

Spring 5-2017

Interview of Robert Leasher

William Leasher

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Recommended Citation

Leasher, William, "Interview of Robert Leasher" (2017). *All Oral Histories*. 112.
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Interviewee: Robert Gerald Leasher

Interviewer: William Leasher

Interview Date: April 20, 2017

Interview Location: Mr. Leasher's home at 865 Aster Road, Warminster, PA

Field notes written on April 25, 2017 and edited on May 3, 2017.

The Interviewee:

Robert was born in Brownsville Pennsylvania, a small town south of Pittsburgh. He was born on February 26, 1944 to Mary and LeRoy Leasher. Robert was the third of four sons born to Mary and LeRoy, with him and his older brothers being relatively close in age, while his youngest brother was considerably younger. He lived in Brownsville, PA until the age of 3. His family then moved to Germantown, where they lived with a relative until he was around 9 years old. In 1958, his parents purchased land and built their own house in Warminster, Pennsylvania where his mother and youngest brother still live today.

Due to a lack of available work after graduating from high school, he enlisted in the US Navy in September of 1962. He completed basic training at Naval Station Great Lakes, located on the shore of Lake Michigan north of Chicago. Between 1962-63, he was assigned to the Naval Air Station Patuxent River in Maryland where he was involved in some testing of the recently introduced F-4 Phantom II. Following that, he was transferred to the Naval Air Facility Midway, on Sand Island in the Midway Atoll, northwest of Hawaii. He served with the Airborne Early Warning Barrier Squadron Pacific [AEWBARRONPAC] for three years and finished the last two years of his enlistment aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ticonderoga [CVA-14].

After his time in the armed forces, he returned home and began a career working for Sears, Roebuck & Company where he met his wife Patricia and remained for thirty years. He and his wife adopted three sons, James, 37, William, 35, and Christopher, 33. During his time at Sears, he worked as a maintenance engineer and automotive technician before accepting an early retirement at age 55. Afterwards, he worked in maintenance for Centennial School District for 13 years before retiring fully. Robert recently became a grandfather when his oldest son had his first daughter Maisie, born in January of 2017. He currently works on small jobs doing handyman and light carpentry work to supplement his income, and is looking forward to visiting Hawaii again.

The Interviewer:

William Leasher (b. 1982 in Philadelphia, PA) was raised in suburban Bucks County Pennsylvania, north of the city of Philadelphia. He earned his B.A. in history from Temple University in 2008, and a Pennsylvania certification for Secondary Social Studies Education in 2009. He is currently working in a history Master's program with a concentration in public history at La Salle University. He lived in Pittsburgh, PA for several years while attending school at the University of Pittsburgh, before leaving to finish his undergraduate education at Temple University. Since that time, he has lived primarily around the Philadelphia area in Bucks and Montgomery Counties.

Background:

I was initially interested in interviewing a La Sallian for the purpose of this interview, and was making preliminary arrangements to that end, when I realized that time constraints for the semester would make it difficult to finish the project. Since the coursework allowed for the interviewing of either a prominent member of La Salle's community, or a veteran of the armed forces, it occurred to me that my father would make an excellent candidate for an oral history narrative.

My father has never been a gregarious individual when it comes to discussing himself and his experiences, so when I began to consider him as a candidate, several benefits of the interview became apparent. First, this would be an excellent opportunity to understand and relate to my father in a way that I had not before. Second, his experience in the military, his work as an electrician's mate, and his time aboard the USS Ticonderoga could be valuable to future researchers if adequately preserved. And lastly, the interview would provide a bridge to future generations of the family interested in learning more about Robert, especially considering the recent birth of my niece.

As stated above, my father never spoke much about his time in the military. Although he rarely seemed overly apprehensive about it, he was guarded about topics such as combat and violence when my brothers and I were younger. Prior to the Interview, most of what I knew about his service was limited to basic information about the time he spent on the Ticonderoga, and I found myself wanting to know more about his life.

After expressing my concern over my previous interview candidate and clearing the narrator change with my instructor Dr. Barbara Allen, I contacted Robert to gauge his interest and set up a reasonable time to conduct the interview. Having consented to the interview, we agreed on meeting at his home the evening of Thursday April 20th, 2017 at 6:30 P.M. In preparation for the interview, I read over the sample questions on the Library of Congress website, refreshed my memory on the timeline and background of the Vietnam War, and prepared a questionnaire expanding on the basic Library of Congress list. Additionally, I sent Robert a copy of the questions so he could refresh his memory regarding his experiences in the military and beyond.

Description of Interview:

I departed for the interview from my home in Doylestown, PA around 6:00 P.M. While I arrived on time for the 6:30 appointment, the start of the interview was delayed due to the necessity of caring for his young granddaughter Maisie.

Robert's home is a large, blue and white, five-bedroom home, located near a major intersection in the township of Warminster. It has an extended driveway which comfortably fits four vehicles, and is situated across from a small park with a narrow field in front and a ring of trees at the back. It is located about 25 miles to the north of Philadelphia Pennsylvania, in an older suburb of approximately the same age as Robert. The house began as a typically mass produced suburban home, but has been improved over time through the skills he learned in the armed forces and from his father. Robert successfully added two additional bedrooms, as well as an expanded kitchen, family room, and outdoor deck to the house over the course of his life.

We agreed to record the interview in his family room. While I thought a bedroom would provide less risk of interruption and be more conducive to the process, his insistence that the room would be adequate won out, as I suspected he would be more comfortable answering uninhibited in an environment in which he spent more time. Additionally, some of the more secluded rooms in the house did not have comfortable seating considering the length of the interview. While there was minimal background noise during the interview, at no time did it overtake the volume of the interviewer or interviewee.

Notes on Recording:

I conducted the interview on my personal cellular phone, an iPhone model 7 Plus, using an application called "Recorder." The application was a free download from the Apple store, and my previous experience using it gave me confidence in its reliability and ease of use. In addition to recording files in .wav format, it also provides an easy to use interface for the naming of files, and an accessible method of transferring recorded audio to a personal computer via wireless connection providing detailed instructions within the application.

Additionally, I acquired a Sony ICD-UX533 digital recorder to capture a redundant copy of the interview. After transferring and assessing both files, I determined that the quality of the iPhone recording was superior, and continued with it for the remainder of the process. Once the files were safely on my personal computer, I used the NCH Express Scribe Transcription Software Pro (Unlicensed for non-commercial home use only). Having used this software earlier in the course, I was already familiar with it. I found the hotkeys, which were set up within the program, made the stopping, starting, rewinding, and fast forwarding of the audio file nearly effortless. Despite the fact that I created a log rather than a complete transcription, I still found the software surprisingly helpful in my work.

Creation and Editing of Log:

I made a variety of editorial decisions while composing the interview log:

1. I removed non-essential words such as “uh” and “um” from direct quotations where applicable.
2. I eliminate false starts from direct quotations, except where they contributed to the flavor of the text, or did not distract the reader
3. I indicated emphasis with bracket parenthesis during direct quotations where applicable in the narrator’s speech [emphasis original], and highlighted the relevant text in **bold** typeface.
4. I inserted commas and periods into the narrator’s quotations to increase the readability of the text.
5. I highlighted time stamps in bold typeface (**1:23:45**) in order to clearly delineate sections of the log.
6. As some of the narrator’s responses overlapped, covered multiple topics, or ran for extended periods of time, I sometimes used time stamps to break up the text. This serves to group related thoughts or ideas together or to separate disparate topics within a response.
7. I indicated reported speech within quotations with single ‘ ’ quotation marks to differentiate it from the narrator’s response.
8. I placed direct quotations within the log text in quotation marks “ ” and used a relevant reference to the corresponding time in the audio file.
9. For longer direct quotations, I used the standard block paragraph indentation with *italicized* typeface to differentiate the quotation from the rest of the text.
10. I used textual footnote references to provide additional clarification or corrections to the narrator without disrupting the text.
11. I included an abstract and basic information at the beginning of the log to provide the reader additional context in the absence of comprehensive field notes.