



CAPTURING VETERANS' STORIES

FORMULATING QUESTIONS

Your questions should encourage those whom you interview to speak with confidence, and to be certain that you are genuinely interested in them and what they have to say.

To win this confidence it is often a good idea to begin with some basic knowledge about the person you are interviewing. For example, you may be able to discover:

- The age of the veteran at the time of the conflict which interests you
- The part of the world in which she or he served
- Their rank and any military decorations they may have earned
- Some details about the conflict/s in which they or their family members served
- Some information about well-known members of the unit, which might prompt a conversation and show you've done your homework without being overbearing

CLARIFY YOUR RESEARCH GOALS

Clarify the purposes of your research. For example, you may be interested in:

- An aspect of the war, such as the hardships of life at the front
- Friendships between service people
- Why individuals enlisted
- Living conditions for a prisoner of war
- A particular battle
- Attitudes among the ranks towards conscription
- Anzac Day or other forms of commemoration
- The general experience of someone who had served with the Australian military forces, or that of their family members

PRE-PREPARED QUESTIONS

Pre-prepared questions, or a topic list, are written based on the background research you've conducted about the veteran and their service. The questions should be open-ended and address the key topics the interviewer is hoping to cover.

They should have a subjective focus rather than one that centres on facts. So rather than asking, 'On what date did you enlist?' you might ask, 'Why did you decide to enlist?'



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PRE-PREPARED QUESTIONS (CONT ...)

A veteran may not necessarily recall the date they enlisted and asking for that kind of precise detail may fluster them, but they are likely to have a story to tell about what inspired their decision to enlist.

The following is an example of pre-prepared questions the author used in interviewing veterans of the siege of Tobruk. These questions might provide a prompt in considering the kinds of pre-prepared questions in which might be formulated before an interview:

- Why did you decide to enlist?
- Did you have other family members serving in the Second World War?
- Can you tell me about your journey over to the Middle East on the ship? (Follow-up prompts: What did your average day on the ship involve? What did you eat on board the ship? Where did you sleep?)
- What were your impressions of Tobruk when you arrived?
- What was your role?
- What did a 'typical' day at Tobruk look like?
- Can you tell me a little about the living conditions at Tobruk?
- Did you spend any time in the outer defensive positions (Red Line)?
- What were your impressions of those you served with, in particular those from other nations, e.g. Britain and Poland?
- Did you have any contact with German or Italian soldiers or prisoners? What were your impressions?
- Was there a time when you were particularly frightened? What happened?
- Did you ever experience an attack from a Stuka dive bomber? What happened?
- Did you go on any patrols into no-man's-land? Do you remember any of those in particular?
- Were you ever wounded in action? What happened?
- Do any memories of your time in Tobruk stand out?
- Did you lose any close friends during the siege, or in later campaigns? How did that affect you?



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LINKS TO SAMPLE INTERVIEWS AND RESOURCE DOCUMENTS



Interview with Bob Wilkie



Interview with Graeme Bayley



Interview with Joe Clarke



Interview with Stan Whitfield



RSL Overview

