1) Failures of Communication

The experience of being a writer is the experience of actively grappling with the desire and perpetual failure to communicate. But such difficulties also define our daily life experiences and relationships. Sometimes miscommunications can produce humorous results, and other times, they can have serious consequences. Try to remember a few specific memories of the military that are shaped by a failure to communicate. Think about any miscommunications that happened within your unit, such as orders improperly conveyed or never conveyed at all, or a dispute between two or more people. Or recall any misunderstandings that occurred between you and someone back home, in the form of a missed phone call, a letter/email misinterpreted, or a letter never sent. If you were stationed in another country, then you may have encountered difficulties in communicating with the people you encountered around issues of translation. Begin by brainstorming a short list of ideas, and then try writing a scene in which you describe one instance of miscommunication or frustrated communication that sticks powerfully in your memory.

2) Digital storytelling

Many veterans are telling their stories in writing and print, as we are doing in this group; however, some veterans are also telling their stories through digital means, namely through videos. George Edinger, a dual Writing and Television, Radio, and Film major here at Syracuse University has volunteered to create videos of members of our group telling stories or being interviewed about their military service. You may remember that George made videos of Derek and Pete reading their work for the publication Intertext, so he has worked with our group before.

These videos would be available for you to show to family and friends and also to put on our website and/or deposited in an archive that is collecting stories and histories of veterans’ experiences if you choose to do so. There are a couple of ways to approach these videos:

1) George could film you reading your writing, adding in photographs or music as appropriate.
2) George could film you being interviewed by me or Ivy or by a family member, friend, or fellow group member about your time in the service. George would edit the interview into a video, including photographs, images, or music that you might want included. You would be included in making decisions about what would stay in the video or be taken out (in other words, you would have creative control). The questions you are asked could be chosen by you and/or we could use a standard interviewing format. Below are some standard questions that are
often asked during an oral history interview for veterans. These can be adapted to fit what you want to address and/or they could be made more specific to focusing on a particular segment of your service.

3) Please let George and Eileen know if you are interested in taking part in making a video. We will be filming over the course of the fall semester.

Oral History Veteran Interview*

Segment 1: For the record

What’s your name? Where you born? Where did you grow up?

When you were growing up, what were your thoughts about the military? Did you have family members who served? Did you ever see yourself joining the military?

What was the time period in which you served?

Segment 2: Jogging Memory

Were you drafted or did you enlist?
Where were you living at the time?
Why did you join?
Why did you pick the service branch you joined?
Do you recall your first days in service? What did you experience?
Tell me about your boot camp/training experience. How did you get through it?

Segment 3: Experience

Where exactly were you stationed for your service?
Do you remember arriving and what was it like?
What was your job assignment?

Tell me a couple of your most memorable experiences or about the specific circumstances you faced during your time in the military, whether during combat or peacetime service?

Is there a story you need to tell about that time—one that stays with you?

Who did you serve with? Tell me about some of your fellow troops or officers.

How much did you move around in your time in the service?

Segment 4: Life

How did you stay in touch with your family?
What was the food like?
Did you have plenty of supplies?
Did you feel pressure or stress?
Was there something special you did for “good luck”?
How did people entertain themselves? What did you do when on leave? Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual events?
What were some of the pranks that you or others would pull?

Segment 5: Artifacts: photographs, letters, diary entries, equipment or uniform, commendations, decorations, awards

Do you have photographs or letters you would like to share? What are they?
Who are the people in the photographs?

Did you keep a personal diary?

Do you have any decorations or awards you would like to mention?

Any parts of your uniform or equipment you would like to discuss and show us for the video?

Segment 6: After Service
Do you recall the day your service ended?
Where were you?
What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?
Did you work or go back to school?
Was your education supported by the G.I. Bill?
Did you make any close friendships while in the service?
For how long?
Did you join a veterans’ organization?

Segment 7: Later Years and Closing
What did you go on to do as a career after your service?
Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general?
If in a veterans’ organization, what kinds of activities does your post or association have?
Do you attend reunions?
How did your service and experience affect your life?

Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this interview?

* Questions adapted/modified from http://www.knowitall.org/generations/participate/planning.html