Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

*Veterans Remember* Oral History Program

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ – Vietnam War

Interview Outline[[1]](#endnote-1)

**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?
  + Tell us about your parents.
  + Did you have any siblings?
* Where you grew up?
  + Schools?
  + What else do you remember about growing up during the 1950s & 60s?
  + Extra-curricular activities?
  + Plans following high school?
  + Any interest in the military at the time? Your thoughts about the draft?
  + Jobs or school following high school graduation?
    - Were you following the war in Vietnam at the time? Your thoughts about that?
  + Do you remember the Cuban Missile Crisis?
  + Building of the Berlin Wall?
  + Do you remember the JFK assassination on Friday, Nov. 22nd, 1963?
  + 1968:
    - Tet Offensive in late January – February?
    - Do you remember the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4?
    - Assassination of Robert Kennedy on June 6?
    - Democratic National Convention (Chicago) in August?

**Military Experiences:**

* Circumstances of being drafted/enlisting in \_\_\_\_\_\_?
* Where were you living at the time of draft?
  + What were you doing at the time?
* Tell us about being drafted/inducted?
  + The mood of the country at the time about the war?
  + Why did you pick the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?
  + Were you married at the time? Girlfriend?
  + Your parents’ reaction?
  + Your thoughts about the war at that time?
* 1968:
  + Tet Offensive in late January – February?
  + Do you remember the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4?
  + Assassination of Robert Kennedy on June 6?
* Democratic National Convention (Chicago) in August?

**Initial Service & Training:**

* 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 training you received?
* Did you get leave before shipping to Vietnam?

**Wartime Experiences:**

* When did you deploy to Vietnam, and how were you shipped overseas?
* Do you remember arriving in theater, where you debarked, and what it was like?
  + Initial impression of Vietnam? Visually, sounds & smells?
  + What were your personal concerns, going into combat for the first time?
* What was your unit of assignment? When did you find out?
  + Your specific job/assignment/MOS?
* Impressions of your first day on the line?
  + Do you remember your first time under fire?
  + The first casualty you saw, inflicted?
* (Questions specific to veteran’s own experiences, developed after the pre-interview session)

**Reflections:**

* 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?
* 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.]
* The toughest part about your service in Vietnam?
* Morale and discipline issues?
  + How was the morale for your unit? It’s fighting ability & effectiveness?
  + What did you know about what was going on back in the states?
    - The protests against the war?
      * Draft dodgers and draft card burners?
      * The ease in which many were able to get deferments?
    - Hippies & the counter-culture back home?
    - Shootings at Kent State in May, 1970?
    - Jane Fonda’s trip to North Vietnam in 1972?
  + Impressions of the integrated military?
  + Was there any drug use among the soldiers that you observed?
  + Counting the days to the end of your tour?
  + Treatment of the new arrivals?
* What do you think about your fellow soldiers/sailors/airmen?
* What was your impression of the NCOs and officers over you?
* Opinions about the enemy you faced?
* Opinions/comments about civilians you encountered?

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

* How did you stay in touch with your family?
* Did you know about the growing protests against the war at home?
  + What was your reaction to that?
* 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?
* Tell us a little about the friends you made while in the service.
* Were you on the point system? A rotation policy?
* Describe your rotation home: When? How?
  + How were you treated by the public?
  + What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?
  + Did you have any challenges with readjusting to civilian life?
* Can you describe your reunion with your family when you came back home?
* What were your thoughts about the Paris Peace Accords of 1973, which gave the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong control of large portions of South Vietnam?
* What did you think about the way the war ended in 1975, with the collapse of South Vietnam, and the U.S. Congress deciding not to send aid?
  + Did the United States respond appropriately to the plight of the Vietnamese refugees/boat people?
* Do you have photographs? Letters? Personal diary?

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

* Did you have any difficulties adjusting to life in the United States? (PTSD)
* 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?

**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 life’s lessons did you learn based on your experiences during the war?
* Why did you agree to do this interview?
  + 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?

1. This questionnaire is a revision of the Library of Congress’ Veteran’s History Project, dtd 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)