

A Guide for Conducting Oral Histories

Sample Questions

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The following is an example of the list I keep in front of me during WWII oral history interviews with former soldiers. Keep in mind however that this is only a guideline for me to use as reference. I always allow the interview process to create more questions in my mind as I listen to the interviewee's story. Refer to "How to interview" for more detailed information about the process.

- Where did you grow up?
 - Who were your parents and what did they do?
 - Any brothers and or sisters?
 - Do you remember where you were when you heard the Pearl Harbor had been attacked?
 - Do you remember what you thought or felt then?
 - How did you get involved in armed forces?
 - How old were you?
 - What were you doing prior to the war?
 - What was your assigned job?
 - What battle were you involved with?
 - What is your first memory of arriving at the war front?
 - Were you scared all of the time or was it just a part of life?
 - Do you remember your first day in battle?
 - Did you leave anybody at home... wife, girl friend, mom, dad?
 - What are the history books leaving out?
 - Do you know you were a part of history while it was happening?
 - During combat how close were you to the enemy?
 - What did you do to break the fear, boredom, monotony, etc.?
 - Did you have any pets in the service?
 - Did you see any of the USO shows we hear so much about?
 - If so did you see anybody famous?
 - Can you remember a favorite song from that time?
 - What was the hardest part of your time in the service?
 - What do you want the generations to come to know and remember about WWII?
 - What was an average day like?
 - Were you ever wounded?
 - Did you ever think you might lose your life?
 - If you could tell me one short story about your time (fun, serious, sad, anything) what would it be?
 - Have you ever faced anything like WWII since?
- Special friendships**
- What have you done since the war?
 - Injured still being treated?
 - What major message would you leave for the generations to come?