



**TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE**  
COMMISSIONER DAWN BUCKINGHAM, M.D.

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Voices of Veterans: John Simmons, Jr. Shares His Story of Service in the United States Navy**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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AUSTIN — Today, Texas Land Commissioner and Veterans Land Board (VLB) Chairwoman Dawn Buckingham, M.D., is proud to introduce the next installment of the series highlighting the VLB's Voices of Veterans oral history program. This week, we highlight the service of Aviation Structural Mechanic Petty Officer First Class John Simmons, Jr., who served in the U.S. Navy.

Simmons Jr. was born in Magnolia, Mississippi, in 1928. He grew up on a large farm with seven brothers and four sisters. Simmons Jr.'s father, John Simmons Senior, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all military men. Simmons Senior had three brothers and a sister in the military and was called to fight in World War II after the war started.

Simmons Jr. joined the U.S. Navy in 1955 at just 17 years old, having the Justice of the Peace sign his enlistment papers because his parents didn't want him to enlist. The hard-working farm boy from Mississippi handled the demand and physical stress of boot camp and basic training with such poise that he was named a squad leader and received the American Spirit of Honor Medal for his outstanding performance.



# VOICES OF VETERANS

name <b>Simmons, Jr. John</b>		
military branch <b>AMH1</b>	rank <b>Navy</b>	conflict <b>Vietnam</b>
date interviewed <b>02/21/2023</b>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> interview available on <a href="http://voicesofveterans.org">voicesofveterans.org</a>

John Simmons Jr. joined the U.S. Navy in 1955. He was an Aircraft Mechanic and worked on S2F Trackers, C54s, C17s, and his favorite, the KA-3B Inflight Refueler. Mr. Simmon's served on the USS Kitty Hawk, traveled worldwide to the Philippines and Japan and had three tours in Vietnam. After twenty years in the Navy, Mr. Simmons retired to Corpus Christi, Texas.



While at different duty stations, Simmons Jr. repaired planes and learned everything about their structures to become an aircraft mechanic. He worked on S2F Trackers, C54s, and C17s. His favorite plane to work on, and one he flew in often, was the KA-3B Inflight Refueler, which refueled bombers and sometimes dropped bombs and carried cargo.

Simmons Jr. did three service tours in Vietnam, starting in 1964 when he served on the USS Kitty Hawk. He traveled the world during these tours, seeing much of the Philippines and Japan. When asked about any experiences he may have had with

discrimination, Simmons Jr. recalled a time in Memphis, Tennessee, when he had trouble securing off-base housing for himself and his family.

He explained how, after being unfairly denied an apartment, he stood up for himself and his family but also noted that he did not let situations like these heavily impact him.



**VOICES OF VETERANS**

VLB CHAIRWOMAN, DAWN BUCKINGHAM, M.D.

“Us military, we let that roll off because that’s why we fight for this country, so people can have the right to speak they

[sic]

piece... Especially my family and my children. That's why we were all in the military. We believe in freedom, we do, and that includes everybody... You're supposed to speak up for what you believe in, no matter what color your skin is. You're supposed to speak up!"

Simmons Jr. served for nearly 20 years in the U.S. Navy. After serving as an aircraft mechanic, he trained pilots in Corpus Christi, where he would stay and raise his family after retirement. Both of his sons would go on to join the United States Army.

He received the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, and a Good Conduct Medal, among other awards, for his service to our nation. When speaking about his love for the U.S. Navy, Simmons Jr. emphasized the educational opportunities he gained by joining the military.

"I learned everything from the Navy. My education, I learned from the Navy. I have a high school diploma now. I have been to college now... Overall, the Navy has been my lifeline comin' out of Mississippi."

To listen to John Simmons, Jr. tell his story, click the button below:

[John Simmons, Jr.'s Story](#)

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Veterans can email [VoicesofVeterans@glo.texas.gov](mailto:VoicesofVeterans@glo.texas.gov) to tell their stories. Please note that the Veteran must be a resident of Texas at the time of their interview.

Voices of Veterans is a state agency's first Veteran oral history program. It records the stories of Texas Veterans through their time in service and after returning home from combat.

The VLB records interviews with veterans over the phone or in person. Their interviews are then permanently archived in the Office of Veterans Records at the GLO, where they join the historical documents of other Texas heroes such as Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, and William Barret Travis.

Veterans' interviews are also available to researchers, historians, genealogists, and the public. These precious records inspire future generations and remind us of our Veterans' sacrifices.

To listen to the over 500 archived stories of Veterans documented through the GLO's Voices of Veterans oral history program, click the button below:

[Voices of Veterans](#)