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?
  o What were you doing at the time?
▪ Tell us about being drafted/inducted?
  o The mood of the country at the time about the war?
  o Why did you pick the ________?
  o Were you married at the time? Girlfriend?
  o Your parents’ reaction?
  o Your thoughts about the war at that time?
▪ 1968:
  o Tet Offensive in late January – February?
  o Do you remember the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4?
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Initial Service & Training:

▪ Tell me about your boot camp/training experience(s).
  o Do you remember your instructors?
  o How thorough and effective was your training?
  o 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?
  
  o Initial impression of Vietnam? Visually, sounds & smells?
  
  o What were your personal concerns, going into combat for the first time?

• What was your unit of assignment? When did you find out?
  
  o Your specific job/assignment/MOS?
  
  o

• Impressions of your first day on the line?
  
  o Do you remember your first time under fire?
  
  o The first casualty you saw, inflicted?

• (Questions specific to veteran’s own experiences, developed after the pre-interview session)
  
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**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?
  o 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?
  o Were there entertainers?
  o What did you do when on leave?
  o Where did you travel while on leave?

• Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual event?
  o 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?
  o How were you treated by the public?
  o What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?
  o 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?
  o 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?
  o Was your education supported by the G.I. Bill?
  o What was your career/professions after the war?
• Did you continue any of the relationships you formed while in the service?
  o For how long?
  o Did you join a veterans’ organization?
  o 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?
  o 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?

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