



U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Creating a Personal Memoir of Your Coast Guard Service:

REMEMBER: We need your help to preserve Coast Guard history for future generations!!

Please Write Your Memoirs--We Will Publish It On Our Website!

The Coast Guard and the Naval Historical Center have an active Oral History Program supported by the Naval Historical Foundation. It encourages retired members of the Coast Guard and Navy to record their experiences and to contribute them to its growing oral history collection. Limitations in funds and interviewers as well as the far-flung nature of our retired shipmates limit the Coast Guard and the Naval Historical Center to interviewing only a small fraction of our retirees. **There is, however, a method whereby retirees can put their recollections into the historical record as well as create a history for one's family.**

This is a unique opportunity to bring one's work and experiences to the attention of historians. More and more of those who write history are interested in what individuals other than the obvious leaders, such as Fleet Commanders, were doing. Since diaries and letters are no longer produced in the volume and format that they once were, memoirs and oral interview transcripts have gained a new importance.

The transcripts are available to researchers interested in naval and Coast Guard history and are posted on the Coast Guard's website. We would like to add your memoirs to this collection.

The computer has revolutionized writing and allows someone at home to produce copy that is just as good as a secretary could prepare in years past. It is the perfect tool for the memoir writer and oral historian. The Oral History Program prefers to have transcripts and memoirs on diskettes as well as paper copies so that they can be easily reproduced and loaded into computer files at a future date. Of course not everyone is adept at using a keyboard. For those who still prefer the pen as the weapon of choice, you probably can arrange for some high

school student to earn a little college tuition by converting your writing to print as most students this age have access to computers.

For those interested in writing their memoirs or conducting oral interviews to be used by the program, here are a few suggestions:

How to Write Your Memoir:

- **Remember that future researchers may be unfamiliar with the organization of the United States Coast Guard today.** Since this is a historical record, it is best to spell out acronyms and explain the events that may be familiar to our generation but not to the next or following ones. For example -- in referring to the Gulf War we had better explain it was the one against Iraq in the beginning of the 1990s. At some point we might find ourselves having to define what was meant by "Soviet."
- **Focus on your personal point of view.** The value of personal memoirs and oral histories is that they reflect how an individual looked at his/her world, and how he/she dealt with it. While there will be places where it is necessary to talk about world/country/Navy-wide developments to set the context, keep in mind the importance of how you saw things at the time and how you and your colleagues reacted to them.
- **Stick to your time frame.** A good memoir does not launch off on an exposition of "Why we need a new cutter today" -- that's for your letter to the local newspaper or your Congressman. What is valuable is to capture as much as possible of the spirit and perspective of the time you are describing. It's easy today to wonder what all the fuss was about Sputnik, but it was a momentous event at one time. Try to capture the time.
- **A certain amount of objectivity does not hurt.** Ego is fine, but a little goes a long way. Remember, these are your recollections and you are on center stage. If, after describing what you and your shipmates did, you now have some doubts about the value or effect of those efforts in the long run, it does not hurt to express these doubts as objectively as possible. At the same time, take full credit for what you feel you accomplished, even if it was only moving the government bureaucracy a fraction of an inch. Historians will be interested to see how individuals did make a difference -- or how the cumulative effect of individual actions may have affected history.
- **How you approached challenges is always interesting.** Using examples, you can describe your leadership methods, your typical problems and how you dealt with them -- tell your sea stories here -- or how it was to serve under a demanding Commanding Officer. What was it like to go into combat in the waters off Vietnam, chase drug smugglers across the Caribbean, or fight the good fight in the halls of Coast Guard Headquarters. The process of how things were done in the various divisions in Washington is part of our history and should be included -- again with examples.

- **The personnel process is always interesting:** how jobs, promotions, assignments were obtained, how the system worked (or did not) and the inequities, as you saw them, of the times will be of interest to historians. The culture of the Coast Guard at particular times will be a topic for many books and dissertations.
- **Above all, tell stories about the people you worked with, warts and all.** Please be prudent -- do not slander people, but do not hesitate to tell the truth. These stories give body to a set of memoirs and transcripts and make for interesting reading. All of us have anecdotes that we trot out at dinner parties -- put them in your memoirs.
- **Remember that the greatest benefit of writing your memoir will go to your family, children, and grandchildren.** They want to know about your experiences during your military career. As one gets older, there is an increasing desire to know about one's parents and relatives. While the Oral History Program wants your memoirs, your writings will also be invaluable to family members of the following generations.

Length

Don't worry about the length. In a memoir, detail is important and helps to give researchers a feel of the times. Also be sure to give equal weight to your early career. As a junior person, you may have been a fly on the wall and saw things from a different perspective.

Research

While memoirs are just what they imply -- the memories of a life and career -- it does not hurt to get a little historical accuracy into them. Details such as dates, ship names, and locations are vital for the historical record. First check your library to see if anyone has written about an event to be discussed. If so, you may want to refer to the work in your memoir and comment on its accuracy. An excellent reference series is called *Facts on File*. They can give you a pretty good idea of when things happened in most countries and the names of key people. The Coast Guard's website may prove to be helpful: <http://www.uscg.mil>. The Naval Historical Center has a website as well that may be useful: <http://www.history.navy.mil>. Be sure to examine the "Frequently Asked Questions" and "Coast Guard at War" sections. You may also have some personal papers that you may want to consult, and to add photocopies of these to your memoir as appendices.

Format

The Oral History Program publishes using single space, 12 point, Times New Roman font, right hand column unjustified. Page numbers are centered at the bottom. Be sure to have a family member or friend proof-read your monograph or transcript. Use the Spell Check feature. Our computer program is Microsoft

Word, but we can convert from most other programs. We will be happy to receive a copy on CD, DVD or as an email attachment (pdf files are best). Don't put too many commands in the text for line spacing and the like, it is easier to have a relatively uncluttered text which can be formatted to our specifications.

In addition to the narrative, our oral histories contain an Introduction, Biography, Table of Contents (subjects covered), and a Personal Memoir Donation Form (attached at the end of this document).

An Introduction is optional. If you include one it should be no more than two pages and you may want to have it written by someone else. The objective of the introduction is to inform the reader about "why is this significant or of interest." The introduction may refer to some of the events, places, times, people served with, and things accomplished, as a means to whet the reader's appetite.

The Biography page is a one page narrative providing a life overview from birth through retirement. Be sure to include your full name, and any nicknames, as well as ranks held. In the last paragraph you should list awards received. You may also acknowledge your spouse and children here.

The Table of Contents page should serve as a guide corresponding with your narrative designed to point readers to the portion of your manuscript of their particular research interest.

As previously mentioned, you may want to add some personal papers such as a letter home describing a momentous event as appendices.

The Personal Memoir Donation Form should be printed out and the top portion filled in. A completed copy with the signature of a representative of the Naval Historical Foundation will be returned to you.

Once you have completed your memoir, send it in hardcopy and disk, as well as a completed hard copy of the Personal Memoir Donation Form to:

**COMMANDANT (CG-09224)
ATTN COAST GUARD HISTORIAN'S OFFICE
US COAST GUARD
2100 2ND STREET SW STOP 7362
WASHINGTON DC 20593-7362**

The Coast Guard, future historians, and members of your family will be forever grateful for your efforts.

Examples of Published Memoirs

Listed below are some published memoirs. Not all were Fleet Commanders! You may want to read a few of these to see how they approached different issues. Who knows? Perhaps your efforts might be rewarded by publication!

Batcheller, Edgar H. *As I Remember*. New York: Vantage Press, 1995.

Fahey, James J. *Pacific War Diary*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963.

Huchthausen, Peter A. *Echoes of the Mekong*. Baltimore MD: Nautical & Aviation Pub. Co. of America, 1996.

Mason, Theodore C. *Battleship Sailor*. Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982.

Puller, Lewis Jr. *Fortunate Son: The Autobiography of Lewis B. Puller, Jr.* New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991.

Sheppard, Don. *Riverine: A Brown Water Sailor in the Delta, 1967*. Novato CA: Presidio Press, 1992.

Zumwalt, Elmo R. Jr. *On Watch*. New York: Quadrangle Press, 1976.

REMEMBER: We need your help to preserve Coast Guard history for future generations!! Write your memoirs!



Oral History Release Form (see next page)



Oral History Release Form

DECLARATION OF TRUST

The undersigned does hereby appoint and designate as her/his Trustee herein, the Coast Guard Historian's Office, U.S. Coast Guard, to perform and discharge the following duties, powers, and privileges in connection with the possession and use of a certain taped interview between the undersigned and the Oral History Program representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard.

1. Classification of Transcript (place an "X" in your choice):

() a. Classified OPEN, the transcript(s) may be published in any medium, read, cited or quoted from or the recording(s) audited, cited or quoted from by qualified personnel upon presentation of proper credentials, as determined by the Coast Guard Historian's Office, without restriction.

() b. Classified PERMISSION REQUIRED TO CITE OR QUOTE, the user will be required to obtain permission in writing from the interviewee prior to quoting or citing from either the transcripts(s) or the recording(s).

() c. Classified PERMISSION REQUIRED, permission must be obtained in writing from the interviewee before the transcribed interview(s) can be examined or the tape recording(s) audited. This provision to apply only to a user other than a member of the Oral History Program.

() d. Classified CLOSED, the transcribed interview(s) and the tape recording(s) will be sealed until a time specified by the interviewee. This may be until the death of the interviewee or for any specified number of years.

2. It is expressly understood that in giving this authorization, I am in no way precluded from placing such restrictions as I may desire upon use of the interview at any time during my lifetime, nor does this authorization in any way affect my rights to the copyright of my literary expressions that may be contained in the interview.

Witness my hand and seal this _____ day of _____ (Month), _____ (Year).

_____.

Interviewee's Signature

I hereby accept and consent to the foregoing Declaration of Trust and the powers therein conferred upon me as Trustee:

_____.

Interviewer's Signature

