



*Joe Bruckner and Tony Hilliard in front of the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center in Columbus (Ft. Benning).*

## Why Veterans Choose to Share Their Stories

“We share our stories to ensure our experiences are accurately recorded. No one can describe one’s life, particularly a war time experience, like the person who lived it. We owe it to those coming after us to provide them with eye witness accounts of what transpired. We should do this for our families, for those studying history in the future, and last but not least for ourselves.”

-**Joe Bruckner**, Captain in the United States Army during the Vietnam War, served in the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) and is a Bronze Star Recipient

“To have their participation in history recorded. It also helps families understand how these brave men and women became the people they know today. Everyone has a story to tell, no matter how insignificant the veteran feels his or her service was. They were generally good experiences that shaped their lives and having them on record is good for them, their families and for generations to come.”

-**Tony Hilliard**, 1st Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps during the Vietnam War, served in the 7th Engineer Battalion, and is a recipient of the Navy Commendation Medal (with Combat V)

*Tony and Joe are both active in the Atlanta Vietnam Veterans Business Association and have been tireless volunteers for the Atlanta History Center Veterans History Project almost from its inception. They are vital members of our interviewing team.*

### Do you know a veteran with a story to tell?

For more information, or to request an interview, please contact Sue VerHoef at

404.814.4042 or [SVerhoef@AtlantaHistoryCenter.com](mailto:SVerhoef@AtlantaHistoryCenter.com).



# Veterans History Project

## PRESERVING VOICES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

By Sue VerHoef, Senior Archivist and Veterans History Project Manager

### “What did you do in the war, Daddy?”

For most veterans, this question will elicit little more than a sentence or two, often peppered with acronyms, and ending with a noncommittal “not much.” The truth is that every veteran has a remarkable story and the Atlanta History Center has been collecting, preserving, and sharing those stories since 1999 as part of our Veterans History Project.

This extraordinary collection contains video and audio interviews that document the experiences of over 600 men and women who served in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. The stories cover a broad spectrum of military life and range from the humorous to the tragic. There is the soldier who describes living in the same uniform for six weeks; the former prisoner of war who made friends with his captors thirty years later; the airman who flew a cargo plane over the Himalayas loaded with fifty-gallon drums of jet fuel topped with 500-pound bombs; the paratrooper who landed in Normandy on D-Day; the sailor who watched the Japanese surrender on the USS *Missouri*; the dustoff pilot whose crew clung to the helicopter skids to save room inside for more wounded; the infantryman who landed at Anzio Beach alongside the best man from his wedding only to watch him shot dead moments later.

These men and women speak volumes, both verbally and nonverbally, and at the conclusion of their interviews they frequently remark, “I’ve never told anyone any of this....” Nearly all have expressed gratitude at being offered the chance to tell their story and their interviews are an

enduring legacy for their families and friends. Perhaps most importantly, their interviews become a permanent historical record for students and researchers to use for decades to come.



*Thaddeus Sobieski, a veteran of the Korean War, at the opening ceremony for Veterans Park in 2013. Sobieski was interviewed for the Veterans History Project in 2004. Panels throughout the park feature a QR code allowing visitors to easily access video files of veterans sharing their personal stories, memories, tragedies, and triumphs of their service to our country.*

The interviews are conducted by combat veterans, members of the Atlanta Vietnam Veterans Business Association, and are captured on high-definition video in the Franklin M. Garrett Studio, located inside the Kenan Research Center. The original video files are permanently archived in the Kenan Research Center along with photographs, service records, and other memorabilia from the veterans’ military service. A DVD copy of the interview is given to the veteran and a copy is archived at the Library of Congress; the Atlanta History Center is a founding partner with the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. With generous funding from the Scott Hudgens Family Foundation, the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, and the Atlanta

Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, the collection is being catalogued, transcribed, and made available online at [VeteransOralHistory.AtlantaHistoryCenter.com](http://VeteransOralHistory.AtlantaHistoryCenter.com)

We think we know how difficult war is and we think we understand the sacrifices our veterans make, but unless we have experienced war firsthand, that knowledge is only academic and bears little resemblance to reality. The Veterans History Project allows us to hear what these men and women went through, how their military service informed their lives, and how they feel about our nation. ✪