

Potential Veteran Interview Questions

(WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan & Persian Gulf Wars)

Segment 1: Give information on date and place of interview, name of person being interviewed, birth date and current address, and the people attending the interview. Ask the veteran what war(s) and branch of service he/she served in, what was his/her rank, and where he/she served.

Use the follow introduction (Fill in information from Biography Data Sheet):

"Today is _____. I am _____ and I am interviewing (interviewee's name) _____ at (address) _____. (State relationship to interviewee) Mr/Mrs _____ is _____. Mr/Mrs. is _____ old and was born on _____. Mr/Mrs. _____ served in (war) _____. Mr/Mrs. was in (unit) _____ and held the following rank: _____.

Segment 2: Jogging Memory [warming up]

Were you drafted or did you enlist?
Where were you living at the time?
Why did you join?
Why did you pick the service branch you joined?
Do you recall your first days in service?
What did it feel like?
Tell me about your boot camp/training experience.
How did you get through it?

Segment 3: Experience [large amount of interview time]

Which wars did you serve in (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf)?
Where exactly did you go?
Do you remember arriving and what was it like?
What was your job assignment?
Did you see combat?
Were there many casualties in your unit?
Tell me a couple of your most memorable experiences.
Were you a prisoner of war?
Tell me about your experiences in captivity and when freed.
Were you awarded any medals or citations?
How did you get them?
Higher ranks may be asked about battle planning. Those who sustained injuries may be asked about the circumstances.

Segment 4: Life in the Service

Ask questions about life in the service and/or at the front or under fire.

How did you stay in touch with your family?
What was the food like?
Did you have plenty of supplies?
Did you feel pressure or stress?

Was there something special you did for “good luck” ?
How did people entertain themselves?
Were there entertainers?
What did you do when on leave?
Where did you travel while in the service?
Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual events?
What were some of the pranks that you or others would pull?
Do you have photographs?
Who are the people in the photographs?
What did you think of officers or fellow soldiers?
Did you keep a personal diary?

Segment 5: After Service

Appropriateness of questions will vary if the veteran had a military career.

Do you recall the day your service ended?
Where were you?
What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?
Did you work or go back to school?
Was your education supported by the G. I. Bill?
Did you make any close friendships while in the service?
For how long?
Did you join a veterans organization?

Segment 6: Later Years and Closing

What did you go on to do as a career after the war?
Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general?
If in a veterans organization, what kinds of activities does your post or association have?
Do you attend reunions?
How did your service and experience affect your life?
Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this interview?

Before turning off the recorder do the following: Redirect additional questions – if there are battle accounts or references to interesting people, rephrase as questions to get more details. Look over notes taken during the interview—are there other questions that can be asked as well? Ask veteran if it is okay to follow up with post-interview questions if necessary. Sometimes you will discover you needed to ask something crucial, but did not realize it. Once you have done some further research, then you can ask the “right” questions and you will need to contact them again. Keep recorder going . . . often there are what as known as “door-knob” questions—they remember something fabulous! You don’t want to miss this.