



# 30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*



## 'It was a great day'

### Honor Flight trip to D.C. was one to remember for veteran Merlin Stahel

DAN RICHTER  
FOR GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA

**M**ARATHON CITY — Longtime Marathon City resident Merlin Stahel was 20 years old when he received a letter stating he'd been drafted into the United States Army.

"When I got that letter, it said 'Your friends and neighbors have selected you for the United States Armed Services.' I thought, 'Who the hell around here don't like me that much?'" said Stahel, 82, with a laugh.

Recently, Stahel talked about being stationed in Korea shortly after the end of the Korean War, his civilian life that followed and the Honor Flight trip to Washington, D.C., he took in 2013.

**Q: What did you do in the service and where were you stationed?**

**A:** I had eight weeks of basic training and then went to school for eight weeks in Kansas to become a field wireman. When I got to Korea, I worked as a short radio operator. They had me do eight more weeks of training in intermediate speed operator, or Morse code. I worked out of a three-quarter ton pick-up truck in radio communication, decoding messages that we received and coding messages that got sent out.

**Q: What is your most enduring memory from your time in the service?**

**A:** I think a lot about the traveling. I think it took 17 days to get to Korea, going over on a boat. I just kept thinking, "When are we going to get there?" It was a long 17 days. The condition that Korea was in when I was there was horrible. From what I hear, today they've rebuilt it so that it's even better than it was before the war.

**Q: What do you most want people to know about the conflict in which you served?**

**A:** The war stopped in July of '53 and I got there in October. I was stationed right up at a demilitarized zone, and even though the war was over, we still had a general that got killed by a North Korean that snuck in our camp at night. Our communications failed that night, too. We weren't expecting anything like that to happen at the point, but it did.

**Q: Tell us about your life after the service and how your time in the military affected your civilian life.**

**A:** I came back to Marathon and married my longtime friend. I got out in April of '55 and in June we were married. I worked jobs here and there, but jobs were hard to get at the time, so we moved to Milwaukee and we lived there for 10 years. I was a maintenance man in a tannery. My dad died in '66, so we came back to Marathon and bought the farm. We had milk cows and grew ginseng. I retired when I was 65 and then worked at the Eastbay distribution center until I was 75.

**Q: What did going on the Honor Flight mean to you?**

**A:** I was in Washington, D.C., before, but saw nowhere near what I saw on the Honor Flight. We had tremendous tour guides that pointed out every building we went by, telling us what each one was. We saw a lot more than just memorials. It was a great day there and when we got back home. It was just unbelievable how many people showed up at the airport to see us.

#### ABOUT MERLIN STAHEL

**Age:** 82  
**Residence:** Marathon City  
**Conflict involved in:** Korean War  
**Military branch:** United States Army  
**Years of service:** 1953 to 1955  
**Rank upon discharge:** Corporal



DAN YOUNG/GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA  
Korean-era U.S. Army veteran Merlin Stahel is shown as he served in the 1950s.

DAN YOUNG/GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA  
Korean-era U.S. Army veteran Merlin Stahel was photographed at his Marathon City home, Friday, May 22, 2015.



#### A flight to never forget

The Central Wisconsin chapter of Never Forgotten Honor Flight celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since April 2010, the Honor Flight program has taken 1,828 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam and 1,106 guardians from Central Wisconsin Airport to Washington, D.C., to view the memorials built in honor of their service.

30 Days of Honor is a project of Gannett Central Wisconsin Media to profile veterans who have taken an Honor Flight, or are scheduled, and to encourage more veterans to do so. Profiles will appear each day April 26 through Memorial Day. Veterans may apply for a free Honor Flight (or loved ones may apply for them) by filling out an application. The only qualification for a veteran to take an Honor Flight is to have served in any branch of the U.S. military during the periods of World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War. Veterans do not have to have been in combat. The applications and more information are available at <http://www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org>

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