

For Immediate Release:

Americans Remembered, Inc.

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Contact person: Bob Babcock at 678-480-4422 or [info@americansremembered.org](mailto:info@americansremembered.org).

## **Completion of 200 Interviews of Veterans - Gary Swanson of Americans Remembered Sets the Bar**

Always a top performer in his 33 years as a salesman and branch manager at IBM, Gary Swanson, 70, of Leawood, Kansas never accepted second best. Regardless of the challenge given him, Gary knew that he would always meet and exceed that objective – and most likely do it better than anyone around him. One of many examples of that focus on excellence is when his IBM branch office won the coveted President’s Trophy two years in a row – marking Gary and his branch as the best in IBM. After retiring from IBM, Gary enjoyed eleven more years of success at two other businesses.

When he took on the challenge of working with Americans Remembered, Inc. and the Veterans History Project, Gary knew that he would do it right – or not do it at all. A non-veteran, Gary was asked why he took on the challenge and why is he doing so well in his volunteer work of preserving memories of America’s veterans and home front workers.

Gary replied, “I volunteered to work with Americans Remembered and the Veterans History Project because Bob Babcock, president and founder, asked me to and I figured it might be worthwhile. However, it was six months after that before I interviewed my first vet (on January 23, 2003). My motivation then became three fold – helping the Veterans History Project, helping Bob Babcock and Americans Remembered, and then my greatest motivation – making sure that the veteran’s story would be preserved for his family and legacy.” It is now a passion. Gary has the tiger by the tail and he won’t let go.

Since doing that first interview, Gary has averaged five interviews per week - one interview per work day - and completed his 200<sup>th</sup> and 201<sup>st</sup> interviews on October 16, 2003. Peter Bartis, Senior Program Officer at the Veterans History Project, not only praised the depth of Gary's commitment but also the quality of the interviews, further noting that “while a handful of volunteers have completed more than 100 interviews, Gary sets the bar at stellar heights--the gold standard, and he is a model for our volunteers nationally.”

When asked to reflect back on his 200 interviews, Gary, now a Director with Americans Remembered as well as being our most active volunteer, has this to say, “Some of the interviews were very exciting – Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima, Bataan Death March, Battle of the Bulge, POW camp, etc – but ALL stories reflect the experiences of that man or woman. I tell the vet who says his story isn’t very exciting that ‘if you did what you were told to do, what more could you do?’ and let’s record the story on videotape. None has claimed to be a hero, knowing that the only heroes are under white crosses or missing forever. The first thing I do after I get home from an interview is to create a VHS tape

which I deliver to the veteran for his family archives. I've only had one interview that was less than good, and I, not the vet, was the reason. I've re-interviewed vets when it was necessary."

Explaining his focus on WWII vets, Gary said, "I'm only interviewing WWII veterans because so many are passing away each day. I go to veterans groups, civic clubs, and schools to interview vets and to recruit volunteers to interview. Our greatest need in the Veterans History Project is not names of people to interview, but recruiting the interviewer. If one could only interview one vet a week, the interviews would add up. My plea is for people to volunteer... they'll get a great sense of satisfaction from interviewing vets."

Further explaining his success, Gary said, "I can't tell you how many vets have said, that while their families had asked about their WWII experiences many times, it is only in the last five years that they have wanted to talk. We need volunteers to help hear their stories and preserve them for posterity. I'm glad I'm here to do it."

With such an amazing year of interviewing, you would think this is all that Gary does. But he is active in other volunteer efforts in the Kansas City area as well and just returned from a two week trip to Kenya and Tanzania. In November and December, he will continue with his interviews. His personal objective for 2003 is 235 interviews completed.

Just as he did in his very successful IBM career, Gary Swanson has set the bar that few will be able to meet, but one that he is glad that he has set – our veterans who saved the world deserve nothing less.

If you would like to volunteer to interview veterans, you don't need to commit to the level that Gary has accomplished. Twenty to fifty interviews per year, an average of five per quarter or one per week, will quickly add up as more and more Americans step up to this critically important opportunity to preserve the memories of all military veterans and home front workers from all our wars – WWII through the current War on Terror.

For more information on Americans Remembered, Inc. and the Veterans History Project and how to volunteer, go to our web site at [www.americansremembered.org](http://www.americansremembered.org) or contact us at [info@americansremembered.org](mailto:info@americansremembered.org). Everyone can help - donations of money as well as time are also needed.

