



**Sharing reminiscences may be a challenge for a number of veterans and civilians who served in wartime. The Veterans History Project offers products and services to individuals with special needs. Please contact the Project office at the Library of Congress (1-888-371-5848) to request these products:**

#### **Audio Instruction Kit**

*An audiocassette version of the Project Instruction Kit is available for individuals with visual or physical impairments.*

#### **Large-print Instruction Kit**

*Participants with visual impairments may request the general instruction kit in large-print format.*

#### **Memoir Kit**

*Individuals who are unable to participate in an audio or videotaped interview may wish, on their own or with assistance, to write a memoir of their wartime reminiscences. This kit is available from the Project Office or can be downloaded from the Project Web site at [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets).*

#### **About the Veterans History Project**

Motivated by the desire to honor our nation's war veterans, the United States Congress created the Veterans History Project in October 2000 and appointed the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to collect and preserve oral histories, memoirs, letters, diaries, photographs, maps and home movies, of America's war veterans and civilians who served in wartime. Please visit [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets) or call 1-888-371-5848 or call 1-888-371-5848, for detailed information on recording a veteran's oral history or donating documents.

This brochure was produced with the support of the **Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage** and in collaboration with the **Foundation for Alzheimer's and Cultural Memory**. The foundation promotes communication and memory preservation for individuals with Alzheimer's disease. The foundation recognizes that people with dementia retain deep-seated memories that are of significant value not only for the individual and his or her family but for scholars in a variety of disciplines such as folklore, history, anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, gerontology, human geography, and nursing. These memories represent a unique repository of knowledge about the construction of identity, the social and environmental influences on memory, vanishing and existing cultures, and historical eras. For more information, please visit [www.memorybridge.org](http://www.memorybridge.org).

The Alzheimer's Association is an Official Partner of the Veterans History Project.

**alzheimer's association**

the compassion to care, the leadership to conquer



**Smithsonian  
Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage**



**Veterans History  
Project**

**For Participants  
with Special  
Needs**



## INTERVIEWING PARTICIPANTS WITH COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

**Individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias can retain vivid memories of events that occurred decades ago. The interviewing tips and resources below may help those who wish to interview a veteran or war-time worker with impaired cognitive abilities.**

**If efforts to engage the veteran or civilian home-front worker in interviews prove unsuccessful, families of these individuals still may honor their relatives' wartime service by donating their letters, photographs, and/or diaries to the Project.**

### Interviewing Tips

- ★ One or two interviews are not enough to unearth memories. Set a regular time so that the interview becomes a part of the week's routine. Indeed, it may be something that the individual with cognitive impairment will look forward to doing.
- ★ Tape the interviews, not only for the record but also so that you can refer back to the recordings for clarification, to refresh your memory about what you and the interviewee have said on a particular subject, or to get ideas of new questions to ask.
- ★ Explain to interviewees that they can play an important part in compiling a historical record for the nation and for future generations to learn from. Tell them that you need their help. That way they feel, quite correctly, that they have something of worth to give.
- ★ Explain that their past service to the nation is more important than their present difficulties with recalling recent events, dates, etc.
- ★ Do some research before the interview. Know where and how the veteran or home-front worker served. Ask family members, fellow veterans, or the interviewee's wartime co-workers about events and people who were important in his or her early life and war experience. That way, if the interviewee alludes to something by using a name or a place as a reference, you will have a good idea what the interviewee is referring to—and then you can ask a follow-up question. Similarly, you can use these references as triggers (For example, "Tell me about when you were with \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.").
- ★ Begin at the beginning ("How did you feel when you heard that Pearl Harbor was bombed?"). Try to tap into the interviewee's feelings at a particular time ("What did you think, how did you feel, when you heard the war was over?"). Use words that signal emotions: "Was it scary?" "Did you feel homesick?"
- ★ Try to match in your speech the cadence, the speed, of the person whom you are interviewing. Give him or her time to find words. Allow pauses between utterances; don't interrupt or be impatient. The interviewee has to feel unhurried and unharried.
- ★ If you're not sure what the interviewee is saying or trying to say, assume that it is meaningful, admit that YOU are having trouble understanding, and work with the person to figure it out ("Let me see if I understand what you're saying here—are you saying that \_\_\_\_\_?").

- ★ If the interviewee wants to talk about things that trouble him or her at present, even if they're not on your "agenda," listen actively and commiserate where you can, and see if you might be able, together, to find options for positive action. Assure the person that, despite the Alzheimer's or infirmities, he or she has a valuable contribution to make.
- ★ Limit each interview to 60–90 minutes. You don't want fatigue to enter the picture, and you want to have more to talk about "next time."

*Courtesy of Dr. Steven R. Sabat, Professor of Psychology at Georgetown University, and author of The Experience of Alzheimer's Disease: Life through a Tangled Veil (Blackwell Publishers, 2001).*

### Resources for Interviewing Veterans with Special Needs

Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral Center, National Institutes of Health  
<http://www.alzheimers.org/caregiving/bibs/r-07communication&behavior.htm>

Alzheimer's Association  
[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)  
[www.alz.org/resources/resources/rtrlcommun.asp](http://www.alz.org/resources/resources/rtrlcommun.asp)

ElderCare Online  
[www.ec-online.net/Knowledge/Articles/communication.html](http://www.ec-online.net/Knowledge/Articles/communication.html)

Foundation for Alzheimer's and Cultural Memory  
[www.memorybridge.org](http://www.memorybridge.org)