

Oral History Program

1. PURPOSE

The American Airpower Heritage Museum of the Commemorative Air Force (CAF) has a program for collecting oral history interviews with aviation veterans of World War II for future research and for the education and enjoyment of later generations. An oral history kit can be obtained from:

American Airpower Heritage Museum
ATTN: Oral History Program
P.O. Box 62000
Midland, TX 79711-2000

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure is to outline the best methods for conducting and recording successful Oral History interviews.

2. GENERAL INFORMATION

The Oral History Program depends on CAF Colonels to conduct the interviews with the many World War II veterans who have stories to tell.

3. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

3.1 Interview Preparation

Most of us become somewhat nervous at the thought of actually interviewing someone because we have never done it before and don't know how.

Here are some suggested guidelines, and possible questions to ask. Since people and their experiences are different, no two interviews are alike; even two people who went through the exact same event will have different memories and impressions of it. Before the interview, follow these steps:

1. Arrange a suitable time/date (allow several hours) and location. Choose a quiet place, preferably the interviewee's home, so they can dig out items to show you.
2. Do your homework. If the interviewee was in certain campaigns, areas of operation, flew certain types of aircraft or was on a particular type of ship, then read up on those things. Do the research before the interview so you can ask relevant questions or possibly catch obvious errors. Try to keep the interview in more or less chronological order.
3. Develop your list of questions in advance, including follow-up questions depending on responses (put some thought into this!).
4. Bring tape recorder and tapes, and paper/pens to take notes (to jot down questions to ask later in the interview, descriptions of mementos, photo captions, etc).

3.2 Conducting the Interview

During the interview, follow these steps:

SOP 10, V5
July 2006

1. Start with basic background questions and be a good listener at all times!
2. Make sure of the proper spelling of names, locations, aircraft nicknames, ships, etc. and try to ensure correct dates if possible.
3. Sample questions could include:
 - What did you do, and where, before flight training?
 - How did you get interested in flying?
 - Initial training – where, when, type of trainers, any unusual experiences?
 - Experiences leading up to the main events to be covered by this interview?
 - Name, purpose, and location of your unit? Type of aircraft in unit? Colors, markings, nicknames, nose art, unusual flight characteristics? Unit mascots? General environment of your base, such as weather, facilities, hazards, etc.?
 - Your most funny experiences?
 - Most colorful characters you knew?
 - Most unusual occurrences, flights with details and dates?
 - Most frightening experiences? Include details, such as casualties if any, crashes, shot down, POW time, rescues and dates.
 - Later assignments with dates?
 - Awards or wounds resulting from any of the above?
 - Post service career?
 - Anything else you would like to add?
 - Photos, with captions, for any of the above? The interviewer may have to help write photo captions.
 - Copies of any citations, letters, charts, or books? Unusual mementos, descriptions?

3.3 After the Interview

After the interview, follow these steps:

1. Thank interviewee for their time.
2. Take a current photo of the interviewee, if possible.
3. If this is to be a published story, assure the interviewee that you will go over the draft with them at a convenient time/date/location (set it right then). A draft review can reveal errors and lead to additional information.
4. Based on interview data, attempt to locate published photos or descriptions of the events, aircraft, ships, etc. During draft review, confirm their accuracy with the interviewee.
5. If you borrow items to make copies, return them undamaged as soon as possible.