time, I had 500,000 Chinese with me, see. They're cheering me on. I asked the lieutenant if he would get a train for me to go to Tsingtao. I wanted him to inform the people between there and Tsingtao, as best they could, that they had to let this train go through and not to dick with it; I don't want to die now. So, by God, they got a train.

In Tsingtao, a rickshaw took me to the Edgewater Hotel. That was fully occupied by Japanese. They had a man there who had been consul in the US, spoke fluent English. I told him I was taking over the hotel now and that I wanted to see the Chief of Staff of the Japanese Navy immediately. Within five minutes, the guy was there. Then, everything went as smooth as silk after that.

Here I am, fully in charge, and I put the Japanese on alert that they had to keep the Communists out of town. I had ordered all roads to be blocked. We kept all hostile forces out. The Communists were trying to take it then, but they weren't prepared yet to quite move in.

—Col. Vincent Kramer, '41

## New Book on Vietnam Has Roots in RLHS Member's Oral History

Carl Burns has recently written *Centaur in Vietnam: Untold Stories of the First Year* (Trafford Publishing). The book tells the story of the 25th Infantry Division, 3/4th Cavalry, D Troop, nicknamed the Centaurs, during its first year in Vietnam, 1966-1967.

Based in Cu Chi, the Centaurs were one of the first units to apply the Air Cavalry concept to the guerilla war in Southeast Asia. To tell this story, Burns urged more than 30 of his former comrades to contribute their recollections, a task compounded in some cases by a reluctance to recall the war of their youth.

Burns was more than sympathetic with their reticence. For many years, the Rutgers College Class of '64 alum did not discuss his service with many beyond his wife and a few close friends. In 2004, after some gentle nudging from his fraternity brother, the late Frank Kneller, '49, Burns finally sat down with Sandra and Shaun to record his oral history. "That opened the flood gates," Burns recalled. "It led me to reexamine those years of my life."

On Saturday, August 9th, at 1:00 PM, Burns and his wife, Ruth Ann, a distinguished journalist who covered Vietnam as a war correspondent, will make a presentation about their experiences and the book at the New Jersey Vietnam Era Educational Center & Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Holmdel.



*The Queens Guard marches in exhibition at the 1964 World's Fair in New York City.*

*Photo Courtesy of The Queens Guard Alumni Association*

## George Street Playhouse to Host *Flight of the Iron Butterfly*

Rich Bencivenga's play, *Flight of the Iron Butterfly*, will be performed at the George Street Playhouse on Friday, August 8th, at 8:00 PM, and Saturday, August 9th, at 2:00 PM.

RLHS members and their families enjoyed a preview of the fully-staged version of *Flight of the Iron Butterfly* following our annual meeting. Five talented actors brought more than a dozen roles to life amidst a whirlwind of costume changes and sound effects, dashing through the crowd to perform scenes on elevated platforms. However, the spectacle complemented, rather than overwhelmed, Bencivenga's tale of his grandfather John Paul Czahor's experiences as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division during the Normandy invasion. "People were really moved. I could see tears in the eyes of those seated around my table," noted RLHS President Bart Klion.

Rich and the play were also the subject of a feature article by Pamela Sroka-Holzmann in the *Courier News/Home News Tribune* on July 14th. Tickets are \$12.00 each and can be purchased through the show's website: [www.flightoftheironbutterfly.net](http://www.flightoftheironbutterfly.net).

### Queens Guard, *continued from Page 1*

Founded as an extracurricular activity for cadets of the Air Force ROTC, the team merged with the Army ROTC's Scarlet Rifles in 1970, and soon thereafter expanded its membership to include all Rutgers University undergraduates. "We are enthusiastic to partner with ROHA in documenting the experiences of our QGAA alumni as both former team members and officers of the U.S. military, ensuring a permanent record for our distinctive tradition at Rutgers and their service to the nation," noted QGAA President Joseph Carlani, RC '84.

In a typical performance, each individual member would execute over 1,400 separate foot and rifle movements in cadence to form, as a group, a variety of geometrical patterns accentuated by spinning and soaring rifles.

"The Queens Guard brought national and international distinction to Rutgers and we aim to capture its history by interviewing its members," remarked ROHA Director Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

## Much Obligated!

The ROHA staff would like to express their gratitude to the following people for encouraging a family member, friend or classmate to share their oral history with us this quarter.

Mr. John L. Archibald, '43  
Mrs. Joan Yunker Higgins  
Mr. Tom Kindre, '42  
Mr. Robert Paoli  
Col. Richard Plechner, '54  
Mr. Peter M. Sarraiocco, '49  
Ira & June Siegler  
The Class of 1958 Committee

Thank you all!

Rutgers Oral History Archives Semiquincentennial Campaign			
Category	Interviews This Quarter	Total Interviews To Date	Goal
1930s & 1940s Alumni	6	43	100
1950s Alumni	3	26	200
1960s Alumni	3	17	200
1970s & 1980s Alumni	1	2	200
1990s & 2000s Alumni	1	1	50
RU Staff, Faculty & Friends	2	8	250

## TAPS

*We have learned of the passing of the following members:*

Mr. John F. Ambos, '42  
Col. Robert W. Billian, '49  
Mr. Reece E. Haines, '41  
Mr. Robert L. Hoen, '49  
Mr. Alfred C. McGrew

This issue is dedicated to their memory.

*These listings may be incomplete. If you know of anyone who should be listed here, please contact*

## Sandra's Soapbox

We continue to hear comments with adjectives like "exceptional" in discussions about the 2008 RLHS annual meeting and, as you have read, plans are underway for next year's meeting, so, please take the time to mark your calendars and we will see you next year on May 15th!

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing an alumnus from the Class of '60 in Groton, CT, who served with SAC – RECON from '60-'68 and, while there, toured the Submarine Force Library & Museum, which includes the *Nautilus* (SSN-571). Dr. John Chambers and Calvin Moon, '48, had recommended the museum and now I, too, urge you to make the trip. You can peruse their website at [www.submarinemuseum.com](http://www.submarinemuseum.com) for highlights, hours of operation and directions. The exhibits range from the technical to the Submarine Force Medal of Honor recipients and include a tour of the *Nautilus* as well.

We have three new Public History interns signed up for the Fall, plus the Crandon Clark Scholars, the Class of 1956 intern and one Aresty Research Assistant. We will introduce them in the Fall *History Alive* and update you on the activities of that stellar group of interns, now RU alumni, you met this past year – they will be sorely missed.

Sandra Stewart Holyoak  
Director, ROHA

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Friday, May 15, 2008  
RLHS Annual Meeting

Join us as we welcome new members  
into the RLHS and Ken Burns accepts  
the Stephen E. Ambrose  
Oral History Award

Look for details in upcoming issues of  
*History Alive*

### PLEASE ENCLOSE THIS COUPON WITH YOUR GIFT

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School/Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount: \_\_\_\_\_ In honor or memory of (If applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like advice on how to include The Rutgers Oral History Archives in your estate planning? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like this donation to be considered a part of your class gift? \_\_\_\_\_

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**CELEBRATING INDIVIDUAL LIVES BY PRESERVING THEIR STORIES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

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