

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History Program

Interview Outline¹

Introductory Information: State the following at the beginning of the interview:

- Your name (as interviewer)
- Date and place of the interview
- Name of the person being interviewed
- “This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library’s *Veterans Remember* Oral History project”

Interviewee Background:

- When & where were you born?
- Where you grew up
- Any early interest in the military?
- Where were you living at the time of draft/enlistment?
- What were you doing at the time?
- How did you enter the service, and why?
- Why did you pick the service branch you joined?
- Were you married at the time? Girlfriend?

Initial Service & Training:

- Do you recall your first days in the service?
- Tell me about your boot camp/training experience(s).
 - Do you remember your instructors?
 - How thorough and effective was your training?
 - ⊖ What helped you cope with the experience?
- What was your military specialty & special trng you received?

Wartime Experiences:

- Where were you posted during the war?
- If overseas, when did you deploy, and how were you shipped overseas?
- Do you remember arriving in theater, where you debarked, and what it was like?
- What was your unit of assignment?
- Your specific job/assignment/MOS?
- Did you see combat? Where? When
 - *[Add additional, detailed questions relative to the specific combat the veteran experienced, based on your background interview.]*
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- The experience of COMBAT:
 - Were you afraid when going into combat? Can you describe your emotions at that moment?

- How did you deal with your fear?
- What motivated you to keep going?
- Are there any other memorable combat experiences we've not already covered?
- Did your unit sustain any casualties in any of these engagements?
- Were you injured? When, Where & How of injury?
- Were you awarded any medals or citations? If so, for what?
- [Higher ranking personnel may be asked about tactics & battle planning, etc.]
- Impressions of the (segregated / integrated) military?
- What do you think about your fellow soldiers/sailors/airmen?
- What was your impression of the NCOs and officers over you?
- How was the morale for your unit? It's fighting ability & effectiveness?
- Opinions about the enemy you faced?
- Opinions/comments about civilians you encountered?
- What are your thoughts about the use of the Atomic bomb at the end of the war? Justified?

Military Life: Ask questions about life in the service and/or at the front or under fire.

- Were you on the point system? A rotation policy?
- How did you stay in touch with your family?
- What was the food like? What was your favorite C or K ration?
- Did you have plenty of supplies?
- What did you do when you/your unit was not in combat?
 - Were there entertainers?
 - What did you do when on leave?
 - Where did you travel while on leave?

- Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual event?
 - What were some of the pranks that you or others would pull?
- Can you describe your reunion with your family when you came back home?
- Do you have photographs? Letters? Personal diary?

Life After Service: Appropriateness of questions will vary if the veteran had a military career.

- Tell us a little about the friends you made while in the service.
- Discuss your release from service, where it was, what you experienced, and what you were feeling?
- What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?
- Did you work or go back to school?
 - Was your education supported by the G.I. Bill?
 - What was your career/professions after the war?
- Did you continue any of the relationships you formed while in the service?
 - For how long?
 - Did you join a veterans' organization?
 - Do you attend reunions?
- Your thoughts on the Korean War (For WW II vets)?
- Your thoughts on the Vietnam War?

Later Years and Closing:

- Do you think your sacrifice during the war was justified? If so, why?
- How did your experience change you / your outlook on life?
- Did your military experience influence your thinking about life; about our current situation?
- What do you think people today should know about what you went through? Or "What lessons could we today learn from your experiences?"
- What do we need to remember about the war & America's involvement?
- What advice or wisdom would you pass on to future generations?

Suggested Questions for Civilians

Introductory Information: State at the beginning of the interview:

- Your name (as interviewer)
- Date and place of the interview
- Name of the person being interviewed
- “This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library’s *Veterans Remember* Oral History project”

Interviewee Background:

- **If interviewing a civilian:**
 - What type of work he or she performed
 - Where he or she served
 - What war he or she served during

Jogging Memory

- What is your name? For married women, what was your maiden name?
- Age?
- Where were you born and raised?
- What was your family background? Educational background?
- What is your current occupation? Current address?
- At the time of the war, were you in a relationship, married, or single?
- What was your spouse's or partner's name and wartime occupation (if interviewed for that reason)?
- If married, when and where were you married?
- Did you have children at any time during the war?

Wartime Work

- Where did you live/work during the war?

- What was your main wartime activity?
- Were you employed outside the home?
- In industry?
- Why did you choose that activity?
- What kind of training were you given?
- What was your title?
- What kind of activities did you perform?
- Who was your supervisor?
- What was your specialty at work?
- What did you like and dislike about it?
- What special rules or conventions did you have to follow?
With whom did you work?
- If you had children, was there child care at work?
- If not, what arrangements did you make?
- Were you unionized?
- Were you an organizer?
- How did you feel about the unions?
- Did you develop friendships during training or the activity itself?
- Did you have family and friends in the service or doing war work?

Life During Wartime:

General:

- How did you feel about the war?
- What were your family or friends' feelings?
- Did you live with family, friends, or coworkers?
- In what ways did the war change your activities or habits?
- Were you or others in your community treated differently because of your gender/ethnicity/race or other factors?
- If so, how did you or others react?
- What were some of the first changes in your life after the war started?
- What different responsibilities did you have to take on?
- What social activities were you involved in at work or after work with coworkers?
- How did you entertain yourself outside of work?
- Did you or others get married during wartime?
- What were weddings like?
- Did you worry that our side might not win?
- Did you know anyone who was killed or wounded in the war?
- Tell me about corresponding via letters or otherwise with friends or family in the service.
- What effect did the war have on your physical and mental health or that of others you knew?
- Do you think that medical care changed because of the war?

- Did you have worthwhile experiences because of the war?
- What was your most memorable experience? Most memorable character? Most humorous experience?
- Have you visited any memorials or participated in any commemorations of the war?

World War II:

- Was there a lack of social opportunities and friends because of the war?
- How did your community respond to the war and civil defense (or other home front initiatives)?
- Did child care activities change for mothers?
- Tell me about shortages and rationing of food and gas.
- Did you have a victory garden or other ways to get enough food?
- How did you cope with wartime shortages?
- Talk about recycling of rubber, grease, or other commodities.
- To what extent was there hoarding or black market activity in your area?
- How did you feel about war news from newsreels or radio?

Korea, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf Wars:

- If your spouse was in the service, did you feel you got good support from the service?
- Were you comfortable and did you have a reasonable standard of living during and after the war?
- What effect did the war have on your physical or mental health?
- Did you think it was right for America to be at war?
- What did you think about the enemy?
- How did you feel about war news from television?
- How did you feel about antiwar protests?
- Did you trust and support American civilian and military leaders?
- Did you change your views over the span of the war?

Postwar Experiences:

- How did you feel when the war ended?
- What did you do when you heard the news? (For WWII: Where were you on V-J Day? V-E Day?)
- How would you describe the ways that the war changed your life and those of others?
- Did you keep your job or continue other wartime activities after the war?
- Is there one thought about your wartime experience that you want to share with future generations?

Closing Questions:

- How did your experiences change you? Change your outlook and attitudes?
- Is there anything else I should ask you?

- Is there anything that you would like to add on this subject?

¹ This questionnaire is a revision of the Library of Congress' Veteran's History Project, dtd 2007.