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FLK/ANTH 399: Field Methods in Ethnography

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Identification for Soldiers

Identification tags have been used for many centuries in not only America but also other countries for soldiers. Identification tags are commonly referred to as dog tags because they looked like the tags that are worn by dogs. They are a way to identify people that are mission or died. Two oblong shaped aluminum discs, both with holes to run the chain through, go around a person's neck. The discs contain information about the person that can help identify them in case of emergency. Today, dog tags are for not only the military but also anybody by giving information about medical conditions, allergies, blood type and even religious preferences. Older dog tags like my father's, had a slight raise or notch around the outside from where the press would "stamp" the information on them. Various military dog tags had different information on them depending on what branch the soldier was and the release year. As of October 14, 2014, Majestic International's website shows during the Vietnam War three different types of identification tags (dog tags) were released. 1965-1967 Vietnam dog tags, the edges are rolled to the back and the hole is on the right. The soldier's service number was on them. 1967-1969 Vietnam dog tags included both a service number and a social security number. This is a transition time when the military switched to using a soldier's social security number for identification instead of issuing a service number. The rolled edge is to the back and the hole is on the left. 1979-current dog tags have a rolled edge to the front with a hole on the left. The tag no longer uses the service number as a reference.

Sitting in front of my computer, I already knew I was going to feature this artifact. Looking down at the artifact brings up many emotions for me. The identification tag (dog tag) I have is my father's: SSG Jack A. Brown Sr. It is not only a family artifact but also a war artifact. He was a Vietnam veteran. From research I have been able to find out the tags that my father wore are from the beginning of 1967, where the United States government was updating the identification tags. On the tag is his full name (Brown, Jack A.) on the first and second line. The branch of service he was in (US), along with his military identification number (XXXXXXXX) is found on the third line. His blood type (O Pos) and his social security number (XXXXXXXXXX) are on the fourth line. Religion affiliation (LDS) or Latter Day Saints is found on the last line. I have only one of his tags while my mother has the other one which will come to me when her passing. The artifact has no real use except nostalgia and memories of a person that has passed away that means a lot to me. I have the dog tag on my key chain that I use for everyday use. I have changed its location, since writing this, and am now wearing it on a necklace as my father did before me.

The last thoughts and reflections on this paper are one of many emotions and thoughts. I do not know if it is because I still miss my father so much or if it is because of the artifact that makes me have all these floods of emotions. From sadness, sorrowful, longing to see my dad again, and heartache, one emotion outweighs them all and that is happiness. Looking down at the artifact reminds me of days gone, happier times and the many stories I listened to from my father about not only the war and service but also his life and memories past. As I touched the dog tag, I wonder how many times my father did the same either in the heat of battle or just lounging around. It also makes me feel sorry for the ones that were not able to come home and the ones we lost during such a troubling time. Because of my closeness to a Vietnam veteran, I

also realize I have stronger empathy towards soldiers and their families especially ones that have had some form of PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder).

I hope that this piece will help not only today's society on remembering our veterans but help our future children remember them also. Many people have fought and died so people of the United States can live free and have the many freedoms we have today. To be able to hold a piece of history from years before my birth, makes a person think of how little our time is here on Earth.