

VETERAN MASON ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION GUIDE

Captain Jimmie Hobough No. 407 Lodge of Research and Information

A practical guide for capturing priceless stories with just a phone and a caring heart

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: THE MINDSET

You're not conducting an interview—you're having a sacred conversation. These brothers have stories that will die with them unless we preserve them now. Your role is to be a respectful listener who gently guides them to share their truth.

Remember: You're capturing THEIR story, not having a conversation. Your voice should be less than 10% of the recording.

PART 1: PREPARATION (THE DAY BEFORE)

1. Contact Your Veteran Brother

Initial Call/Email: "Brother [Name], as you know, we're preserving the stories of veteran Masons for future generations. Your experiences are important—both your military service and your Masonic journey. Would you be willing to share your story? It's just you and me talking, very informal. I'll record it so we don't lose any details. We can take as much time as you need."

Key Points to Cover:

- This is informal and comfortable
- They can share as much or as little as they want
- They can skip any questions
- We can take breaks anytime
- If emotions come up, that's perfectly okay
- We want THEIR story, in their words

2. Prepare Your Equipment

All you need is a smartphone:

- **Charge to 100%** the night before
- **Clear storage space** (at least 2GB free)
- **Download a backup recording app** (Voice Memos for iPhone, Easy Voice Recorder for Android)
- **Bring a charger** just in case

- **Test your recording** the day before

3. Prepare Yourself

- Review the questions but don't be rigid
- Think about this brother—what might be important to him?
- Clear your schedule—never rush a veteran's story
- Prepare to listen, not talk

PART 2: SETTING UP THE SPACE

The Ideal Setup

Location:

- Quiet room with minimal echo (living room better than kitchen)
- Away from TVs, radios, air conditioners
- Close windows to minimize outside noise
- Turn off ceiling fans

Seating:

- Sit at 90 degrees (corner of table) not directly across
- This feels less confrontational
- Allows for eye contact without staring
- Keep 3-4 feet between you

Your Phone Placement:

- Place phone on table between you
- Prop it up slightly with a book
- Screen facing YOU (so they forget it's there)
- Airplane mode ON (no interruptions!)
- Do Not Disturb ON

Comfort Items:

- Glass of water for them (and you)
- Tissues discretely available
- Their military photos/memorabilia if they want
- Notepad for you (write questions, don't interrupt)

Quick Sound Check

"Let me make sure this is working..."

- Record 30 seconds of both talking
- Play back to ensure clarity
- Adjust position if needed
- "Perfect, we're all set"

PART 3: THE WARM-UP (5-10 MINUTES)

Never jump straight to heavy topics. Start casual:

"Before we dive into your service, tell me—how are you doing these days? How's the family?"

Then ease toward the topic:

"You know, before we get to your military days, I'm curious—what made you first knock on the door of a Masonic lodge?"

This gets them talking and comfortable before deeper topics.

PART 4: THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Opening Questions (Get Them Talking)

1. **"Tell me about yourself—where did you grow up?"**
 - Let them paint the picture of their youth
 - This context matters for their later story
2. **"What was going on in your life when you entered the service?"**
 - Were you drafted or did you enlist?
 - What were you leaving behind?
 - What were your hopes/fears?
3. **"Do you remember your first day in the military?"**
 - Sensory details often unlock memories
 - "What did it smell like? Sound like?"

Service Questions (Follow Their Lead)

1. **"Where did the military take you?"**
 - Let them guide the geography
 - Ask about specific places they mention
2. **"What was daily life like?"**
 - Not looking for combat stories (unless they offer)
 - Food, friendships, routines, boredom
 - "What did you do for fun?"
3. **"Who did you serve with that you'll never forget?"**
 - Often unlocks powerful memories
 - "Tell me about him/her"

4. **"What's something about military life civilians never understand?"**

- Often produces profound insights

Transition Questions (Service to Masonry)

1. **"When you came home, what was that adjustment like?"**

- Don't rush this—it's often complicated

2. **"How did you find your way to Freemasonry?"**

- Was it family? Friends? Something you saw?
- "What attracted you to it?"

3. **"Do you see connections between military service and Masonic values?"**

- Let them make the connections
- Often produces beautiful insights

Masonic Journey Questions

1. **"Tell me about your degrees—what stands out in your memory?"**

- Emotional memories are gold
- "How did you feel?"

2. **"How has Freemasonry shaped your life after service?"**

- Looking for personal growth stories
- Friendships, support, purpose

3. **"What would you tell a young veteran thinking about joining?"**

- Their "sales pitch" reveals their values

Closing Questions (These Matter Most)

1. **"What story from your service do you most want preserved?"**

- This is often THE story they need to tell
- Give them all the time they need

2. **"What lessons from your military days still guide you?"**

- Looking for wisdom to pass on

3. **"Is there anything else you want future Masons to know?"**

- Always ask—surprises often come here

PART 5: THE ART OF LISTENING

The 8-Second Rule

After they finish speaking, count to 8 in your head before talking. Often, they'll continue with the REAL story during this silence.

Follow-Up Prompts (Not Questions)

- "Tell me more about that..."

- "What was that like?"
- "How did that feel?"
- "And then what happened?"
- "Mm-hmm..." (with a nod)
- *Silence with eye contact*

Watch for Emotion Trails

When their voice changes, eyes water, or they pause—that's where the important stories live.

Gently explore:

- "I can see that still means a lot to you..."
- "Take your time..."
- "Would you like some water?"

What NOT to Do

✗ "Oh, my uncle was in Vietnam too! He said..." ✗ "I know exactly what you mean..." ✗ "That reminds me of when I..." ✗ Rushing through silence ✗ Changing topics when emotion appears ✗ Looking at your phone/notes constantly

What TO Do

✓ Maintain gentle eye contact ✓ Nod and show you're engaged ✓ Let emotions happen naturally ✓ Say "Thank you for sharing that" ✓ Write notes for follow-up questions ✓ Trust the silence

PART 6: HANDLING DIFFICULT MOMENTS

If They Get Emotional

- **Don't** rush to comfort or change subject
- **Do** sit quietly, maintain gentle presence
- **Say:** "Take all the time you need"
- **Remember:** Tears often precede the most important stories

If They Apologize for Rambling

- "Please don't apologize—this is exactly what we want"
- "Your stories are important"
- "Keep going, I'm listening"

If They Clam Up

- Return to easier topics

- "Tell me about your kids/grandkids"
- "What are you proud of?"
- Sometimes scheduling another session helps

If They Share Something Dark

- Listen without judgment
- "Thank you for trusting me with that"
- Don't try to fix or minimize
- Ask: "Would you like that included in the record?"

PART 7: CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

Winding Down

"We've covered so much ground today. As we wrap up..."

1. **"Is there anything you wished I'd asked about?"**
2. **"Any message for your Masonic brothers?"**
3. **"How do you feel about what we've captured today?"**

After Stopping Recording

- Thank them sincerely
- Ask how they're feeling
- Stay for a few minutes of normal conversation
- Some of the best stories come after the recorder stops

Follow-Up Commitments

"I'll make sure this is preserved properly. Would you like a copy?" "Can I call if I have any follow-up questions?" "Thank you for this gift to future generations."

PART 8: TECHNICAL TIPS

Recording Best Practices

- **File naming:** Lastname_Firstname_Date (Smith_John_2025-01-15)
- **Format:** Most phones default to good quality
- **Backup:** Upload to cloud same day
- **Transcription:** We'll handle this centrally

Quick Troubleshooting

- **Too quiet?** Move phone closer to them (not you)

- **Echo?** Add soft furnishings (pillows, blankets)
- **Background noise?** Pause and wait it out
- **Phone dies?** "Let's take a break while I charge this"

PART 9: SAMPLE CONVERSATION FLOW

You: "Tell me about when you first entered the service."

Veteran: "Well, it was 1968... I was just 18..." [talks for 3 minutes]

You: [Count to 8] "What was that like for an 18-year-old?"

Veteran: "Scary as hell, to be honest..." [continues]

You: "Mm-hmm..." [maintaining eye contact]

Veteran: [After pause] "You know, I never told anyone this, but..."

THIS is where the gold is. Your silence invited the real story.

PART 10: AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Immediate Steps

1. **Save recording** with proper filename
2. **Upload to cloud** (Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.)
3. **Send thank-you** text/email same day
4. **Make notes** while memory is fresh
5. **Report completion** to Committee

What We'll Do

- Professional transcription
- Archive in multiple formats
- Create excerpts for publications
- Preserve for generations

REMEMBER YOUR MISSION

You're not just recording words—you're preserving a life, honoring service, and creating a bridge between past and future Masons. Every story matters. Every emotion is valid. Every minute you spend listening is a gift to generations unborn.

These brothers answered when called to serve. Now we answer the call to preserve their legacy.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Technical Issues: [Committee Tech Support]

Emotional Support: [Committee Chaplain]

Questions: robertwlinn@gmail.com

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now."

Start collecting stories today. Time is not on our side.

QUICK REFERENCE CARD

Essential Reminders

- 📱 Phone charged, airplane mode ON
- 😊 You talk less than 10%
- ⌚ Count to 8 after they speak
- ❤️ Follow emotion trails
- 🚫 No personal anecdotes
- ✅ "Tell me more..."
- 📝 Write follow-ups, don't interrupt
- 🙏 Thank them sincerely

If Only One Question:

"What story from your service do you most want preserved?"

*This guide prepared by Captain Jimmie Hobaugh No. 407 Lodge of Research and Information -
Preserving Veteran Wisdom for Future Generations*