



photos by Brian Wilson

Changing of the guard

Veterans taking part in the Oct. 6 Never Forgotten Honor Flight watch as the honor guard keeps watch at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. Nearly 100 veterans took part in the day long trip to Washington, D.C. This was the 18th trip taken by the organization.

News Editor Brian Wilson accompanied the Oct. 6 Never Forgotten Honor Flight. The flight took nearly 100 veterans from Central Wisconsin to Washington D.C. to visit the monuments and be recognized for their service. Several area veterans and their guardians were on the trip.

Oct. 5 - The evening before the flight -- Raymond Bourgeois of Park Falls had just gotten into San Francisco after serving 13 months in Korea. He was anxious to get home to see his wife and two children. But his first stop was at a laundry and for a shower so he could get both the real and psychological dust of Korea off his body and clothes.

Wearing his dress blues, Bourgeois stopped at a bar for a bite to eat and a drink. Being mid-day the place was virtually deserted except for a woman sitting halfway down the bar.

Bourgeois looked at his watch and realized it still read "0 dark 30" -- military speak for 12:30 a.m. Since Korea is across the international date line, he wasn't quite sure if he had gained or lost a day.

When he asked the woman at the bar for the time, he was unprepared for her to react negatively, incorrectly thinking he was attempting to pick her up. Even 60 years later he can remember her blistering comments and how he had to quickly set her straight about his intentions.

That was the welcome Bourgeois remembers from his military service. The goal of the Never Forgotten Honor Flight is to give veterans the welcome they should have received.

Bourgeois' story was just one of those being shared as veterans arrived at the Howard Johnson Hotel in Rib Mountain Sunday afternoon.

Other veterans, like Alton Cain of Medford, told sto-

ries of the initiation ceremony sailors took part in when they crossed the equator for the first time -- including crawling through a tube filled with kitchen waste and being dunked in a tank by sailors who had more miles under their belts. During his years in the Navy, Cain logged more than 107,000 nautical miles and circled the globe several times.

Other memories of service included Stratford resident Orville Bornbach's story of being trained as a mechanic, but arriving in Korea and being given a clerk's job. His wife was quick to add that it was likely because they recognized his talent for numbers and put him where he would do the best job. "He is like a living calculator," she said.

For some, the trip was a chance to remember old comrades. While for others, such as George Duerr and William Guldán who live across the road from each other in Stratford, it is another shared experience to talk about when they go down to the Legion Hall back home.

Neal Olkives, currently of Medford and formerly of Rib Lake, talked about delivering the mail while stationed in Germany and serving four years, four months and four days in the Army.

Others, like Dick Gordon of Rib Lake, expressed some concern about the trip. Gordon has only flown three times in the past 50 years and was not looking forward to that portion of the trip. Fortunately, he had George Buksa and Chuck Strebel of Rib Lake, along with Mel Hultman of Ogema, to keep him company on the trip along with his son-in-law who is along as a guardian. Strebel, a Marine veteran, participated in the landing at Inchon -- a major turning point in the Korean War. He worked with field artillery and said despite the battle, he never felt any fear of not coming home.

While the veterans and their spouses were swapping stories, their guardians for the trip were taking part in a training session. The job of a guardian is an important one to ensure the veterans have the most enjoyable time possible. The major job for guardians is to ensure the safety of the veterans. Many of the veterans have mobility issues. The guardians were warned to watch for dehydration and fatigue, noting the veterans would be walking up to five miles as they toured through the memorials. Some of the guardians had loved ones attending the trip. Other guardians were volunteers, such as Mike Lindau of Medford, who felt it is the right thing to do to help honor veterans. Lindau signed up a few years



Raymond Bourgeois of Park Falls told of his homecoming from Korea.



Sharing stories

George Buksa (left) and Dick Gordon of Rib Lake socialize at the Howard Johnson lounge prior to Sunday's banquet. The veterans who were traveling from a distance spent the night at the hotel.

ago to volunteer and was excited to get the call that he was needed on this flight. Guardians have to meet certain age and physical requirements. They also pay \$500 for the privilege of helping veterans enjoy the trip of a lifetime.

Lindau's sentiment about feeling honored to help out was echoed by Rebecca Brunner-Stroede of Hayward. She remembers seeing the sign at Kwik Trip calling for volunteers. She never had grandparents of her own and has always had a deep connection to older people, especially those of the World War II generation. "We owe them so much," she said. She is also something of a World War II history buff and collects memorabilia. She is concerned the culture of service and being willing to sacrifice for our county is missing in younger generations.

This was my first experience in seeing this part of the Honor Flight trip. I was one of the media representatives on the flight. It is my job to help share the stories of the veterans and make people aware of the program.

The call came late last week from Jim Campbell, one of the co-founders of Never Forgotten Honor Flight.

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★ **Honor Flight**

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There had been a last minute opening due to a health-related cancellation and he asked if I would be interested in going on the trip as a media representative.

I was familiar with the Honor Flight program, having written stories for the past four years about it. I knew that it was a whirlwind day for the veterans who participated and a chance for these veterans to get the recognition they richly deserve.

I quickly said yes, knowing it would require some calendar juggling and extra work to make up for not being in the office. I always was aware a lot of work went into making the Honor Flights successful, but was amazed at the coordination and volunteer hours involved with the program.

There was a banquet the evening before the trip. Lieutenant General Jack Bergman gave a keynote address followed by a musical selection from the vocal group Trillium and the CenterStage Singers along with accordionist Mike DeSiscio. Following the banquet, the veterans and their guardians called it an early night. The bus for the airport was set to leave at 4:30 a.m. and for the veterans and guardians there would be no time for sleeping in.



Entertainment

The musical group Trillium performed for the veterans and their spouses during a banquet Sunday night. The evening also included a speech from Lt. General Jack Bergman and a ceremony recognizing each of the branches of service.

During his keynote speech, Bergman called on the veterans to tell their stories so people of other generations would know what happened and why. He also raised concern that the majority of today's high school graduates would be ineligible for military service due to being obese or because of medications they are taking. He cautioned about people being too quick to medicate young people, saying parents are doing a disservice by doing so.

Oct. 6, 5:17 a.m. - The veterans and their spouses were lined up and waiting in the lobby of the hotel well before 4:30 a.m. Monday morning. They were smiling and excited for the day ahead. Many of them had just a few hours of sleep the night before, waking up to check the time so they would not be late.

"I woke up about once every hour," Olkives said. Other veterans shared similar stories of being too excited to sleep well the night before. A school bus transported the veterans to the airport, located a few miles down the highway.

After getting through security, the veterans and guardians were treated to Kwik Trip donuts, McDonald's coffee, juice and snacks.

Another traveler at the airport walked among the gold-shirted veterans thanking them for their service. Smiles were as wide as the sky.

For many of the men, this was their first trip to Washington, D.C. in decades, if at all. Strebel's last time in D.C. was in 1952. He was pretty sure things had changed a bit since then.

8:37 a.m. - The unsung heroes of the Never Forgotten Honor Flight are the volunteers who make it possi-



Veterans remembered

Nearly 100 veterans from Central Wisconsin took part in the Oct. 6 Never Forgotten Honor Flight. This was the organization's 18th mission and to date they have taken 1,666 veterans to Washington, D.C. The veterans' first stop was at the World War II Memorial where they posed for a group picture.

photos by Brian Wilson

ble. Among those are the medical staff. They stood out in the crowd with their blue shirts and bright red hats. The medics are doctors, nurses and EMTs sharing their time and talents. They are there to make sure all the veterans come home in the same shape as when they left.

During the guardian training, Jeff Zriny hit home about the risks of falling and of things like dehydration or a veteran forgetting to take their medication.

The medics were busy throughout the flight. Some have portable pulse oxygen meters they use to make sure any veterans who need extra oxygen in the pressurized cabin can get the help they need. One of them noted on their first flight, the meter cost more than \$6,000. Just four years later they are under \$40 and available at retail stores. Other medics help the elderly veterans with personal needs. Throughout it all, they treat the veterans with nothing but dignity and respect.

I sat in a middle seat. To my right in the window seat was a television reporter trying to catch a nap on the plane after working the overnight shift. On the aisle seat to my left was an air force veteran, Marshall Blas-



Relaxing

Neal Olkives of Rib Lake enjoys a drink while socializing with other veterans prior to the start of the banquet Sunday.

kowski of Schofield. He was a radio man flying on B 29s. His daughter lives between Stratford and Mosinee. He was stationed at Roswell, N.M., but has flown all over the world. "My longest flight was 24 hours," he said. It was a flight out of England that circled Europe, flying south to the Mediterranean, then north along the border with Russia during the height of the Cold War.

Before boarding the plane I got to speak with LeRoy Knauf of Marathon who served as a chaplain's assistant in the military, and later became a deacon helping serve parishioners in Wisconsin. During his time in the service, he was stationed at a base in Texas. He told how the base bigwigs and their families would attend services with the Catholic chaplain.

The plane was filled with stories, both of time in service and of trips taken in the decades following. Stories of military lives merged with family stories of the logistical issues of transporting a set of 10-foot longhorn cattle horns as carry-ons through three changes of flight coming home to Central Wisconsin from an Air Force reunion. All of the men and the lone woman veteran on the flight shared the bond of serving their country. That shared experience shaped and altered their lives. Men like Henry Brushaber of Medford, served during the Army of Occupation in Korea and had a job helping troops communicate shared stories of their time in the service. Others such as Olkives were hoping to find information about former comrades. In his case, another soldier who he served with named James Riley, who he feared was killed in Korea.



Traveling

George Duerr and William Guldán of Stratford were among area veterans making the trip.

Some veterans took out their cameras and grabbed snapshots. The sound of small talk and laughter filled the cabin.

11:30 a.m. Eastern Time - Emotions were high leaving the plane at the airport. Volunteers on the ground helped pump up the crowd at the airport — busy with business travelers on a Monday morning — and brought a high level of excitement.



Checking up

The medical staff was busy throughout the day making sure all the veterans were safe.

The blue-shirted board members — none of whom receive any compensation for their time — were constantly busy coordinating the logistics of the day and tightening the schedule in imperceptible ways.

Noon — Staff members from Sen. Ron Johnson and Congressman Sean Duffy's offices were at the World War II memorial to greet the veterans with welcome signs and cheering. Other visitors and tourists greeted and thanked the veterans with their accents from all over the country and the world. The group gathered in front of the fountain in the center of a monument for a picture. Hundreds of snapshots were taken, especially near the Wisconsin pillar in the monument. A ceremony was held recognizing World War II vets who died before they could take part in the Honor Flight. Their service was not forgotten.

"I have been in management my entire life and the people who run the Honor Flight are impressive," said Bill Lauer of Marshfield. Lauer served more than 20 years in the Army and National Guard. After active service, he worked at Wenzel Sausage and when he retired was told he was the last master sausage maker in the state. He said sausage making is an art and you have to know how to control the fermentation process to make it all come together. He used that process as an example to praise the volunteers and coordinators for the Honor Flight program for having everything come together seamlessly.

2:33 p.m. - The World War II Memorial is grand and magnificent, reflective of a global effort to push off the yoke of tyranny. It is classical with its fountains and pillars and iron wreaths.

By comparison, the Korean War Memorial is in-

timite, and while much smaller, this monument to America's longest war (the two Koreas are still technically at war) is in many ways more moving. The memorial shows 19 men in ponchos carrying their gear as they walk through a rice field. Their weariness shows on their faces. A granite wall reflects the men doubling their numbers to 38, representing the 38th Parallel, the line on which the two countries are split. Faces from pictures taken during the war are etched into the wall as ghostly reminders of the war that included not only American troops, but soldiers from around the world as part of the United Nations forces. The majority of men on the flight served during the Korean War. For them this monument held special significance. A fascinating addition among the crowd of gold-shirted veterans was the number of Korean tourists visiting the monument. Fathers and grandfathers pointed out details and shared stories with their families in their own language.

William Benzschawel of Owen spent some time at the Korean War Memorial looking at the faces etched on the walls. His son was his guardian on the trip. Benzschawel said he joined the military as a way to get off the farm. He said he favored having all young people serve in the military, or something similar, to get the experience of being out in the world so they could grow up some and learn about what was really important. He said all too often young people graduate college not having any idea of what they want to do. For Benzschawel, it took leaving the farm and serving as a record keeper in the Air Force to decide he really missed the farm. After leaving the service, he returned and has been a farmer ever since.

4:30 p.m. - On a ridge overlooking the Pentagon stand three stainless steel spires. The spires are part of the Air Force Memorial. From the center of the three spires a guide told of the events of Sept. 11, 2001 when a plane crashed into the Pentagon as part of a terrorist attack. Benches in front of the Pentagon are engraved with the names of those who died that day. The benches facing



Finding some shade

Alton Cain of Medford paused for a picture in the shade by the Wisconsin pillar in the World War II Memorial.

the building have the names of those on the plane, and the ones facing out from the building have the names of those who were in the building. Although built years after the attack, the monument offers a unique view of where the attack occurred. The guides — who are all Honor Flight "ground crew" volunteers — pointed out the different shading in the stone walls of the building. At this point in the day, the veterans were starting to show wear from the long day. Our next stop was Arlington Cemetery for the changing of the guard. It had been a long day so far, full of emotion for the veterans and the volunteers who helped make this possible.



Remembering

William Benzschawel of Owen checked out the faces etched in the granite reflecting wall of the Korean War Memorial.

5 p.m. - The guard took 21 steps, paused for 21 seconds, turned and took another 21 slow, measured steps back, repeating the process over and over ignoring the crowds watching him. The Tomb of the Unknowns is a sacred place within a sacred place. Arlington National Cemetery is the final resting place of nearly 400,000 men and women. Within its manicured lawns are heroes who gave their lives to defend America in conflicts over the years. Two presidents — John Kennedy and William Taft — are buried within its borders. Simple white markers note the names of heroes. Behind a marble amphitheater, there is a tomb for those who died without being identified. It is marked with the inscription "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God." A special unit stands guard at the tomb around the clock, the click of the soldier's heels breaks the solemn silence of the spot. The guard detail is full of symbolism. They stand watch out of respect for the sacrifice of the unknown soldiers in the tomb, and symbolically for all those whose remains were never identified or recovered. The 21 steps and seconds represent the 21-gun salute. The veterans and others present stood at attention to watch the changing of the guard. From October through May the guard changes every hour, in summer it changes every half hour. Nighttime shifts are two hours long. The impact of the changing of the guards ceremony could be read on the faces of the veterans.

6 p.m. - The last stop before heading to the airport for the journey home was the Marine Corps Memorial. The guide noted that in keeping with the reputations of the different branches of the military, the monument with



Korean War Memorial

Chuck Strebel of Rib Lake is a Marine veteran who took part in the landing at Inchon. The Korean War Memorial was of special interest to him.

the best bathrooms was the Air Force Memorial. Restrooms at the Marine Corps Memorial are a cluster of weather-worn Porta Potties. As one veteran quipped, "At least we don't have to dig our own hole for a latrine." The monument is a representation of the Pulitzer Prize winning photo of the flag raising on Iwo Jima. Around the base of the monument are the names of the places Marines fought and died, from 1775 to currently in Afghanistan.

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Welcome home

photos by Brian Wilson

About 1,000 people crowded into the boarding area at CWA Monday night to welcome the veterans home. Emotions were high for both the veterans and their families.

★ **Flight returns heroes home**

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8:33 p.m. — The group was at the airport for a while waiting for the airline crew to arrive. It wasn't that they were late, instead the group was a little early coming back. Efforts were made to give enough rest time on the bus between the memorials, yet at no time were the veterans rushed, instead there were given ample time to take in the memorials.

It was refreshing to see airport security personnel wave the veterans through the checkpoints with a hearty "Thank you for serving" after making sure their name badges matched those on the list. The crowd of travelers and staff watching football at the concourse bar, turned and faced the concourse and clapped and cheered as the veterans went by.

Soon the "first class" veterans were boarded. These were the veterans with the most health needs who required a little more care. Many were looking forward to resting on the plane home. But the day was far from over.

10:36 p.m. (Eastern Time) — We were somewhere over the Great Lakes. The lights of what we guessed were Cleveland, were fading away below us. The organizers were busy passing out the mail call. They formed a brigade down the aisle of the aircraft calling out the names of each veteran and delivering a packet of letters from their friends and loved ones. Each packet came with a box of Girl Scout cookies — a treat veterans of any generation appreciate. Jim

Campbell warned the veterans just as when they served, they had the choice to eat all of their cookies in the 20 seconds after opening them, do 20 push ups in the aisle, or share them with their comrades. Marshall, my seat mate, opened his large envelope and smiled. He shared pictures of his grandchildren. Chuckling as he read the letter from his brother, he paged



Photo opportunity

Hank Brushaber pauses for a photo at the World War II Memorial. Each star on the wall behind him stands for 1,000 soldiers who died in the war. More than 400,000 soldiers died in the war.

through the other letters, some written in fine, firm handwriting, and others in and the blocky writing of children. One was a child's picture of a flag with just the words "Thank You" on it.

10:36 p.m. (Central Time) — Several hundred families and friends were packed into Central Wisconsin Airport. The air was electric with anticipation to see the veterans come off the plane. I was kneeling on the ground next to the television reporter, ready to take pictures of the veterans as they left the plane. Behind me were easily a thousand people who had been waiting hours to see their loved ones return home.

The media representatives deplaned ahead of the veterans so we could get pictures and see the reactions when they were greeted by the crowd.

People in the crowd held signs and flags and anxiously awaited their loved ones.

It took time for the volunteers to get the veterans assembled in the jetway before they left the gate. An honor guard of members from a dozen different veterans groups lined the path from the gate to the concourse. As the veterans entered the airport, a band played patriotic tunes welcoming them home. There were very



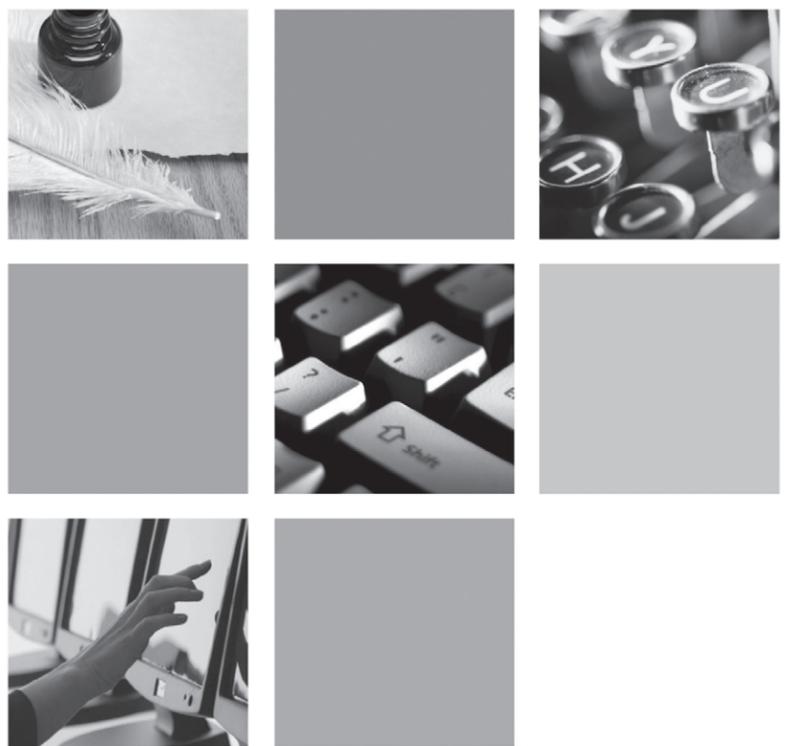
Homecoming

Mike Lindau of Medford pushes Mel Hultman of Ogema into CWA at the end of the long day.

few dry eyes and emotions ran high for both the veterans and their family members. Many of the out of town veterans went back to the hotel on buses, while those who lived nearby went home after the long day. Some spoke of the need to get up and do farm chores in the morning and get back to their routine. The welcome home of hugs, tears, flags and marching bands was a far cry from the greeting received by Bourgeois after coming home from Korea decades ago. It was a welcome worthy of their efforts and sacrifice. In that welcome home is a call for other World War II and Korean War veterans to come forward and sign up for future Honor Flight trips so their service may be recognized. It was an honor to have met these veterans, and the long day was worth it to hear their stories and share in their memories. Our

veterans are a treasure that should be cherished.

While my portion of the day ended at the airport, with me driving back to Medford to get some sleep before going to work Tuesday morning, for the veterans the night wasn't quite over. Marilyn Cain, wife of Alton Cain, called Tuesday to tell me what happened after they loaded onto three school busses to head back to the hotel. An honor guard of motorcycle riders, at least 10 in front and behind each bus, escorted the veterans back to the hotel. "I was just blown that there was that escort," Marilyn said. Once there, the riders took over the tasks of the guardians, helping the veterans and their wives to their rooms and making sure their needs were met. It was a special way to end the day.



READY TO TELL
AMERICA'S
STORY
FOR ANOTHER
325
YEARS

{ The first newspaper was published on September 25, 1690 in Britain's North American colonies by Benjamin Harris and was called the Publick Occurrences. }

No one does community news better. From quill to computer - platforms may change but our commitment to you will not.



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