

Potsdam Revisited Oral History Projects: Resource Guide

Contents

Page 1: Interview Tips

Page 2: Professor Deborah Dash Moore's Interview Questions For Veterans

Interview Tips

This interview guide uses the 'Veterans History Project Field Kit' [2013] as its basis:

<https://www.loc.gov/vets/pdf/fieldkit-2013.pdf>

Make sure you have everything prepared:

Recording Device: The microphone on a smartphone should be good enough to conduct the interview, make sure your phone is fully charged and on silent. If you are using another recording device make sure you are familiar with it before the interview. If the recording device is battery powered make sure you have tested the batteries and that you have spares. Make sure that the recording device is digital and does not use tapes - the LOC will not accept tapes and digitizing tapes is time consuming.

Environment: Use a quiet, well-lit room for the interview. Avoid rooms with fluorescent lights, chiming clocks, loud climate control or any other distractions.

Record and Introductory Statement Before the Interview: For Example

"Today is March 8th 2016, this is the beginning of an interview with Ben Cohen at his home in Pleasantville, Maryland. Mr Cohen is 92 years old, having been born on November 23, 1923. My name is Hannah Cohen, and I'll be the interviewer. Ben Cohen is my grandfather. He is my father's father. Grandpa Ben could you state for the recording, what war and branch of service you served in? What was your rank? Where did you serve?"

Interviewing Instructions:

1. Keep questions short. Avoid complicated multipart questions. Don't ask questions that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' but ask 'how, when, and why' questions.
2. Encourage the interviewee with nods of the head rather than audible responses such as 'yes' or 'uh huh' that will be recorded
3. Be patient and give the interviewee time to reflect before going onto a new question
4. Use follow up questions to elicit more details from the interviewee. Examples of good follow up questions include: Did that happen to you? What did you think about that?
5. Make sure the interview is **AT LEAST 30 MINUTES LONG** the Library of Congress will not accept recordings shorter than that length.
6. Be sure that interviewees sign this - <https://www.loc.gov/vets/pdf/vetsrelease-fieldkit-2013.pdf> - veteran's release form after the interview. This is a requirement of the Library of Congress.

Deborah Dash Moore's Interview Questions For Veterans

These questions were written by project consultant Professor Deborah Dash Moore of the University of Michigan, the author of *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* [2004].

Family background:

Name (did you change it?, nickname?)

Where were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Any brothers or sisters? Older or younger?

What language did you speak at home? (what language did your parents speak?)

Where did you go to school? (public school? Private school? Religious school?)

What was school like? (Who were the students? Who were the teachers?)

Did you have a bar mitzvah? (what was it like?)

Do you have a picture of yourself as a teenager?

Cultural background:

What were your favorite hobbies or music or movies?

Did you work after school? (what did you do?)

Were you involved in any Jewish youth groups? (or Young Socialist or Young Communist League? Or a social and athletic club?)

What did you know about what was happening overseas? (About Hitler? About Stalin? About persecution of Jews by Nazis and Jewish refugees?)

Did you read any newspapers? (which ones?)

Did you graduate from high school?

Did you go to college?

Military experience:

How old were you when you entered military service? (What month and year?)

What branch did you enter?

Were you drafted? (did you volunteer?—if so, why?)

How did you feel about entering the service? (how did your parents/wife/girlfriend feel?)

What were your first impressions about the military?

Do you have a picture of yourself in uniform?

Did you serve overseas? Where? (if not, where in US did you serve?)

What did you think of where you served?

What did you miss when you were overseas (or in service)?

Ideas about World War II:

What did you think about the war?

What was the purpose of fighting?

Did you share your ideas about the war with other GIs?

Had any of them never met a Jew before you? What did they think?

Did you ever observe any Jewish holidays in the service? (what were they like?)

Return home:

When did you get demobilized?

What was the first thing you did when you got back to the States?

How did you feel when you came home?