

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Veterans Remember* Oral History Program

Interview Outline<sup>1</sup>

**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 ALPL  
*Veterans Remember* Oral History project”

**Interviewee Background:**

1. When & where were you born?
2. Tell me about your parents?
3. Where did you grow up?
4. Where did you attend high school?
  - a. What were your favorite subjects?
  - b. Were you involved in any extra-curricular activities?
  - c. Your plans after high school?
  - d. Any early interest in the military at that time?
5. Do you remember December 7th & attack on Pearl Harbor?
6. Where were you living at the time of draft/enlistment?
  - a. What were you doing at the time?
7. How did you enter the service, and why?
8. Why did you pick the service branch you joined?
9. Were you married at the time? Girlfriend?

**Initial Service & Training:**

1. Do you recall your first days in the service?

2. Tell me about your boot camp/training experience(s).
  - a. Do you remember your instructors?
  - b. How thorough and effective was your training?
  - c. What helped you cope with the experience?
3. What was your military specialty & special trng you received?

### **Wartime Experiences:**

1. Where were you posted during the war?
2. If overseas, when did you deploy, and how were you shipped overseas?
3. Do you remember arriving in theater, where you debarked, and what it was like?
4. What was your unit of assignment?
5. Your specific job/assignment/MOS?
6. Did you see combat? Where? When
  - a. *[Add additional, detailed questions relative to the specific combat the veteran experienced, based on your background interview.]*
7. The experience of COMBAT:
  - a. Were you afraid when going into combat? Can you describe your emotions at that moment?
  - b. How did you deal with your fear?
  - c. What motivated you to keep going?
8. Are there any other memorable combat experiences we've not already covered?
9. Did your unit sustain any casualties in any of these engagements?
10. Were you injured? When, Where & How of injury?
11. Were you awarded any medals or citations? If so, for what?
12. [Higher ranking personnel may be asked about tactics & battle planning, etc.]
13. Impressions of the (segregated / integrated) military?

14. What do you think about your fellow soldiers/sailors/airmen?
15. What was your impression of the NCOs and officers over you?
16. How was the morale for your unit? It's fighting ability & effectiveness?
17. Opinions about the enemy you faced?
18. Opinions/comments about civilians you encountered?
19. 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.

1. Were you on the point system? A rotation policy?
2. How did you stay in touch with your family?
3. What was the food like? What was your favorite C or K ration?
4. Did you have enough supplies?
5. What did you do when you/your unit was not in combat?
  - a. Were there entertainers?
  - b. What did you do when on leave?
  - c. Where did you travel while on leave?
6. Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual event?
7. Can you describe your reunion with your family when you came back home?
8. Do you have photographs? Letters? Personal diary?

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

1. Tell us a little about the friends you made while in the service.
  - a. Who was your best friend(s)?
2. Discuss your release from service, where it was, what you experienced, and what you were feeling?
3. What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?

4. Did you work or go back to school?
  - a. Was your education supported by the G.I. Bill?
  - b. What was your career/professions after the war?
5. Did you continue any of the relationships you formed while in the service?
  - a. For how long?
  - b. Did you join a veterans' organization?
  - c. Do you attend reunions?
6. Your thoughts on the Korean War (For WW II vets)?
7. Your thoughts on the Vietnam War?

**Later Years and Closing:** [Below are some suggestions for closing questions.]

1. Why did you agree to do this interview?
2. Do you think your sacrifice during the war was justified? If so, why?
3. How did your experience change you / your outlook on life?
4. Did your military experience influence your thinking about life; about our current situation?
5. What do you think people today should know about what you went through? Or "What lessons could we today learn from your experiences?"
6. What do we need to remember about the war & America's involvement?
7. 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?

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