

The Oral History Program of the Canadian War Museum

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The Canadian War Museum (CWM) maintains a research collection of audio interviews in its archives. These are the end product of its own oral history program. That program concentrates on capturing historically relevant experiences, primarily from Canadian Forces members. This paper describes how the oral history program began, some of the decision points during its formulation, how the program runs at present and some possible directions for the future.

The Canadian War Museum Oral History Program had its beginnings in 1999. At that time, the Friends of the Canadian War Museum were looking for a project in which they could support the museum and staff. The Friends had a long tradition supporting the museum in a number of areas such as fundraising and volunteer interpreters. The organization wanted to enhance that relationship. The suggestion was made that CWM could capitalize upon the experiences of the Friends by means of a series of interviews with some of them concerning their military careers. Many of the Friends had held senior military appointments or had been personally involved in aspects of recent Canadian military history. The interviews would then be kept in the museum's archives.

Discussions with the Canadian War Museum (CWM) historical staff revealed that they were quite supportive. No current oral history program existed. Some CWM staff historians over past years had done interviews in the course of various projects but there was no organized collection. The interviews that existed were few, eclectic, structured at the whim of the individual for their own purposes, lacked legal releases (and were, therefore, of limited future value) and were poorly stored on bookshelves, in desk drawers or in cardboard boxes in a warehouse. The staff historians were also keen to begin an oral history program because the plans for the new War Museum building opening in 2005 included an expanded research centre with improved archival storage. An oral history collection was seen as an attractive addition to this new facility.

But, even though the proposal envisaged most of the work being done on a voluntary basis, there was still a need for supplies, some reimbursement of local travel expenses, transcription costs and administration. The initiative stalled because there was no money in the current year's budget for a new program. Quite co-incidentally at this time, a charitable foundation approached the CWM and asked about the feasibility of donating money to fund interviews with Second World War veterans. With this donation, the last stumbling block was removed and planning began.

With a guarantee of funding, a feasibility study was done to confirm that the idea was viable. More importantly, it was necessary to ascertain how best to design and to operate such a program. It was clear that by concentrating the work initially in the National Capital Region there would be a large number of interviewees to choose from. The Ottawa area was a popular locale for military retirees and many had remained there after a military, business or public service career. Within the Friends organization alone, there were a large number of retired military members. As importantly, the Friends could provide a number of people, many with advanced degrees or specialty military knowledge, who had a deep interest both in history and in the support of the CWM. This was a source, then, of the first slate of interviewees

A first step was to conduct a survey of other oral history programs in Canada and elsewhere in the world, specifically those with military content. The results of a short survey were surprising. There was obviously great interest and activity in military oral history. A number of programs existed, most of which were sponsored by various levels of government, private organizations and, in some cases, individuals for their own research or commercial purposes. But, in many cases, interviews were being done in neither an historically meaningful nor in an efficient way.

The best and most highly organized oral history programs were those conducted by the US military forces. Each service in that country has a structured program to capture not only immediate "after-action" reports in the field but also to record for historical purposes the impressions and actions of senior officers each time they vacate a command or senior staff position. In Canada, there is a very much more modest approach taken. The army and other services try to capture "lessons learned" after

major exercises or operational deployments, mainly by means of written reports supplemented occasionally by interviews. The Canadian Forces Directorate of History and Heritage historical staff conducts periodic interviews to assist in the writing of official histories and monographs. They conduct no broad general program of oral history interviews.

For the most part, all the other oral history programs reviewed seemed to be motivated by a rush to interview people for commemorative purposes before they were beyond the reach of a microphone. A few programs were obviously learning tools for history students. Others were patriotic and well-meaning efforts, but unguided. While commemoration is a laudable and worthwhile goal in itself, many oral history programs appeared to be structured like a museum that accepts into its collection everything that people deposit at the door. Soon the warehouse is full of artifacts that defy cataloguing, piled so high and so randomly that the collection becomes useless because articles cannot be retrieved for display or research.

Some of the transcripts in programs we reviewed, while telling an interesting anecdotal story, failed to give a context for the interview. Was this the story of a young person who, at the time, was impressionable or was it the considered opinion of a veteran? While personal impressions are important, they cannot be taken in isolation. Many collections seemed to take a shotgun approach and few interviews related to one another. Often, interviews seemed to have endless repetition as soldier after soldier, sailor after sailor and airman after airman told similar stories.

The worst thing was that many interviewers clearly did not have a military background and, to put it kindly, the resulting interviews were shallow. For a military history researcher, it is particularly disappointing when reading a transcript or listening to a tape to see that the interviewer failed to explore an issue fully. For instance, in one interview that was reviewed, one university student interviewing an American former general officer touched upon the various personnel replacement systems that he had experienced in his career in WW II, Korea, Vietnam and US Army Europe during the Cold War. Just as the narrator warmed to his topic, one he knew intimately as a combat veteran and senior staff administrator, and when the general was about to give an rationalized opinion of which system was best, the interviewer abruptly turned the

interview onto another unrelated topic. A golden opportunity for a seasoned opinion on an important area was lost for a future researcher.

This indicated to us that our interviewers would need to have a depth of military background to produce good military oral history interviews. The interviewer would have to be intuitively aware of things that did not seem correct or that begged for further explanation. Because interviewers deal with the human memory with all its foibles, an interviewer would have to be alert to know if facts, sometimes quite inadvertently, got twisted. The best resource for interviewers would undoubtedly be former military members who had experience in a variety of field and staff positions. It would be almost impossible to duplicate their career experience in a non-military interviewer. Further, interviewers would have to specialize to a degree, capitalizing on their former careers. As novel as it sounds, soldiers would have to interview soldiers, sailors interview sailors, and so on.

It was clear that interviews would have to be historically-based in order to produce a high quality research collection. Commemorative interviews alone would not fill the bill for a national-level research collection. Each interview would need to fit into an area of enquiry to be determined at the beginning of the year with a view to systematic exploration of a particular aspect of military history. Still, there would be a need to be flexible enough to respond to those interviewees that might be "fleeting targets", those people who were visiting or whose story was needed for a particular purpose. The historical requirement would be decisive as to the areas to be explored

Material, once collected, would have to be accessible. Many programs did not do a sufficient job of indexing or cataloguing material, thus rendering the collections almost useless for serious research because of the effort involved in retrieving specific data. Because the aim was to build a research collection, there would have to be a system of indexing or cataloguing that would preclude users having to listen to hours of tape on end or plow through endless pages of transcripts to find the facts that they wanted. The program would have to be able to conform to the existing museum cataloguing system and supplement that with good finding aids.

Military officers are taught that the first and most important principle of war is Selection and Maintenance of the Aim. After some discussion, it

was decided that the CWM Oral History Program would have one main aim and two subsidiary aims. Primarily, the aim of the program is to build a military oral history research collection worthy of a national institution. Secondly, from that collection CWM also had to be able to draw material for display purposes and for educational and outreach programs.

With the results of our informal survey in mind, and guided by the aims of the program, decisions were made on how to proceed. The selection of interviewers was a paramount concern. Interviewers, first of all, had to be historically minded, personable and self-starters. They had to be able to conduct research and interview and, most importantly, agree to this as a volunteer task. They had to be computer-literate because we foresaw an increasing use of computers for communication and interview preparation in future. Luckily, that described a lot of former military personnel involved with the Friends organization. When approached, most candidates were enthusiastic about getting involved. In fact, the most awkward moments occurred when keen applicants, for whatever reason, had to be turned down

A basic question was what medium to use for recording interviews. After reviewing the options and equipment available, and carefully considering the aims, it was decided to use audio only, not video. The reason was that video provided no advantage for purposes of the program over audio. Video posed several problems. The equipment was more elaborate and bulkier. The end product interview was not as easily used by researchers and transcription of video called for more elaborate equipment on the part of the transcriber. Having moving images of the speaker, it was felt, was not necessary for the attainment of the aim – to produce factual interviews.

Once it was determined to use audio solely, the question for us, as for many other programs, was whether to go digital or analog. After long and hard consideration, analog was chosen. Specifically, the program took the low-tech road and standardized on 90-minute audiocassettes. The reasons for this trailing-edge approach were all practical. Despite the long-heralded replacement of audiocassettes by digital disks or computerized recording equipment, it has not happened completely yet. Further, there seemed at the time to be little standardization of formats and no clear leader for an industry standard. Audiocassettes can last a long time. The equipment to make decent recordings was readily

available from retail stores at a reasonable price. Audio recorders were portable and did not require studio space or skill to produce a final product. Lastly, there seemed to be a lot of machines still extant on which audio cassette interviews can be played for many years to come.

While it is good archival practice to re-record audiocassettes on to archival quality reel-to-reel magnetic tape, that is a long process and expensive. CWM currently does not do that. However, all original cassettes and duplicate working copies are kept in temperature and humidity controlled conditions at the CWM archives and this, it is felt, will slow deterioration.

Some of audiocassettes have been used for display purposes in the new museum and the professional audio studio had no problem re-recording those segments and enhancing them to professional broadcast quality. CWM will watch the development of new technology and may institute changes in the future. One area of interest is the capability to digitize some or all of our interviews with a view to transmission on the internet to make the collection more widely available. At the present moment, however, digitization will be the exception and the original recordings will continue to be made on audiocassettes

Some of the oral history collections reviewed featured interviews of multiple hours in length. Generally speaking, unless they were elaborately indexed, they were hard to navigate and research. A number of long interviews rambled and seemed to lack order, often reiterating stories. It sometimes appeared that both the interviewers and narrators seemed to tire as the interview continued. This was particularly noticeable among older narrators. Time frame, then, appeared to be one of the determinants of a good interview.

Again, in the interests of building a usable collection, the average limit on each interview was set at 90 minutes. This is not an immutable time frame. Some interviews go longer and some shorter. However, 90 minutes was not only was a convenient tape size, it proved to be about as much time as the average structured interview needed for a specific topic. It also seems to be convenient for narrators. Most narrators tire after a two-hour session. The key to good timing, it became apparent, is that everyone must be very clear about the subject of the interview and the points to be covered. The interviewee needs to be aware that their material must be organized and that they would be questioned on it. It

was decided that a second or more interviews would be done with the same person if other subjects were presented during initial work with a narrator.

The next question faced was one of how many interviews could be completed in a year. The charitable donor expected to see some return on the money invested in the first year but had left the parameters of the program to the CWM staff. In discussion with the historical staff, and after considering the amount of work load that would be required over and above the actual interviewing, it was determined that the program would aim for 50 interviews in a year. This was, to be honest, a guess regarding capability that could be mustered. It seemed, however, to be a reasonable target and a number that would make the donor feel that the money was being well used. As it turned out, it has been a solid goal that we have used for each year of the program. The number of interviews was short by one or two only in one year, and offset by extra interviews in the succeeding year.

The program is based upon the fiscal year. In practice, interviewing normally does not start until September and all interviews are finished by mid-February so that transcription can be completed by mid-March. This allows a finish of the program by 30 March, the end of the government annual fiscal period.

The Program in Operation

Interview Administration

The interview process begins with preliminary contact with a potential interviewee, often by telephone or a mutual friend's introduction, to ensure that they are suitable and that they agree to participate. The program is verbally explained to them. We may have an exchange of emails to do this. Then the narrator receives a welcoming contact letter from the War Museum, on official letterhead. This again outlines the program in general terms and warns of the need to sign a legal release. The narrator is asked to complete a simple biographical data form so that it can be put on file. A copy of the form we use is at Annex A to this paper. Sometimes we find from the data form that is returned that a person has other unique experience of which we were not aware. This may merit a change of interviewer, change of interview focus or a

second interview. Normally, the biographical data situates the person well enough for the interviewer to frame his questions intelligently.

When the form is returned in the supplied self-addressed envelope, an interviewer is formally assigned. He is given a copy of the data form. His job then is to research the background of the interviewee and time period, operation, event, etc. The interviewer makes contact, normally by telephone but sometimes in person, with the narrator and conducts an informal preliminary interview. At this time, the interviewer has an opportunity to size up the narrator for such things as voice quality, reticence or garrulousness, actual recall, perspective of the event, and interpersonal relationships.

The interviewer then makes a small plan based upon this and, if necessary, the topic list drawn up for this particular interview, or series of interviews, is changed or the emphasis is moved in various places. Normally, the interviewer sends the narrator a copy of the topic list well ahead of the interview. This allows the interviewee to organize his or her own thoughts. It is best to avoid the perception that the interview is a "pop quiz" or that it is an unimportant event. Rather, it is preferable that the narrator be drawn into the process as a full participant and made to realize that they are vital to its success.

The interviewer makes a mutually convenient appointment to conduct the interview. We strongly discourage public places like officers' messes or restaurants, of course. Interviewers normally visit interviewees in their home. If the interviewee wishes, a room can be made available in the CWM. Almost all interviewees want to do it in familiar surroundings, their home, and often use the opportunity to consult maps, photos, diaries or other documents they may have. Interviewees are encouraged to use anything that may jog their memory, with the reminder that they must describe verbally anything they refer to in the course of the interview.

Once the interview is completed, the interviewer indicates that to the Program Director with an email or telephone call. Then a letter, once again on museum letterhead, is sent to the narrator thanking them for their participation. The aim is to get thanking letters out to participants within 48 hours of the interview being completed.

Interview Team

As noted above, it was determined that it was mandatory that only subject matter experts would interview in various areas. In looking at other programs' transcripts, particularly those dealing with military subjects, it was painfully clear that many of the non-military interviewers did not have an in-depth grasp of the subject matter. Without a military background, an interviewer runs the very real risk of not being able to ask "the next question" simply because of lack of knowledge in a specialized area. Insisting on ex-military members to be interviewers has paid off handsomely. The interviewers do ask the correct questions, and the "next question". Moreover, when the interviewer has the same basic background in training and experience as the narrator, an instant bond is established because they speak the same jargon and probably know mutual friends. This is important to the success of the interviews.

Luckily, most military members (especially in senior NCO or officer ranks) are no stranger to having done interviews in their career as part of the normal process of man management and leadership. All had had some military staff training, normally well above the level of rank they held. They also had a mastery of the technicalities of their particular specialty. Military leaders normally are well-spoken and logically-minded, with an eye for detail. The same goes for narrators, of course.

CWM has been blessed with good interviewers, well educated and articulate. Each year some new blood is recruited and some go on sabbatical, depending upon the needs of the interview program. The interview team runs between six and eight in strength each year. Each are asked to commit to six interviews as a minimum but often they do more. At least half of the interviewers have advanced degrees in history or war studies, often from Royal Military College or other Canadian universities.

Structure of Interviews

The structure of interviews is referred to colloquially as the "sandwich technique". Each interview is roughly divided into the following parts: 10% introduction and biographical information, 80% subject-specific content, and 10% wrap-up.

The first 10% segment serves a couple of functions. It puts on tape the necessary administrative information (standard opening narrative to identify the tape, narrator and subject material and the audio confirmation of the legal release having been signed), a short biography of the individual, the correct spelling of surname, rank and other tombstone data.

For biographical information, the narrator is asked to give an outline of his complete career experience, quickly, in point form. This, by getting the narrator speaking, helps overcome any nervousness and concentrates the mind of the narrator so that the microphone become less intrusive to his thought process. This also situates for the future listener/researcher the narrator's experiential envelope. Researchers will quickly be able to tell if an interview is with a person who was only a young soldier, sailor or airman at the time. Or had the person been trained for a higher level of staff work or command? Or is the narrator telling the story of his youth but now seeing it through experienced eyes? It is important that this be done because, particularly in military operations, understanding the perspective and viewpoint of the observer is vital to interpretation of what they say. A young soldier on his first deployment will have a different view of the same event than will an experienced officer working at a higher headquarters.

The middle 80% of the interview is specific to the main subject of the interview. It concentrates upon the advertised subject and tries not to meander into areas that, while interesting, are not germane to the interview topic. This is sometimes difficult with military people because they have had such wide experiences. However, narrators are normally provided with the topic list of areas to explore. These lists often take the form of selected areas of interest with subsidiary example points. Both the interviewer and the narrator have the flexibility to use or ignore the topic lists or to move into more tangential areas, within reason. Interviewers have discretion in the actual conduct of the interview and this is another reason that having very experienced people is vital.

In general terms, the interviews could be characterized as being narrow and deep, as opposed to broad and shallow. Most people know what Wellington and Napoleon did at the Battle of Waterloo. Few people know what the sergeant in the rear rank of Picton's division did, or why he was placed where he was, or why he had a sword and not a musket.

The research collection is interested in not only the technicalities of military history but also strives to explore the reasons for why things happened the way they did. The strength of the collection is that depth in each interview.

To give an example, we are now beginning interviews on the Balkan deployments of Canadian Forces to the Former Yugoslavia. There were a number of different operations in the 12 years that Canadian troops were in the area. They worked in different geographic areas and often under various command headquarters, the UN and NATO, all of which changed the experience. An interview would zero in, as much as possible, on one situation and one time frame when interviewing a CF member that was there. If, as is the case sometimes, the member or his unit served multiple times in a different area, or under a different command arrangement, it might be useful to have them comment upon the differences or similarities of the situation. Normally, however, the bulk of the interview would stick to the advertised subject. Of interest might be topics such as the training and pre-deployment briefing, how the real situation compared to that preparation and what tactical organization was used to do the job.

In another instance to illustrate the narrow and deep approach, the former commander of the air force was interviewed. The interview did not span the entire 37 years of his career but concentrated upon his time as a photo-reconnaissance pilot flying mainly from Malta during the Second World War. The interview took almost the entire 90 minutes and went into great depth. In the beginning, it covered quickly his enlistment and initial training and specific reasons for volunteering for this type of operations. The interview then moved into the main area of interest. It covered: the colour of his aircraft (blue and some pink), how targets were briefed, armament carried (none), communications facilities on board, types of cameras, flight profiles for various types of photos, target areas, how targets were changed in mid-flight (with difficulty), evasion tactics (fly high and fast), range and flight characteristics of the aircraft, processing of photos, intelligence de-briefing, and aircrew and groundcrew living conditions as the squadrons moved into Italy along with the advancing armies. The narrator related some personal anecdotes but only with a view to illustrating a point (such as how he went to the bathroom at 30,000 feet in a pressurized suit over the length of a five or more hour mission). It was a comprehensive look not only at his personal experience but the technicalities of the job.

In the last 10% of the interview, this officer related how his war experience influenced him as a pilot and as a person who decided to make the peacetime air force his career.

The Transcription Process

While all the interviewers were computer-literate, the attraction of their volunteer job was to do interviews with interesting people. They were less enthusiastic about spending long hours transcribing interviews. Further, because CWM was a national institution, the transcriptions needed to have a certain professional, or corporate, look to them. Technical terms and military jargon would require transcription of a specialized type. While there was no shortage of commercial transcription firms in the Ottawa area, all came with hefty price tags. Given the volume of interviews we might expect, it was decided to explore other alternatives.

By questioning people in the local historical community, it was ascertained that some had had manuscripts prepared by a second party. From them the names of a few people who did audiotape transcription in their spare time were obtained. These people were a combination of administrative workers who worked full-time, and mothers who had stepped out of the work force to stay at home with their young children. Most did not have any military background, except for one person who had temporarily worked at National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa.

Over the past three years the transcription team has varied between two and six, all women. The core this year is two for English and one for French transcription. It would be better to have one or two more for depth as a precaution against slowdowns caused by sick children or holidays at inopportune times.

The transcribers have become remarkable adept at learning the military lexicon and the quality of their transcriptions is high. Naturally, the more they do, the better they become. They often do additional research themselves for their own education, as was the case when we did a series of interviews with war artists. A few of them went to the CWM and National Gallery websites to look up the artist and their works on the internet. We encourage interviewers to have difficult names, abbreviations or words spelled by the narrator on tape to speed the work

of the transcribers. As well, interviewers are required to highlight uncommon words, foreign place names, and search keywords in the synopsis they produce with each interview. A copy of that synopsis goes to the transcriber for guidance. Transcribers work to a standard format for interviews. They also have a style guide. The uniform appearance of the interviews in hard copy is a plus for the collection.

The initial lack of awareness on the part of the transcribers regarding military jargon or technical terms was overcome in a number of ways. Each transcriber was given the telephone number and email address of the interviewers and had full access to clarify anything they did not understand. Most of the transcribers did not talk much to interview team members, however, preferring instead to communicate with the Program Director for their general queries on military terminology. Normally, it is easy to assist them because the subject material is generic military and the tape has been heard when a duplicate working copy was made. A few of the transcribers built their own glossary lists and traded them among each other as a mutual support society. In places on the tape where it was impossible for the transcriber to detect the correct pronunciation or spelling or, sometimes, even phraseology, they used a standard notation system that they insert into the transcript using square editorial brackets. When the tapes are audited after transcription, this alert mechanism allows corrections to be inserted.

Transcripts are not normally sent back to the narrator for checking or correction. Despite what most oral history texts say about that, there are a couple of reasons for not doing it. Experience has shown that people are often slow in correcting and returning transcripts. Many cannot believe that they said what they actually said and want to hear the tape to prove it. Then they want to correct it. Exact and proper grammar or punctuation is the lesser of our objectives. Rather, the interviews strive to capture the essence of their thoughts. The dash and elipse are used in transcriptions a lot to indicate hesitations or changes of direction in the thought process during the interview. For military people brought up in a system that stresses accuracy and the written word, this is anathema and their natural reaction is to want to correct their grammar. With 50 plus interviews each year, the administration involved is more than we could bear.

Only seldom is it really necessary to go back to the interviewee to ask about something, normally highly technical. Because of the high level of

experience of the interviewer team, one of us can make a correction or answer questions if the transcriber types something that does not look right. Interviewers are asked to be very clear on tape about abbreviations or technical terms, mainly for the ease of the transcribers, but also for the clarity of the interview. Not going back to narrators for a transcription check has not harmed the quality of the collection.

The stable of transcribers has gradually changed and expanded, replacing some as years went on. In almost all cases, recruiting is done by word of mouth. One transcriber, perhaps, would have a neighbour or friend who saw this as an interesting sideline. Others have been contacted as a result of dictation work that they have done for our contemporaries. Quality is important and we stopped using a few transcribers who were not up to the standard required.

Each transcriber is paid a standardized set amount for a full 90-minute audio cassette. Partially-filled tapes were pro-rated. Working copies of the interviews were given to them, along with some supporting documentation to assist them in spelling and understanding. Tapes are given to them at the rate they wish and, at the end of each month, an invoice is prepared for them and submitted to be paid by the museum from the oral history budget. The transcriber receives a cheque in the mail for work done the previous month. Tapes and transcript disks are exchanged at a central location at the CWM, or by personal meeting, most usually, by dropping off tapes and disks when they are doing shopping, carting kids to activities or feel the need to get out of the house.

Initially, transcripts were all done electronically. That is, the transcribers would listen to the tape and then return transcripts on a 3.5 inch disk, or via email if they finished one before the others, for auditing and editing. This worked well and cut down the paper flow. The disks then, like the tapes, were stored in controlled conditions. Interestingly, while doing some work on interviews over two years old, it was discovered that one or two files on disk could not be opened. This indicated that there was a need for backup of the floppy disk transcripts and a program was instituted to put all transcripts on CD. Being aware of possible data decay in this medium as well, a museum volunteer was detailed to print each transcript in hard copy. That is now held on the shelves of the CWM archives. Storage of transcripts, then, seems to have gone full

circle and ended with paper being the only firm medium in which we have confidence.

Practical Considerations

Feedback from the interviewers has been good. A couple of interviewers have been with us for the entire duration of the program. Others come and go, and one is re-joining this year after a couple of years away. All have enjoyed it and most have left because of other commitments, not dissatisfaction with the program.

Narrators have been happy, also. There have been direct or indirect compliments upon the thoroughness of the interviews. Sometimes, narrators are surprised about the depth in which the interview is conducted despite the fact that we try to tell them beforehand that this is not simply an opportunity to recount war stories. The best interviewees are those who want to tell their story and who prepare well for the interview. In some cases, this has been overdone. There have been narrators who have written out 15 pages of material by hand and attempted to read it aloud. Others have pulled out maps and diagrams, photos and memorabilia, all interesting but slightly off topic.

Some researchers have used the collection and have reported it to be useful and easy to use.

Material is not solicited during the interview for the CWM. Narrators often ask about donations of artifacts and the standard answer is to give them the CWM acquisitions office telephone number. The museum is, understandably, unable to take everything offered to it. Further, what may look interesting to an interviewer may simply be an item or artifact of which copies already reside in the collection. The museum collection managers rule on the desirability of acquisitions. It is preferable that interviewers not be directly involved in the process

Our equipment is a desk-top standard audio cassette recorder. They are standard recorders bought from Radio Shack. The best microphone to use is a clip-on microphone that has its own battery. Very soon the narrator gets used to having it on their collar or shirt front. Some difficulty was experienced with the batteries constantly being drained and there was occasional fading out of sound if the narrator moved and twisted the wire. Cheaper, non-battery, table-top mikes have been

introduced over the past year. These work well but are prone to being hit or moved with the resultant scraping or loud banging noise on tape. Both microphones need to be well-placed and tape checks need to be done frequently.

Digital equipment is not used because of the cost and because of the uncertainty of data degradation. Our tapes are re-recorded and the original is kept apart. Both the original and duplicates are stored in a controlled area with humidity, light and temperature monitors. Tapes used to date in some of the displays have required only minor enhancement by a professional studio to meet broadcast quality.

Tapes are not edited. Interviewers make use of the "pause" button as required. Interviewers may stop an interview, or re-record a part of the interview on the spot, but there is no later studio editing done. The standard technique is to quickly go over the part of the topic list with the narrator, give them a minute to collect their thoughts or consult their notes and then run the tape. At the end, the process is repeated with the next point or points

Each new interviewer receives two days of training. New interviewers receive background on the program and how it works. They are introduced to the research resources at the CWM and given a few background readings to orient their minds to oral history. They are then issued with and show how to use the recording equipment. They are asked to practise with it in a classroom setting for a few minutes to ensure that they at least know where the instruction booklet is found. There is a short lecture on ethics, libel and slander, and the copyright laws as they pertain to our program. The remainder of the time is spent in reviewing their duties and the administrative paperwork that the program demands.

New interviewers are given a short introduction to interviewing. In truth, all have done this before in their military career so that they are very aware of the techniques of interviewing in general terms. The lecture reminds them not to ask leading questions, and not to get ahead of their interviewee. Points such as standard introductory narratives, how to conclude the interview, and ensuring that everything is properly identified on tape are stressed. They then either watch while an interview is conducted or conduct one under supervision, normally on another

trainee. Most of the problems for new interviewers seem to arise in the operation of the recording equipment, but that is soon mastered.

Returning interviewers and, when possible, the transcribers gather together for part of that training time annually to go over points noted from the previous year's activity. It also allows the new people to hear from experienced interviewers some of the tricks of the trade.

Principal among the documents is the legal release that both interviewee and interviewer must sign prior to recording the interview. This release is all-encompassing and gives all rights to the interview to CWM for use as it sees fit in the future in any medium. Without the release being signed, the interview may not proceed. In two cases in the past, narrators queried the legal release. One was an engineer worried about patent information and the other was an artist concerned about copyright. After it was explained to them that the release covered only material in the interview, that is the spoken words, both proceeded with the interview. While some have commented that our legal release is rather broad in scope, the legal department of the museum feels that this is the minimum required to allow current and future uses of the material in the public domain. A copy of the legal release used is at Annex B .

The interviewee and interviewer must audibly acknowledge on tape that they have both signed the legal release. This is to protect against loss of the paperwork in future.

We repeatedly make it clear to interview candidates that their interview will be in the public domain. Consequently, all interviews must be unclassified with regard to military operations or sensitive information. By the same token, interviews must not be libelous or slanderous. The first question of classified information is not difficult because we structure the interviews to avoid that. But, sometimes it is difficult to convince some people that they can speak freely today about formerly classified subjects. There was a clear reluctance, for example, on the part of some narrators to speak freely about army signal intercept intelligence procedures, even though their work was done in 1943! Most realized, after it was pointed out to them, that the techniques of their work had long ago been surpassed by technology.

To counter the second point of libel or slander, the use of specific names is discouraged when it is necessary to refer to people. Normally, this

can be manipulated by referring to the position held by the person and a judicious choice of phrases. For instance, it is not acceptable to say: "Colonel Bloggins was a real jerk to work for." It is better to say: "The Chief of Staff was exceedingly demanding and this caused some problems among the staff." One might say it is semantics but it is better to take a moderate course. All interviews are vetted to ensure that they do not cross the line. None, to date, have done so.

At the end of the interview, the interviewer is required to complete a synopsis sheet of the interview. In addition to tombstone data at the beginning to identify the narrator and details of the time/place of the interview, the interviewer must give a short narrative of three or four paragraphs to detail the content of the interview. Then a selection of keywords is chosen representative of the interview for future cataloguing. Lastly, a tape log counter of major points is listed. Most of this material will be cut and pasted into the museum's cataloguing system when the interview is archived.

The practice is to use tape log counter numbers instead of a time counter number when doing the running index. This is because a researcher can use the tape log counter on a recording set to get quickly to the area they may be interested in without having to guess at timings when fast forwarding or reversing the tape. While tape counters vary from machine to machine, they give a rough estimate of where in the side of a cassette the particular part of interest is found.

A copy of the synopsis sheet format used is at Appendix C.

Evolution of the Program

For the initial year, the program was bound by the terms of the charitable donation to interview Second World War veterans. Selection of interviewees was done in a relatively random manner. Notwithstanding that admission, 50 narrators from a variety of services with experience in various geographic areas and time frames agreed to interviews.

The first year was judged to be a success. Fifty interviews were completed and valuable administrative lessons and procedures were learned and developed as we worked through the process. The charitable donor was provided with a report, as was the CWM staff. The donor did not return for subsequent years but, because the program was viewed as

a valuable addition to the museum, CWM management agreed to fund oral history for five more years.

As a result of the success of the first year, and because of the amount of work involved in organizing and co-ordinating the program, CWM authorized a contract position for the Program Director for subsequent years. Payment is based upon deliverables such as the amount of training completed, interview and program administration done and finished interviews deposited in the CWM archives.

It became obvious quickly that choosing interviewees by the shotgun method was not the best approach for the program. Interviewers, although assigned to interview people from the same service that they had served in, found that they were hopping from one geographic area or time frame to another. An interviewer might have been asked to interview a veteran who served in Holland first and then a veteran of the Italian campaign. The disparities in the historical background of the interviews proved to be a burden on the interviewers who had to do extensive research on two very different time periods, tactical operations or geographic areas. Interviewers reported that they were doing an average of five to six hours research minimum for each interview. The lesson learned from this was that interview areas must be as tightly focussed as possible and grouped together.

In conjunction with the historical CWM staff, the program was further refined. The "project" approach was introduced whereby interviews were grouped into defined areas of interest and a search was made for specific interviewees who could elaborate upon the chosen area. Each project would consist of interviews in the same time frame, with the same theme, operation or geographic area. The interviewer or interviewers assigned to that project would be able to maximize their research time and use the effort invested in a number of similar interviews. Further, in the course of conducting the interviews, they would be able to build upon previous interviews to further enhance subsequent questions with later interviewees. Topic lists upon which the interviews were based could be more standardized with the result that future researchers would have a more consistent basis upon which to do comparative research.

The project approach begun in the second year has proven to be useful and popular. In the beginning of the year, each interviewer is provided

with a Project Definition Sheet. This document has been developed and approved in conjunction with the CWM historical staff. It is a simple document but it acts as a “contract specification” of sorts to ensure that everyone is clear about what we will be expecting at the end of the year. At times, it becomes a useful reality check when interviewers or administrators get too enthusiastic and begin to stray from the stated aim.

A number of projects have been completed over the years. Some of them are:

- Pilot training 1950-1975 (a comparison of various types of pilot training from propeller Harvard aircraft to ab initio jet training; interviews were with both trainees and instructors);
- 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade in the north of Germany 1952-1970;
- 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade in the south of Germany 1970-1995 (both of these projects consisted of interviews with military commanders, soldiers and dependents);
- Army radio intercept signal intelligence operation in Northwest Europe in the Second World War;
- Naval carrier aviation in the post-war RCN and Canadian Forces (interviews with aircrew of fixed and rotary wing aircraft, ship captains and sailors down to and including the Chaplain and the ratings that ran the catapult; detailed descriptions of tactical operations);
- Airborne Intercept Navigators (these were the back-seat Weapons Officers in CF-100 and CF-101 aircraft; interviews included detailed descriptions of individual training, unit training, real and practice alerts in Canada and Europe in NORAD and NATO, tactical manoeuvres used and weapon delivery techniques);
- UNEF 1957-1967 (this UN force was on and south of the Gaza Strip and interviews were with a variety of people in operational units, on the headquarters staff and in support roles over the ten years of the life of the force);

- Tactical army aviation (interviews traced the introduction and use of army helicopters in Canada; interviews were with staff officers responsible for procurement and doctrine work, line pilots of light and heavy helicopters in Canada and abroad);
- DDH operations (interviews with engineers and test pilots to trace the development of the Bear Trap system that allowed large helicopters to be flown from relatively small ships, destroyer captains and squadron commanders describes anti-submarine tactics used with helicopters and their general utility for the fleet);
- 1 Air Division in Europe (a number of interviews with dependents and service personnel who were in the UK, France and Germany in the early days of the 12-squadron RCAF air division); and
- Post-war submarine operations (interviews with Canadians trained in both the UK and US, staff officers who planned procurement and doctrine and crewmen who served on mainly OBERON class submarines)

About 10 interviews each year are kept for what is termed “opportunity targets”. This includes any number of people who, for one reason or other, become available to be interviewed. The category also provides flexibility to the program in that a small group of interviews that may not be large enough to justify their own project can be included here. For instance, over the past two years, we have been interviewing about five or six civilian artists whose work is in the CWM collection. Sometimes there is the possibility of interviewing specific individuals on an opportunity basis. An example of this was the chance last summer to interview a former air force officer, during a visit to Ottawa, who had developed a system of radar prediction mapping for low-level attacks by CF-104 nuclear strike aircraft in Europe. This “opportunity” project category also allows flexible response to short-deadline requests from the CWM staff to get audio input for a display or research program.

One guideline we developed was termed the “Holes in History” principle. It was decided that it would not be generally useful to interview people whose story or viewpoint had been otherwise made available to the public. As much as possible, the program would try to illuminate those areas of Canadian military history that had been under-represented to date in Canadian military history work. For instance, if a

person had already written an autobiography or been interviewed extensively in the media or by other academics, we would not consider them a high priority for an interview. Thus, it is unlikely that someone like General Romeo Dallaire or General Lewis MacKenzie, both of whom have been the subject of intense public scrutiny, would be interviewed in the program.

Likewise, while it is planned to conduct interviews this year about the Somalia operation in the early 1990s, those interviews will not dwell upon or highlight the material covered by the Somalia Inquiry. This is neither from any sense of squeamishness nor a wish to ignore the facts. It would be impossible to not mention the Somalia Inquiry material in such a series of interviews. In fact, the Commission's proceedings would be required reading for background research. However, there are a number of other issues that probably need to be explored about that mission regarding its effectiveness that have been generally overlooked until now. These might include tactical methods of conducting operations in the desert, command and control, civil action operations, and interoperability with international aid organizations, to name but a few.

The program is now embarking upon the sixth year of operation. Program administration and procedural issues are well established, although they are subject to refinement in light of each year's experience. To date, just over 250 interviews have been completed and the number will top 300 in the collection in 2006. All interviews are catalogued and descriptions are accessible to the public via the CWM web site.

Organizers of other oral history programs have examined our approach and, in at least two cases, they adopted the program's formats and procedures almost in total, to the degree that they simply inserted their own headings on the material developed by CWM. The program has been briefed to the Canadian Oral History Association and material and briefings provided for the Michigan Oral History Association, Michigan State University, and Brescia College oral history classes. Liaison is maintained with the University of Victoria/Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island oral history program. The Canadian Forces Directorate of History and Heritage is kept informed of annual activity.

This year there will likely be six interviewers and three or four transcribers working on projects that cover Somalia, the Balkans, senior

Canadian officers in multinational staff and command positions and, of course, the ubiquitous Opportunity project. In this latter category, interviews with some artists will continue and, hopefully, there will be a few Second World War Typhoon pilots with whom one of the interview team members has forged some contact over the past year

As indicated above, the program's area of interest is now moving into more modern times. There is a de-emphasis upon Second World War and Korean War interviews, although we will conduct some if the occasion presents itself or a unique story presents itself. For the most part, concentration will be upon the past 35 years of Canadian military history. The Balkans project is expected to be a multi-year activity.

Interviews in French and with Reservists will be expanded. Until now, most Francophones wished to be interviewed in English because it was not until the mid-1970s that most of them received military and technical training in French. Typically, Francophones would say that they did not know the military or technical terms in French. As we move into more modern times, that does not apply as much. Reservists, of course, have played a much greater role in the operations conducted by the Canadian Forces over the past 20 years and their story must also be told.

CWM needs to fulfill its mandate as a national institution and must try to establish more of a national presence. Until now, the program has been centred upon the National Capital Region. As much as anything, the costs of travel have been prohibitive. In addition, it was necessary to ensure that the administration and procedures were foolproof. The time is ripe to expand the program. Therefore, this year a CWM oral history interview cell will be created at Kingston, another hotbed of military active personnel and retirees. If this is successful, expansion will follow to other cities and areas as time and money permits. The program will search for innovative ways to allow an interview team to make visits to selected areas to interview pre-selected narrators. It will also experiment with conducting telephone interviews.

Our liaison and co-operative ventures will be expanded also. A number of exploratory discussions have begun with local museums, unit and branch associations, service organizations and the Department of National Defence. CWM is interested in establishing co-operative ventures to capitalize upon local presence and capabilities for a common aim, the preservation and collection of military oral history of high

quality. There is no intention to impinge upon the current Veterans' Affairs Canada program or that of the Dominion Institute so CWM will not conduct commemorative interviews. The CWM program will retain the history-based research collection approach.

To encourage the development of a high quality of military oral history in Canada, CWM will make available all material it uses in this oral history program for use by any individual or organization in establishing their own oral history program. There will also be a list of suggestions to assist in training and administration. This material will eventually be available in both hard copy and on the CWM web site in both languages. It will be free. In addition, CWM will assist with training for administrators or interviewers of other programs to the extent possible within current budget constraints. Eventually, the general aim is to have a small training package available by internet backed up by on-site visits.

The CWM oral history collection is not well known. Now that the collection is a reasonable size, there will be more effort to publicize its existence this year among the academic community and to the general public. It may be possible to institute on the CWM website a portal to access not only the synopses of the interviews, currently available, but also electronic transcripts. This would make the collection instantly useful to researchers without delay or cost.

There are some areas of Canadian military history not represented in the collection and under-represented in the historiography generally. Some of the areas suitable to explore in future might be:

- DEW Line and Pinetree Line radar sites;
- NORAD command and control systems;
- Minor UN and other humanitarian operations in which Canadian Forces were deployed individually or in small numbers such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, East Timor and parts of South West Asia and Africa;
- Military exchange positions in which some Canadian officers served in combat areas with allied forces; and

- Canadian officers who served in high-level NATO, coalition or allied positions on an individual basis.

The oral history program at the Canadian War Museum has been a successful undertaking to date. The program has been designed from first principles and changes have been evolutionary. With a solid format and sound administrative procedures, the program is building a major national research collection in the field of military history. Interviews are not merely commemorative in nature. It is the intention of the Canadian War Museum to encourage the expansion of military oral history within its own resources and in co-operation with like-minded organizations in the future.

Appendix A**Canadian War Museum Oral History Program—2005-06****Pre-Interview Data Sheet**

Surname:	First Name	Initial(s)	DOB:
Service: Army ___ Navy ___ Air Force ___ Merchant Marine ___ Civilian ___ Other ___(please specify)		Era: WW II ___ Korea ___ NATO ___ Post-war ___ UN ___ (specify)	
Eventual Military Rank:		Rank during interview period:	
When did you enlist?			
When did you leave the military?			
When and where did you serve?			
What was your job, trade, duties, military occupation?			
Do you have any decorations?			
Did you participate in any unique or famous operations/incidents?			
Notes:			
Contact Data:			
Is there a time period NOT good for an interview with you?			
Have you done an oral history interview before?			
Telephone:	Fax:	Email:	
Please confirm your address:			

GUIDE TO COMPLETION

PRE-INTERVIEW DATA SHEET

This data sheet will be used to categorize your interview according to service, geographical area and jobs done. When you return it, this form starts the administrative process, and the background research to be done by the interviewer. It helps make the interview experience beneficial to all concerned. It will also be placed on a biographical file at CWM.

You have been targeted for this project because of your particular experiences. Naturally, any occasions of note should be covered. But, your ordinary work and common daily routines are of great interest. Moreover, please do not be bashful about any decorations or major events in which you participated.

Here are a few comments to bear in mind when completing each area.

The first tier of information is basic personal data. Your date of birth (**DOB**) will give the interviewer a sense of your life experience level at the time of the topic about which you will be interviewed. We need to know the eventual (final) rank you attained in the Service. As well, please indicate the rank held during the period about which you are being interviewed. For instance, you may have been a Cpl during the time we will discuss but finished your service as a Major years later.

In the Service block, tick the one applicable. If **OTHER**, please specify the organization such as "Red Cross", "YMCA", "ARP", "RCMP", etc

The Notes box gives you a space to amplify any of the above and to alert the interviewer to any interesting facet of your experience.

In the last box, let us know if a particular time is not convenient for you to be interviewed so that we can schedule you appropriately. For instance, you may wish to preclude specific days ("Thurs afternoons not available") or large time blocks ("out of town 11 Oct-5 Nov"). We can and will work around your timings.

You may have done an oral history interview before. If so, it may be useful to read it or listen to it as part of our background research. Tell us about it or how/where we can get it.

Lastly, please confirm your contact data. Home, work and fax telephone numbers are useful. Of particular interest to us is an e-mail address if you use one. Please PRINT your home address, with particular note to the postal code, particularly if we have it wrong.

Always give more, rather than less, information if you are in doubt about any of the questions. Feel free to include an extra sheet of paper if you wish.

Appendix B

To CWM Oral History Program

Oral History Interview Release Form

1. I, _____, participated in an oral history interview conducted by _____ on behalf of the Canadian War Museum (CWM) on the following date(s): _____

2. It is understood and agreed by me and the CWM that no information contained in my interview is currently classified under any government security classification.

3. I understand that any and all transcripts, notes, audio and video tapes, digital or other records, including CD-ROM versions, resulting from this oral history interview will belong to the Canadian War Museum, to be used in any manner deemed in the best interests of the museum.

4. I hereby voluntarily relinquish all copyrights (rights to reproduce, publish and exhibit using any and/or all existing and future reproduction technologies), and all rights to distribution, to the Canadian War Museum acting as an agent on behalf of the Crown.

(Signature
Interviewee) _____ (Date) _____

(Signature
Interviewer) _____ (Date) _____

Appendix C

To CWM Oral History Program

Canadian War Museum Oral History Program 2005-06

Interview Synopsis Sheet (reduced in size to fit *Forum* page)

Surname: BLOGGINS	First Name: Hector	Initial(s): X.	DOB: 31 Feb 22
Service: Army ___ Navy ___ Air Force ___ Merchant Marine ___ Other (please specify) _____		Era: WW I ___ Korea ___ NATO ___ Post-war ___ UN (specify) _____	
Interviewer: Your name here		Date: Use format "31 Feb 05"	Interview Control Number: 31D 6 NAME
Place of Interview: City, Prov (use 2-letter abbreviation)		Number of Cassettes: Use Arabic numbers	
<p>SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEW:</p> <p>Use this form for the synopsis sheet. Delete these instructions and type in the information. As you type, let the page form expand. Aim to keep all the boxes down to "Keywords" on the same page.</p> <p>Use font Times New Roman 10 normal (not bold) for all text throughout the entire document except the first line [Surname, First Name, Initials, DOB] and the Keywords. There use Times New Roman 12.</p> <p>Insert a short outline of the interview in this Synopsis box. The information should be succinct but complete enough to guide a researcher reading this who is searching for specific information. This form and these paragraphs will form the basis for the finding aid for the collection in the archives. Three or four short paragraphs are normally sufficient.</p> <p>Continue the form with the Tape Counter Log. Start each side of each cassette at "000". Record a subject, highlights of the interview or change of direction against the counter log reading. Repeat for successive tapes as necessary.</p> <p>Use the format shown in the following example:</p> <p>000 - Introduction 025 - Education and reason for enlisting in CF 099 - Selection and training as a widget turner</p>			
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Normally use 12 point font in this area. Keep keywords within a project as standard as possible: eg, Army, infantry, Korea, RCR, HMCS MAGNIFICENT, place names, prominent people, etc. Try to go from the general to the specific. Transcribers will use this section to check spelling. This will also be used by the archivist in cataloguing the interview.</p>			

Tape Log Counter (approximate)

Tape 1, Side 1

Tape 1, Side 2