

Veterans Think They Don't Have Much To Say – But They're Wrong

"It wasn't all that exciting."

That's what a lot of veterans say when their families ask them to tell their stories.

"I couldn't possibly talk for more than ten minutes."

Time and again, the veterans insist there isn't much to tell.

But it never takes ten minutes.

It often goes on for hours.

Because once veterans start talking, they remember so many interesting things. The people they met. The places they went. What they saw. What they thought. What they did. What it felt like.



That's what the National Veterans History Archival Institute (NVHAI) is all about.



Providing a venue where veterans tell their stories, **so that their families - and the rest of the world - can understand what it was like, what it meant, and what it stands for.**

Like an army finance officer who served in Tehran in WWII. He had never talked about it to his two daughters.

"They were spell-bound," said Dave Milidonis, founder of the Cary, NC based [Veterans History Institute](#). "Every veteran has a fascinating story to tell.

Oftentimes, the less they think, at first, they have to talk about, the more interesting their story turns out to be."

What is the Veterans History Institute?

The [Veterans History Institute](#) is dedicated to preserving the historical heritage U.S. veterans, hailing from all branches of the service; the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Air Force AND the nation's oldest branch, the U.S. Merchant Marines. For over 230 years, **these brave souls have taught generation after generation of a free people that Freedom is not Free** and we have a responsibility never to forget that lesson.

The NVHAI is a dedicated group of volunteers, a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization with the mission to collect, preserve and present the history of our veterans, from both war and peace.

Has the Veterans History Institute Conducted Many Interviews?

The organization conducted **an amazing 564 interviews in the first 10 months of 2008**, all using a network of local and not-so-local volunteers.

From a nurse who went from ship to ship, never landing anywhere and never actually helping anyone who was hurt, to a navy officer who served in every major theatre between WWII and Korea, every story adds depth to the history of America.

Some veterans come to the NVHAI on their own. They want their story to go down in history, as an important part of American culture. But many times, it's the families who bring in their veterans. Families recognize the value of a story that needs to be told. They may have heard it a hundred times. It may be totally new. But they want it to be heard.



Families Hear Stories for the First Time

"We love it when families come in with the veterans," said Milidonis. "We want to hear their stories, too. It's a part of history that's often overlooked - what the folks back home were going through, when their loved one was serving their country."

As the veterans and their families tell their stories, they often remember things long since forgotten. Some of it sounds dangerous. Some seems miraculous. Some is romantic. And there are even things they laugh about.

"It's so **fascinating to see hear these stories** coming back," said Milidonis. "A veteran may think what he or she did isn't all that important. He may see himself as only one of thousands. But in fact,

what he sees as a small experience can give new meaning to huge events."

Storytelling like this provides insight into military activities all over the world.

It's Not Just World War II

Of the 564 stories collected so far, 34% were from **WWII**, 22% from **Vietnam**, 14% were stories from those serving in **Iraq and Afghanistan**, 13% from the **Cold War**, 9% from the **Korean War**, and 2% of interviewees served in the **Persian Gulf War**. The balance served in **Grenada, Panama**, or "other", which may mean they served during a period without a major conflict.

Volunteers across the country, including local businesses, help the NVHAI collect these important stories.



"These personal accounts are fascinating," said Stan Williams, CEO of [Stanton Homes](#), a custom home builder in Raleigh, NC that opens its model home to veterans and the NVHAI, for Veterans History Interview events. "We are very pleased to be able to offer a comfortable place to relax and bring out these historical perspectives. It's a real eye-opener about the kind of history textbooks don't usually bring out. Being able to help real people relate real events like this is awe inspiring."

Be a Part of History!

If you or someone you know has a story to tell, Stanton Homes is hosting a Veterans History Interview Open House on Saturday, November 22nd, in the Pittsboro, NC area. Call **Dave Milidonis of the NVHAI at 919-449-5440** or **Penny Hull of Stanton Homes at 919-278-8070** to reserve an interview time, or get directions to this drop-in event.

Volunteers will be on hand to videotape stories and make digital copies of any records. Veterans are encouraged to bring **letters, service records, commendations**, or any other historical documents with them.

Saturday November 22nd 12pm - 4pm

Free Event

Families Welcome!