

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History Program
_____ – Vietnam War
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?
 - 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.