

Reflecting on

VETERANS' STORIES



AWM E00051 (detail)

The following questions support an historical inquiry into the lives and experiences of the interviewed veterans. They are designed to assist students to understand and appreciate the wartime experiences of individuals.

Students are encouraged to analyse the different historical perspectives and interpretations of the veterans and evaluate the reliability and usefulness of oral history.

Students may use this list of questions to interview a veteran from their family or local community.

Enlistment

Why did they enlist to fight in a war?

What was their knowledge and understanding of war prior to enlisting?

What were the reactions of others to their enlistment?

Are there differences in the reasons for enlisting between the Second World War veterans and Korean War veterans?

What other question would you ask this person about enlistment?

Experiences of war

What were some of their positive experiences of war? (friendship, learning skills, leadership opportunities)

What were some of their negative experiences of war? (fighting, conditions, danger)

How did the terrain/climate conditions affect how they fought?

How were the experiences of war different for nurses, soldiers, sailors and airmen?

From their reflections, what can we infer about their attitudes to war?

Do you think their reflections, now years later, would be accurate?

What other question would you ask this person about their experiences of war?

Living Conditions

Describe the different types of terrain/climate etc they fought in.

What challenges did they face in keeping dry, warm and safe?

What impact did the climate have on their ability to perform their tasks? (e.g. impact of cold in Korea)

Describe the living conditions faced by those on the front line.

What was their diet like?

What other question would you ask this person about living conditions?

Casualties and Illness

What injuries and illnesses did they/others suffer from?

What treatments did they receive for these?

How difficult was it to treat the sick and injured?

What impact did the number of casualties have on those at home and on the front line?

What impact did any injury/illness have on this person?

From this person's story, what is your understanding of medical care during war?

What other question would you ask this person about casualties and illness?

Recreation and Celebration

What activities did they/others do in their spare time?

How important was recreation to those who were fighting? Why?

How were special events celebrated by those on the front line?

Why did they continue to celebrate special events when they were fighting?

How were the celebrations different from those they might have had before the war?

What other question would you ask this person about recreation and celebration?

Homecoming

What were the challenges for those who returned home?

How quickly did they re-adjust to civilian life?

What did they do to celebrate the end of the war?

How did their families/communities react to their homecoming?

What other question would you ask this person about coming home?

Civilians

What kind of interaction did Australians serving overseas have with civilians?

What can we tell about civilian experiences from the recollections of those serving?

Prisoners of War

How did Australians, both serving and civilian, become prisoners of war?

Describe the living conditions in the prison camps.

What did prisoners do to try and survive?

What kinds of jobs were prisoners used for?

What punishments did they receive?

How significant is the additional burden of being a 'POW' compared with those who survived the war without capture?

What other question would you ask this person about prisoners of war?

Home Front

What can we learn about the home front from the recollections of these veterans?

A number of veterans make reference to a strike by civilians who worked on the wharves loading ships. Do you think those veterans supported this strike? Why/Why not?

Army/Navy/Air Force

What was the role of the Army?

What was the role of the Navy?

What was the role of the Air Force?

How were the experiences of each branch of the armed forces similar/different to the others?

Oral History

What are some of the challenges in using oral history as a source?

What might be the benefits?

What might these stories tell us about Australian wartime history that we may not be able to learn from other sources?