

Author Porter Briggs / Biography

Born in Little Rock and a graduate of Hall High School where he was the first student body president, Porter Briggs grew up steeped in the rhythms of the South before heading to Vanderbilt University for one semester and then the University of Arkansas, where he became a campus leader — even booking the legendary blues singer Josh White for an event, confronting the entrenched racial attitudes of the time. His early experiences during the Civil Rights era, from his friendships to witnessing the slow transformation of Arkansas society, shaped his lifelong commitment to civic service.

After graduation, Briggs was commissioned as a U.S. Army infantry officer and served in Cold War Germany, where he commanded a rifle platoon and then a tank platoon under the fabled V Corps. A defining moment of his service came when he was chosen to brief General Creighton Abrams — General Patton’s protégé and later the namesake of the M1 Abrams tank — an encounter Briggs describes as one of the highlights of his military years.

Returning to Arkansas in the 1960s, he was recruited by Governor Winthrop Rockefeller, in the wake of the Central High School desegregation crisis, to lead Arkansas Careers, a pioneering statewide initiative to retain talent and foster development when the state was losing almost all of its graduates. Over the next decade, he became a driving force in promoting Arkansas’s cultural and economic future, from supporting rural hospitals and agricultural enterprises to advancing historic preservation. His founding of the award-winning *American Preservation* magazine — later acquired by the National Trust for Historic Preservation — reflected his lifelong passion for protecting the South’s heritage.

Briggs’ career took him far beyond Arkansas. He co-led an anti-nuclear campaign in California with actor Paul Newman, staged John Denver’s historic concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg at the height of the Cold War, and worked in both finance and public service, including a six-year tenure on Wall Street. Yet, through decades of public achievement, his private life was often marked by upheaval — from personal loss to being in

the heart of world-shaping events such as the collapse of Drexel Burnham Lambert and the attacks of September 11, 2001.

In later years, Briggs' entrepreneurial spirit brought him back home. In 1996, he founded A Briggs Passport & Visa Expeditors, which he sold to CIBT in 2014. In 2015, he launched Travelier, a "discovery engine" cataloging more than 90,000 U.S. destinations to help travelers uncover iconic and overlooked places. He also founded "The Voice of the South," an archive of original Southern stories celebrating the region's history and culture. He later sold Travelier to an Israeli company.

Equally notable is Briggs' deep commitment to service and community. For sixteen years, he quietly tended the boxwood shrubs at the Lincoln Memorial as a personal act of civic duty — a gesture recognized when the National Park Service named him Volunteer of the Year. Closer to home, he and his wife, oncologist Dr. Diane Wilder, have chaired CARTI's Festival of Trees, raising critical funds to ensure equitable cancer care for Arkansans in need. Porter has been the key fundraiser for the Delta Children's Trust, an Arkansas Delta effort to help children from impoverished and failing families in Clarendon and Marianna mature into successful adults.

An advocate for fellow veterans, Briggs has pledged a portion of sales of his memoir to support the proposed Fisher House in Little Rock, which provides free lodging for veterans and military families seeking medical care.

Briggs' memoir offers readers more than a chronicle of public achievements; it reveals a candid portrait of a man shaped by his Southern roots, wartime service and personal redemption. Among the most poignant threads in the book is his forty-nine-year search for the son he relinquished in Zürich, Switzerland at birth — a quest that ultimately led to reconciliation with his son and his family and a deeper understanding of Christian grace.

Today, living in Little Rock with Dr. Wilder, Briggs reflects a lifetime of service — from the battlefields of Europe to the boardrooms of business, from the halls of government to the gardens of the Lincoln Memorial. His memoir stands as both a personal odyssey and an invitation to readers to see the South, and themselves, with renewed eyes.