

Sample Oral History Interview Questions

Our Soldiers' Stories: Vietnam

The questions below are provided to engage both the interviewer and interviewee in the conversation. This list is comprehensive, and it is not intended that every interviewee be asked every single question. These questions should also be used as a launching point for discussion that is meaningful and relevant to the interviewee's experiences in and with Vietnam.

Please review and let your interviewer know if there are any questions that you wish not to answer.

Before the interview begins, make sure the provided release form has been signed.

Introduction: Name the interviewer and interviewee, the date and time, the location of the interview and the title of the project and name of institution: (Our Soldier's Stories: Vietnam, Museums of Historic Hopkinsville-Christian County), and a general description of the interviewee's branch of service, rank(s), locations served, etc.

Jogging Memory:

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. How is Christian County home to you?
3. If not born here, where born? Birthdate
4. How old were you during most of the Vietnam War era?
5. What were you doing during this period?
6. When did you first hear the word Vietnam? What were your thoughts/impressions previous to serving?
7. What was your attitude initially regarding American involvement in this military conflict?
8. Did you know anyone who served in the Vietnam War before you? What stories had you heard?
9. Were you drafted or did you enlist?
10. If you enlisted, why did you choose to join?
11. In which branch did you serve? What was your rank?
12. Why did you pick the service branch you joined?
13. Tell me about your first days in service.
14. Tell me about your boot camp/training experience(s).
15. Who was the first person(s) you remember meeting? Tell me about them.
16. Do you remember your instructors?
17. How did you get through it?

Experiences:

18. Where exactly did you go?
19. What were your first impressions of Vietnam? What do you remember most?
20. Do you remember arriving? What it was like?
21. What was your job/assignment?
22. Describe a typical day for you in Vietnam.

23. What was the most dangerous part of your job?
24. Were there many casualties in your unit?
25. Tell me about a couple of your most memorable experiences.
26. Were you a prisoner of war?
27. Were you awarded any medals or citations?
28. How did you get them?
29. As the war progressed, did your attitude change? If so, how and why?
30. How did you feel when Saigon fell in April 1975?

Life:

31. How did you stay in touch with your loved ones back home?
32. What was the food like?
33. Did you have plenty of supplies?
34. Tell me about how you dealt with pressure and stress.
35. Was there something special you did for 'good luck'?
36. How did people entertain themselves?
37. Were there entertainers?
38. What did you do – and where did you go – on leave/R&R?
39. Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual event?
40. What were some of the pranks that you or others would pull?
41. Do you have photographs? (If so, have them describe photographs that are present.)
42. What did you think of your officers or fellow soldiers?

After Service:

43. Do you recall the day your service ended?
44. Where were you?
45. What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?
46. How did it feel to be "home"?
47. Did you work or go to school?
48. Did you make any close friends while in the service?
49. Did you continue any of those relationships?
50. Did you join a veterans' organization?

Closing:

51. What does Vietnam mean to you now?
52. Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or politics in general?
53. How did your service and experience affect your life?
54. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank the interviewee for his service, for sharing his experiences, and for spending time with you today.