



U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Oral History: A Guide for Conducting Naval Historical Interviews

Prepared by Commander David F. Winkler, USNR

NHC VTU 0615R

Naval Historical Center

Table of Contents:

- * Preface
- * Why Oral History Is Important
 - * Folklore versus History
 - * Types of Interviews
 - * Who to Interview
 - * Preparation
 - * The Interview
- * To video-record or not to video-record
 - * Other Interview Options
 - * Follow-on Activities
- * Summarizing an Interview
- * Transcribing an Interview

- * Editing a Transcript
 - * Packaging the Transcript
 - * Bibliography
 - * End-of-Tour Interview Core Questions
 - * Necessary Forms / Interview Preliminaries
-

Related Resources: [Creating a Personal Memoir of Your Naval Service](#)

Preface

The purpose of this guide is to standardize some of the practices developed at the Naval Historical Center (NHC) by historians of the Contemporary History Branch (CHB), members of Naval Reserve Combat Documentation Detachment 206 (Det. 206), Naval Reserve Volunteer Training Unit 0615R, and the Naval Historical Foundation (NHF) oral historian. This guide is also designed to provide some direction to volunteers who conduct oral histories on behalf of the NHC or the NHF. Consequently, there are passages in this guide that may not apply to you, depending on what your objectives are in conducting oral history.

This guide should not be considered the final word on how to conduct oral history. There are several fine references and organizations that can help a novice oral historian. Some of these are listed in the bibliography at the end of this guide. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions on how to improve this guide, or need additional assistance, please write to the Naval Historical Foundation, call the Oral Historian at (202) 678-4333, or send an e-mail to nhfwny@navalhistory.org.

Why Oral History Is Important

The second half of the 20th Century was a critical time in the history of the US Navy. After defeating German U-boats and the Imperial Japanese Fleet in World War II, the US Navy responded to more than 250 crises during the following five decades, including major conflicts in Korea , Southeast Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Afghanistan . The Navy responded to challenges involving China , Lebanon , India , Libya , Grenada , Liberia , Cuba , Haiti , Bosnia , and Kosovo. The Soviet Navy was a significant concern through much of the period.

The past fifty years mark incredible developments in naval architecture and technology. Nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, submarines, and surface combatants; submarine-

launched ballistic missiles; ship-launched surface-to-air and cruise missiles; plus information collection and dissemination mark just some of the revolutionary advances of recent decades.

While future historians will note the significance of technological strides made by the Navy during the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries, they will also study social changes. A shift away from a Naval Academy-dominated officer corps, racial integration, the switch to an all-volunteer force, and finally, the movement of women into most Navy billets are subjects that will be explored in many research and writing projects.

The irony of this information age is that it will probably be more difficult for future historians to reconstruct the events of the late 20th Century than to study the 19th Century. People are less likely to keep diaries, draft correspondence, or send memoranda as in the past. Major decisions are made using e-mail, telephones, facsimile, and teleconferencing. Although files are supposed to be maintained electronically, in fifty years floppy disks will likely have followed the path of 8-track tapes and vinyl record albums. In some cases, verbal recollections may constitute the only documentation as to why certain decisions were made. Furthermore, many individuals who fought during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, and served and contributed to the Navy during this modern era will no longer be with us in the near future. Already many who have fought in World War II have passed on, surviving Korean War veterans are past retirement age, and the majority of Vietnam veterans are nearing retirement. As recognized at a national level by the Library of Congress Veterans History Project, there is an urgent need to capture the memories of our veterans.

Let us be candid. As the following pages detail, oral history takes a great deal of effort. However, the end result will more than compensate for the hours spent conducting research and reviewing transcripts. You will have enriched your life as you have taken onboard the experiences of those individuals interviewed. Additionally, you will have provided a measure of immortality for the individual as their recollections are made available for future generations. Finally, you are doing a great service for the Navy by assisting in preserving our great heritage.

Folklore versus History

There is a Folklore and Historical approach to conducting oral history. While the objectives of the respective approaches are often compatible, it is important to understand the nuances.

With the Folklorists, often it is not what is said, but how it is said, that is important. Often the interview focuses on individual characteristics. Folklorists consider the recording as a primary source document. They argue that a transcription cannot capture the accents, voice inflections, tone, and emotions are lost in transcription. Folklorists especially love video-recording interviews to capture the individual's demeanor and facial expressions.

Historians are interesting in oral history for the information yielded. The interview focuses on the events and people that the interviewee was involved with. Historians also love oral history as interviewees often provide lively insightful quotes suitable for insertion into a text. Historians understand that oral history is not a perfect means to capture history due to the foibles of the human mind. Consequently, interviewees are strongly encouraged to review transcripts or interview summaries to check dates, names, places, and other information for historical accuracy. Once the transcription or interview summary is edited and corrected, it becomes the primary source document.

While respecting the folklorist approach, this guide aims to take the historical approach in capturing naval history.

Types of Interviews

The Navy Oral History Program collection includes four types of interviews: **(1) After-action, (2) Topical, (3) End of Tour, and (4) Biographical (or Career).**

After-action interviews consist of interviews conducted by historians of the NHC's Contemporary History Branch and members of the Naval Reserve Combat Documentation Detachment 206 in the wake of significant naval or joint operations. Recent examples of this genre include interviews by NHC historians and Det. 206 members with dozens of naval personnel who survived the impact of American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, and interviews conducted by Det. 206 members with naval personnel engaged in the War on Terror in Central Asia . Such interviews tend to be short and focused.

Topical interviews focus on a specific subject and target individuals associated with the subject. For example, an NHC historian has conducted extensive interviews to provide material for his study on the integration of African-Americans at the U.S. Naval Academy. In 2000, two Det. 206 members traveled to Newport , Rhode Island , to document the evolving roles and challenges of the Naval War College in response to the Navy's shift to network-centric warfighting. The length of these interviews are dependent on the interviewees involvement with the subject and they tend to be focused.

The End of Tour interview program has been assigned to the Naval Historical Center 's Naval Reserve Volunteer Training Unit 0615R as a primary mission. The goal of the program is to document the recollections of senior Navy leaders as they complete major Navy tours of duty. The length of the interview is dependent with such variables as the length of tour and the interviewee's responsibilities. One to three hours is the norm for such interviews.

While the first three types of interviews can usually be conducted during one recording session, **biographical interviews** usually involve several sessions. Both the U.S. Naval Institute and the Naval Historical Foundation have ongoing biographical collection efforts. Biographical interviews are usually conducted well after retirement and tend to be more reflective. A biographical interview may take several multi-hour sessions.

Who to Interview

While everyone has a story to tell, not all stories are worth recording. Oral history projects can consume many hours in preparation, recording, transcribing, editing, and accessioning. You should begin with some objectives. Ask yourself how an individual's story might fill a void in our understanding of naval history. You should also consider the health of your potential interviewee as well as other extenuating circumstances that may affect the final product. Look for referrals. When contacting an office, a ship, or an organization, you should ask, "who would be the best person to talk to on this issue." Additional guidance will be provided when different types of oral history interviews are discussed.

Correspondence or e-mail introduction will help to open doors. For members of Det. 206, contact procedures are outlined in the detachment's "Standard Operating Procedure" document. In the communication, you need to convey your project's objective, why interviewing this individual will help meet those objectives, how long you anticipate the interview will take, and how the information will be used. You should then follow up a few days later to confirm that the individual received your communication and is agreeable to the project.

Preparation

How you prepare for an interview depends on the type of interview you are conducting. One common denominator in all interviews is recording equipment. While a recording studio equipped with state-of-the-art recording equipment is the ideal situation, reality dictates that you go to the interviewee to "get the story." Thus, portable recorders are often our tools of the trade. Before acquiring new recording equipment, it's important to consider the flexibility of the sound storage medium with regards to transcription equipment and long-term storage. For example, videotapes are very difficult for transcribers to work with and have a limited shelf life.

The Naval Historical Center provides recorders for use by its historians and members of Det. 206. A good recorder can be purchased for under \$50 and most brands share common features. One useless feature that seems common to many is the AVR switch. In the ON position, this feature turns the recorder on with the sound of a voice and then shuts it off if there is a pause. A historian once conducted an interview and noted his recorder stopping and starting. This switch was the culprit. It is not difficult to imagine the quality of your recording should this switch be engaged. It is recommended you tape over the switch.

Frequently check the volume dial to ensure it is set at the right level. Once at the beginning of an interview the interviewer took the recorder out of his pocket and friction caused the volume dial to go from maximum to minimum. Fortunately, the interviewee graciously agreed to another recording session.

Of course you should have fresh batteries and have spares handy. Should you be using a cassette recorder, the tapes you use can also make a difference. We recommend you use high-density, 60 or 90-minute tapes. Avoid the use of micro-cassette recorders.

Conduct a test recording before you conduct the interview. This way you will know that you have a good tape and good batteries and that the volume is adjusted correctly. Remember the "Play" and "Record" buttons both should be depressed. There is a one-button recording feature on some of the newer models. An interview was once conducted with just the "Play" button engaged. The end result was a very silent interview.

Whatever the type of interview, you will start each tape by stating your name, the interviewee's name, rank and title if appropriate, the date, and location. If a second tape is used repeat the above and state "This is the second tape." You should have a notepad handy and take notes. If there are two of you, one individual should be the note taker and the other should focus on asking the questions. What questions you ask depend on the type of interview.

Because After-action interviews deal with a recent event, your questions may simply focus on establishing a narrative of "what happened"-when, where, why, and how and the role the interviewee played. Take advantage of opportunities to review message traffic, situation reports, and any media coverage prior to the interview. As for whom to interview, identify individuals holding responsible billets and individuals who may have executed significant actions.

Topical interviews can require a bit more research. For example, if the topic is integration of a new weapon system into combatant ships, review articles written for the Navy Times, U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, Navy League Sea Power and other journals. The Chief of Naval Information (CHINFO) can provide public statements on the subject. Do not ignore the Navy Department Library or other resources within the NHC. The NHC has an excellent Internet website that can be reached at <http://www.history.navy.mil>. The "Wars and Conflicts" and "Frequently Asked Questions" sections are of particular interest. There are numerous other DoD and non-DoD websites that may have germane information. NHC historians should be consulted to see if the topics to be covered are relevant to ongoing research projects.

To target interviewees, identify the individuals involved in the policy-making loop. Usually these individuals are named in articles and press releases. A call to that individual's office should also help to identify who the "action-officer" was. You will want to talk to that person. Finally, consider interviewing individuals at the deckplate level to get a bottom-up perspective of the subject.

End-of-tour interviews also requires some preparation. There is a list of standard questions adopted from the Army's EOT program that provides a good starting point for an interview and are included as an appendix. To build on these core questions, a point of contact (POC) needs to be established to arrange the interview and obtain background information about the command, the interviewee, and issues of importance. Since most

major commands have Naval Reserve support, there may be insights gained through contacting the reserve unit Commanding Officer. The NHC Operational Archives may have command histories from the organization. Some commands even have their own homepages. Obtain the interviewee's biography and command mission statement to be included with the completed interview summary or transcript.

Biographical interviews usually take the greatest preparation. The Naval Historical Foundation uses a biographical survey (see appendix) that is sent to potential interviewees that lays out the expectations and requests background information. In addition one should research if anyone has written about this individual or the events that this person participated in? Has this individual written or spoken on any issues? Although your approach in an interview depends on the person, a chronological approach is best. You should consider a "get to know you" session early on to record childhood memories and discuss follow-on interviews. See if the individual will allow you to review personal papers, cruise books, or photograph collections. Ask the individual if they have ever recorded their recollections. Take notes and develop a general outline. Share this outline with the interviewee prior to the recording session and ask for comments. Be sure to get a copy of the interviewee's latest biography sheet. Knowing the ground to be covered allows the interviewee an opportunity to reflect and prepare.

The Interview

Good rapport is critical to a good interview. Appearance helps. Obviously naval reservists sitting down with senior naval officials will want to have sharp military creases, squared away gig lines, and spit-shined shoes. In a non-official venue, such as an individual's home, the interviewer may want to strive for an informal "Mr. Roger's" look. The comfortable sweater can be as valuable a tool as the recorder.

If time permits, an icebreaker conversation should take place to establish common interests. Is there a commonality with regards to travels, tastes in art or music, experiences? Look around. There usually is one item on display that will evoke a good sea story if queried on.

Conduct the interview at a location where the interviewee feels at ease. This can be at the interviewee's home, office, or stateroom. Keep the ambient noise in mind. On one occasion the "at ease" location was a backyard patio. Unfortunately, the interviewee lived under the flight path into the local airport. The interview was subsequently moved inside. Conducting an interview on board a ship can be especially challenging. If there is a noise interruption during the interview, just give the interviewee a time out signal and your transcriber will thank you.

Do not place the recorder on a hard surface such as a tabletop because interior sounds, especially on a ship, will transmit right into the recorder. One should normally place the recorder on a padded surface such as a pillow or mousepad. Ideally the recorder should be within five or six feet of the interviewee. As you proceed with the interview, take notes. This is not an easy task since you will also want to focus on what the individual is

saying so that you may proceed with follow up questions. Having good notes can be extremely helpful as shall be discussed later.

Before you turn on the recorder, go over some ground rules. Explain that you may interject at times to ask for or include the spelling of the names of people, places, and things or the meaning of an acronym for the benefit of the transcriber. Explain the purpose of the interview and the eventual disposition of the recording and/or transcript. If the interviewee is not a current member of the Department of the Navy, explain that he or she will be asked to sign a release form. Active duty personnel giving interviews about their official duties and responsibilities during their official working hours are not required to sign a release form. Inform the interviewee that slanderous remarks about another individual, if transcribed, could subject the interviewee (and the Department of the Navy) to a libel lawsuit.

The interviewee may want to impose some restrictions. While active duty personnel cannot place access restrictions on their interview, non-DoD interviewees have more latitude. If the interviewee asks, you may suggest that they can restrict access to the interview for a time period. Try to avoid an access restriction of more than five years. Incidentally, courts have ruled that "closed" transcripts held within government repositories are not exempt from Freedom of Information Act requests.

As a rule, you should avoid discussing security classified material. (Interviews conducted under the aegis of the Naval Historical Foundation Oral History Program will NEVER discuss classified information.) If there is classified material that is vital to the story, then ask the interviewee to identify the classified information and explain why it is classified. Refer to the appropriate security instructions on current marking instruction. If classified material is discussed, be sure to conduct the interview in a secure space and have provisions for secure storage and shipment of your completed recordings to the Naval Historical Center's Operational Archives. .

How the recording session goes depends on the interviewee. Many sessions have been conducted during which the individual has talked at great length, covering all of the desired issues without the interviewer having to ask questions. During other sessions it can be like a dentist trying to extract teeth. The key is to ask general questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no. "Explain" or "Discuss" are the types of words that should be prevalent in your question list. Focus on events. Avoid the hypothetical "in what direction should the Navy go" question unless you are interviewing an incoming Chief of Naval Operation or Secretary of the Navy. If an answer involves a theoretical discussion, ask for examples to illustrate. When the interviewee finishes a statement, do not be so quick to ask the next question. Pause. The interviewee may often add additional insights. In addition, be prepared to ask amplifying questions that you had not considered during the outline-preparation process. Always remember that this is an interview and not a conversation. If something the interviewee says triggers a sea story that you would like to share, hold it until after the recording session is over.

After you have run through your list of prepared questions, a good closing question might be, "Is there anything else I should ask?" or "Is there anything that you would like to add on this subject?" You may also want to ask for referrals to other individuals who are familiar with the subject.

To video record or not to video record?

There several factors to consider. First, arranging for video support requires additional resources and technical expertise. Transcription is possible but that also requires additional equipment. Long-term storage also is problematic as the NHC does not retain an official video/film archive and the media is evolving. Will there be VHS players in ten years with the current transformation to digital? Also some interviewees (and interviewers!) are intimidated by being on camera and may feel uncomfortable. Finally, if the objective is to derive historical information through the interview process, the value added with video over audio is negligible.

However, video-recording, besides capturing the individual's appearance and emotions, offers the advantage of having a video record for use in some future historical documentary or museum exhibit. With that in mind, videoing lends itself more to show-and-tell presentations and touring. This interviewing technique is frequently used by oral historians who work on historic naval ships. For example, Hornet's oral historian videoed an interview with a pilot in an aircraft explaining the cockpit controls, while his counterpart on New Jersey recorded a detailed walkthrough of a 16-inch turret by a retired gunner's mate. Navy and Marine Corps Combat Documentation Teams effectively employed video in Afghanistan. A video tour of Kandahar detailing the contributions of Navy Seabees was displayed as part of an exhibit in the Navy Museum, and a Marine walking tour of the damaged U.S. Embassy in Kabul lent credence to the adage "a picture can be worth a thousand words."

Regarding the question of video, the answer comes down to what are the long-term objectives for the collected material.

Other Interview Options

If a face-to-face interview is not possible, consider the following options:

Telephone: Det. 206 once completed an end of tour interview from the NHC in Washington with the Seventh Fleet Commander who was embarked on USS Blue Ridge steaming in the Sea of Japan. The recorder was placed up against the speaker phone and the recording proved adequate for transcription. There are also recorder feeds that can be wired directly into the telephone handset that can provide an even better feed. Remember you must inform interviewees that the conversation is being recorded.

E-mail: Several excellent e-mail interviews have been conducted by NHF volunteers. The preparation work is the same as a regular interview. The interview should take place over time as the interviewer sends questions and follow-on questions in a chronological order.

While the format discourages spontaneity, the interviewee tends to be more retrospective and can research answers. The format also has the added benefit of providing a finished transcript on completion of the process!

Memoir: Once an interviewer sat down with an interviewee and asked a question and the interviewee pulled out a memoir he had written and began reading verbatim. There is an excellent "Do-it-yourself Memoir Guide" on the NHC's website. If it is not possible or impractical to conduct an interview, perhaps the subject can be encouraged to place his or her recollections on paper.

Follow-on Activities

An NHC historian once asked another staff member to make a duplicate of a cassette tape that was to be sent out for transcription. The staff member accidentally put the two tapes in backwards and duped the blank tape over the recorded tape. This episode provides several invaluable lessons: (1) The historian did the correct thing by duplicating the tape before sending it out for transcription because you never know what can happen--he just chose the wrong person to do the duplication. (2) Had the historian snapped off the two tabs along the edge of the cassette as soon as the interview was concluded, a regrettable error would have been avoided. When you complete an interview using a cassette recorder, immediately break those tabs and write in the date, interviewer and interviewee names, and security classification (if needed) on the cassette and the casing. (3) Because the historian took good notes during this interview, the staff member's error wasn't the disaster it could have been!

Similar miscues can occur with digital technology. As with most digital files, at the earliest opportunity, a copy should be made and stored at an alternative location.

Now what? How you proceed depends on what treatment the recording warrants. In the case of most After-Action interviews and some Topical interviews, you may just want to do an interview summary. In contrast, most End of Tour interviews, some Topical interviews, and most Biographical interviews should be transcribed. Of course there is a third option: do nothing. Good judgment comes into play as the interviewee may have only repeated observations made by previous interviewees or had blatantly faulty recollections. In these cases, forward the recording with a short abstract, noting why resources would be better expended on other interviews.

To produce an accurate transcript, it takes approximately 9-10 hours of work for every recorded hour. In contrast, a good interview summary can take 2-4 hours to produce for the same period. Given a choice, historians prefer to work with a transcript over an interview summary. This bias is unfortunate as a good interview summary can actually be superior to a transcript. However, the historians preference for transcripts is understandable, given their desire to use primary source material. Historians often look at interview summaries as the historical equivalent of "hearsay."

Summarizing an Interview

So how can good interview summaries be superior to transcripts?

Sometimes the interviewee goes off into tangents that are not germane to the focus of the interview. Also interviewees can be repetitious. A good summary cuts out some of the needless chatter and summarizes key points. The interview summary should read like a book report. Some summaries have gone on for three and four single space pages. Draft the interview summary shortly after the interview; it allows you the advantage of writing while the interview is still fresh in your mind. There are two steps in summarization. First, type out the notes you took and incorporate your recollections on what was said. Then play back the tape and flesh out the narrative. Look to transcribe good quotes and technical explanations verbatim into the summary.

Some interview summaries conducted by Det. 206 have tended to overuse bullets and were formatted in the style of fitness reports. Avoid this. A paragraph format is easier to electronically transfer to the Trim finding aid system. After typing your summary into a word processing computer, if possible, e-mail, fax, or drop off the summary draft to the interviewee for review. Often the interviewee can correct misspellings and resolve misinterpretations. You will forward a disk with the summary, a printout, and recording to the NHC's Operational Archives. If these are done correctly, a researcher should feel no need to listen to the recording.

Transcribing an Interview

Transcripts are wonderful for those who write history for they gain the interviewee's direct insights about an event and may be able to extract great quotes to liven up their narratives. However, it takes about 10+ hours of work of transcribing and editing per hour of tape to create a transcription. The good news is that you will not be saddled with all of this work.

If you have completed a relatively short interview that warrants transcription, consider doing it yourself. First of all, you will comprehend what has been said more easily because you have just sat through the interview and have an appreciation for the interviewee's verbal nuances. Second, you can assure yourself a relatively quick turnaround time. How long it takes to transcribe an hour of tape depends on how fast you can type, the pace of the interview, and the clarity of the recording.

The Oral History Program tries to obtain a near verbatim transcript, although "ahs," "dahs," "umms" and other false starts are edited out. Don't kill yourself trying to interpret something that is unintelligible. Just type [unclear] and move on. The draft transcript is double-spaced, left-justified, 12 pt pitch, New Times Roman. Page numbers are placed at the bottom of the page and centered. Type out the interviewer's and interviewee's names in capital letters, as follows:

JONES: Admiral, please explain the reasoning behind the decision to build the new aircraft carrier out of balsa wood?

SMITH: Balsa wood has incredible stealth qualities. Our scientists at Naval Research Laboratories conducted extensive tests

to verify this.

[Note there is no indentation. Commercial transcribers who charge by the page love to indent because it leaves fewer words per page!]

Editing a Transcript

In most cases someone else will transcribe the interview. Before shipping the recording to the NHC, make a duplicate just in case something happens during the shipping process. When the draft transcript, and disk are returned to you, do a light proofread to catch silly stuff. For example, during an interview an interviewee stated he was born in Dedham, Massachusetts. The transcript read he was born "in the dead of Massachusetts!" If there are passages of the interview where the individual is unclear, you should mark on the margin "please clarify." After your review, forward the transcript to the interviewee for review. Check with the interviewee to see if he or she would prefer a hard copy of the transcript to mark up or a disk copy so they can perform their own editing.

Most individuals will prefer to review a hard copy and return the draft to you marked up. Occasionally, you will get a transcript back with few changes. However, do not be surprised if you get back a transcript full of heavy edits. Folklorists oral historians would scream "foul." However, we welcome such edits because they demonstrate that that interviewee has a sincere interest in getting the story correct. The history of the United States Navy is quite complex and many issues need to be carefully explained. It is found that after these edits, the transcript becomes a far more useful resource for historians. When there is heavy editing, however, you should note this in the preface to the interview.

The final step in editing the transcript is to create in a separate file, a "Subjects Covered" listing. Your efforts will be for naught without the creation of a good finding aid to point researchers in the right direction. An example of this follows:

: Subjects Covered

Father's Navy career in submarines - Growing up in Smithville Decision to go to the Naval Academy - Observations on Naval Academy life Graduation in 1960 - Marriage to Thelma Lou - The triplets Attending flight school at Pensacola - My first plane crash - Earning my wings Assignment to VA-25 Observations on Commander Skip Rock Escorting Admiral Salty in Japan - The sushi incident and so on.....

On the same file as "Subjects Covered" you may consider writing a short preface to introduce the interview. The preface should allude to the interviewee's distinguished career and why this career may be of significance to historians. The preface also provides

an opportunity for you to thank the interviewee for his or her cooperation and anyone else who worked on the project.

Packaging the Transcript

Once all of the above is written, have someone else proofread the preface, subjects covered, the biography sheet the interviewee provided, and the transcript, to catch additional errors. If needed and you have not done so already, you should obtain a signed release form from the interviewee transferring the copyright on the transcript. To transfer the transcript package to Operational Archives, send the original release form, preface, biography sheet, subjects covered page, transcript, disk, and tapes to:

**Operational Archives
Naval Historical Center
805 Kidder Breese Street SE
Washington Navy Yard DC 20374-5060.**

If a decision has been made to publish the transcript, forward the materials to the Naval Historical Foundation (attn: Oral Historian), at the following address. They will forward the material to the Operational Archives when they are finished preparing it for publication.

**Attn: Oral Historian
Naval Historical Foundation
1306 Dahlgren Ave. SE
Washington Navy Yard DC 20374-5055**

Once the package is received, additional formatting will be done (single-spacing, bolding names and questions, etc.) and a cover page and cover added. A limited run of transcripts will be printed for distribution to the Naval Academy Library, the Naval War College, the Naval Postgraduate School, and the Navy Department Library. You and the interviewee also receive copies. Upon completion of production, the originals are transferred to Operational Archives for long-term preservation.

Bibliography

There are quite a few resources you can draw on in addition to the guidance provided above. The national Oral History Association with several regional branches is a likely source. If you have Internet access all you need to do is type in "Oral History" in one of your search engines for potentially useful sources.

Bogart, Barbara Allen and William Lynwood Montell. *From Memory to History: Using oral Sources for Historical Research*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Baum, Willa K. Oral History for the Local Historical Society. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1974.

Davis, Cullum, Kathryn Back and Kay MacLean. Oral History: From Tape to Type. Chicago: American Library Association, 1977.

Dunaway, David K., and Willa K. Baum eds. Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984.

Everett, Stephen E. Oral History: Techniques and Procedures. Washington: Center of Military History, 1992.

Frank, Benis M. A 'Do-It-Yourself' Oral History Primer. Washington: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1982.

Hoopes, James. Oral History: An Introduction for Students. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

Richie, Donald. Doing Oral History. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

Thompson, Paul. The Voice of the Past: Oral History. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

End-of-Tour Interview Core Questions

The Naval Historical Center's End-of-Tour (EOT) Interview Program captures and preserves the experiences of senior U. S. Navy personnel in various key leadership positions throughout the fleet. Such interviews will serve to pass on experience to incoming commanders and hold on to the institutional memory of major events occurring during a particular leader's tenure. Particularly given the situation at home and abroad since the terrorist attacks of September 2001, maintaining an accurate record of who, what, where, when, why, and how takes on even greater significance. The other military services have been doing this for years and have been very successful at preserving history for the benefit of their service and leadership. For consistency, the following core questions will be incorporated into the interview.

1. When you assumed your duties, what guidance did you receive from your superiors? Were you charged with accomplishing specific objectives? If so what were they? Did you have the opportunity to discuss your duties with your predecessor? How was the transition handled? How could the transition be improved?
2. Looking back at your career, which assignment best prepared you for this position?

3. What area/responsibilities consumed most of your time?
4. Please describe your style of management? What were your techniques for handling the vast spectrum of information and ideas that you needed to understand in order to carry out your duties? What criteria did you use for making tough decisions?
5. What were your major initiatives during this assignment? What were the major problems you faced in getting these initiatives accepted?
6. What was your greatest challenge?
7. What were your most significant accomplishments?
8. Did you make any major organizational changes? If so, why? Do you see a need to change the organization, staffing, budget, or responsibilities of your office?
9. As you leave for your next position (or retire), what areas still cause you concern and what things did time not allow you to complete? How has your own perception of your duties changed since assuming this position?
10. What major issues will your successor face?
11. What advice would you like to pass on to your successor?
12. What do you see as the course of the Navy in the future? What will be the major challenges in fifteen years, thirty years? Are the Navy's long range plans appropriately focused to meet future needs?

Preparing for Your Oral History Interview

There is a great quantity and diversity of individuals who are willing to talk about their naval service. From current active duty personnel, to former fleet commanders, to World War II deck seamen, we have the potential to collect much useful material for future historians desiring insights about the U.S. Navy in the 20th and early 21st centuries. In addition, by participating in this program, you will be creating a document that you will be proud to pass down to future generations.

The typical document that we will create opens with a preface, either written by the interviewer or a historian, placing your story in context of naval history. The preface is then followed by a one to three page biographic overview of your life. Because the interview will focus on your naval service, the biography should contain information about your life before, during, and after naval service (assuming you are retired). Finally, there will be an index that will highlight key aspects of your interview.

You will be expected to edit the final product. The objective in editing is not to put your words into the King's English but to capture historical errors, misspelled place and people names, and catch other obvious transcription mistakes. Timeliness is appreciated.

Unless the interview is being conducted by an individual attached with the Naval Historical Center or other government agency having a security clearance, the interviews must be conducted at the unclassified level. In addition, you must be cautioned that derogatory comments about living individuals could subject you to charges of slander.

For interviews conducted by the Naval Historical Foundation, restrictions can be put on the public release of transcripts, although it is discouraged. Such arrangements can be made with the approval of the Executive Director of the Naval Historical Foundation. Interviews collected by government agencies could be subjected to Freedom of Information Act requests.

Interviews usually take a chronological approach. On occasion, a topical approach has been more effective. If you think this may be a better approach, discuss it with your interviewer.

If the interview is conducted by the Naval Historical Foundation, upon completion a release form will need to be signed to donate the final product to the Foundation and the Foundation will then donate the final product, along with the recordings, to the Naval Historical Center Operational Archives. Copies of the transcripts will be offered to the Naval War College, Naval Postgraduate School, and Naval Academy libraries.

There are no legal requirements for Navy Department personnel being interviewed by other Navy Department personnel, to sign a release form.

The final product is dependent on the cooperative efforts of you and the interviewer. The better prepared the two of you are for the interview, the better the final product. The following questionnaire is designed for biographical interviews but can also be a useful tool for preparing for other types of interviews.

Interview Preliminaries / Necessary Forms:

(Please write on the back or on additional sheets as necessary)

Your name: _____ phone # _____

address: _____ e-mail: _____

1. Place of Birth: _____ Date of Birth: _____

2. Others in family who served in the Navy? _____

3. Entry year into service: _____ Year left service: _____

4. Listing of Duty Stations (Attach on a separate sheet...A biographic sheet listing assignments is welcome).

5. Conflicts you participated in: _____

6. People you met who left lasting impressions: _____

7. Issues/Topics you desire to specifically address:

8. Books/Articles that you may have written: _____

9. Friend/Colleague recommendation for consultation on interviewing:

Phone# _____ E-mail _____

Thank you for your response. The survey will assist the interviewer in crafting appropriate questions.

Oral History Donation Form

Subject to the terms, conditions and restrictions set forth in this agreement,

I/We _____ located at

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone _____,

do hereby give, donate, and convey to the Naval Historical Foundation a nonexclusive, paid-up license throughout the world in the information provided in the enclosed oral history (hereafter referred to as "the donated materials") conducted in

(year) _____ by _____

at _____.

It is understood that Naval Historical Foundation will then donate "the donated materials" to the Naval Historical Center. This donation includes all copyright interests in the materials, which I may now possess or which I may in the future obtain and includes the right to reproduce the work in copies, to distribute copies to the public, to perform or display the work publicly, and to prepare derivative works thereof. Specifically, the Naval Historical Center may publish copies of the oral history for limited distribution to Navy libraries and relevant Navy commands. With my permission, the Naval Historical Foundation may retain a copy of the oral history for purchase by the public at a cost to cover reproduction and shipping.

____ I hereby donate "the donated materials" to the Naval Historical Foundation with the understanding that it will be donated to the Naval Historical Center and that historians of the Naval Historical Center will have free access to the oral history for use as source material for histories being written and published under the auspices of the Dept. of the Navy. I understand that copies of the oral history may be reproduced and distributed to Navy libraries and relevant Navy commands and thus may be accessible to independent researchers.

____ I hereby allow the Naval Historical Foundation to retain a copy of the oral history for purchase by the public at a cost to cover reproduction and shipping.

____ I hereby allow the Naval Historical Center the option to post the oral history on the Center's Internet web site for widespread dissemination to researchers.

____ Other:

Donor's signature

Date

From: Executive Director, Naval Historical Foundation

To: Director, Naval Historical Center

Subj: Donation of Oral History "Donated Material"

The Naval Historical Foundation donates the attached "donated materials" under the terms prescribed above. It is understood that the Naval Historical Center staff may dispose of the donated materials, as they see fit, at any time.

(Name of Official accepting donation)

I accept the license and materials donated above on behalf of the Dept. of the Navy, subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth above.

