

Mosinee Times Reporter Accompanies Veterans on Ninth Never Forgotten Honor Flight to Washington D.C.

by Paul Nelles

Editor's note: Mosinee Times reporter and photographer Paul Nelles accompanied the veterans on this flight to our nation's capital.

Monday, September 24th 2012 began at 4:00am for ninety U.S. military veterans of World War II and the Korean War. They began arriving at the Central Wisconsin Airport at 5:00am for the ninth Never Forgotten Honor Flight. The Honor Flights fly these veterans to Washington D.C. to see the monuments that have been erected in their honor.

The sendoff at CWA was capped by a water-cannon salute from two of the airport's firefighting vehicles. This ceremony is normally reserved for a retiring pilot's last flight but has become a staple of the Honor Flights.

travelers in the concourse that broke into spontaneous cheers and applause when it was announced that a flight of U.S. War veterans was arriving.

Here we boarded three busses that took us to our first destination, the World War II Memorial. The weather in Washington was perfect for an outdoor event, sunshine and 75 degrees. Two thirds of the flight roster were veterans of the Second World War, so it was appropriate that the tour begin at this memorial, located on the Mall between the Washington and Lincoln Memorials. This is where the formal group photograph of all 90 vets was taken.

Veterans who died before these monuments were built were remembered here in a moving "Fallen Comrade Ceremony". Three wheelchairs, two containing widows holding their husbands' burial flags and one empty chair are slowly paraded in silence before the assembled Honor Flight.

The veterans and guardians were free to explore the memorial for about two hours. Many were drawn to the "Freedom Wall", a display of 4,048 gold stars, each star representing 100 dead or missing Americans. The wall is marked with the inscription "HERE WE MARK THE PRICE OF FREEDOM". Many of our vets took their personal moment of silence and prayer here.



Veteran Glenn Dettinger of Rib Mountain and his guardian John Enk at CWA before the flight . Dettinger is a retiree of the Mosinee Paper Mill.

First class seating on the chartered 737 was reserved for those twelve that had been pre-determined by the three physician medical staff that accompanied us to be most in need of medical monitoring.

The flight to Washington's Reagan National Airport took about an hour and 40 minutes. There were three volunteers at Reagan, who greeted the vets. However the most impressive welcome came from the regular



Vets with a Mosinee area connection pose at the Wisconsin Pillar of the World War II Memorial. Seated L-R: Vic Barth USN, Willys Thompson USA, Standing L-R: Glenn Higgins USN, Dick Higgins USAF, Frank Kramer USN, Glenn Dettinger USAAC, Jim Riedel USN.

There are 56 granite pillars at this site, each engraved with the name of a state or territory. As expected, many photographs were taken at the Wisconsin pillar.

After two hours we boarded the buses again for a box lunch and 45 minute tour of some of the sites of the Washington including the U.S. Capitol Building and the White House.

Our next stop was the Lincoln Memorial, and the Korean and Vietnam War Memorials which are located close together.



An unidentified veteran and his guardian reflect on one of the engravings at the WWII memorial, this one quoting President Harry Truman.

The Korean Memorial consists of 19 larger-than-life statues representing a squad on patrol. All are wearing rain gear and are depicted as walking through juniper bushes to symbolize the rugged terrain of Korea. When reflected in the polished black granite wall, they become 38 infantrymen, symbolic of the 38th parallel.

I walked with a Korean vet here, Mosinee's Jim Riedel. He wasn't talkative. I could only guess at his memories of the conflict called "America's Forgotten War" that took over 54,000 American lives.

The Vietnam Memorial, informally known as "The Wall" is a short walk to the north of the Korean site. The names of 58, 261 Americans that were killed or remain missing in action are engraved on the wall. Here many of our party located the names of friends or loved ones.

After about an hour and forty-five minutes, we got back on the busses for a trip across the Potomac River to Arlington Virginia. Our first stop was at the U.S. Air Force Memorial. This impressive monument consists in part of three stainless steel spires curving

upwards to over 200 feet to symbolize the Air Force Thunderbirds signature bomb-burst maneuver. This monument was dedicated in 2006. Had it been standing on 9-11, it would have been struck by the plane that crashed into the nearby Pentagon.

30 minutes later, we were bussed into Arlington Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknowns. Here the vets witnessed the "Changing of the Guard". The Army has guarded the tomb 24 hours-a-day continuously since 1937, regardless of weather or other situations.

The last stop was at the Marine Corps Memorial, a sculpture based on Joe Rosenthal's iconic photograph of the flag raising on the island of Iwo Jima during World War II. Here is where a veteran of that battle, Clem Boehm, who was raised in Halder, told me that he witnessed that event. He said he was closer to the actual raising than he could get to the memorial.

After about an hour we were back on the busses, enjoying another box lunch, and headed back to Reagan Airport for our return home.

But the day wasn't over yet. On the flight back... Mail Call! 60 years ago, Mail Call was one of the most anticipated events in a serviceman's life because it was the only connection home. For this Mail Call, each veteran was given a packet of about ten letters written by local students, and a box of cookies.

It was our misfortune that the only Monday night Packer game would occur this day, but the pilot kept his anxious passengers informed of the score.

As usual, a large welcome home crowd of family and friends, was on hand at CWA as a finale to the veteran's big day that had begun 19 hours earlier.

The most impressive thing to me this day was not a single monument, but that after 60 years the camaraderie of these men and women still exists.

I wish to thank the Never Forgotten Honor Flight staff for the honoring the Mosinee Times by inviting us along.

Above all I wish to thank these veterans. Freedom is not free.

Thank you for our freedom.

The Ninth Never Forgotten Honor Flight



Top to bottom, left to right:

A portrait of the ninety United States military veterans of World War II and the Korean War that comprised the ninth Never Forgotten Honor Flight. Lincoln Memorial is in the background.

The Fallen Comrade Ceremony at the WWII Memorial remembers fellow honored veterans who did not live long enough to see their memorials. The veteran in the rightmost wheelchair is Patsy Beyel of Stratford.

Frank Kramer, now of Mosinee, visits the Massachusetts pillar at the WWII monument. Kramer was raised in Boston.

An unidentified veteran is reflected in a panel of the Vietnam Memorial. "The Wall" contains the names of the 58,261 Americans that died as a result of that war or remain missing.

Three veterans and their guardians at the Lincoln Memorial. This monument is located between the Korean and Vietnam memorials. All three sites are within walking distance.

The veterans witness the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery.

Jim Riedel of Mosinee at the Korean War Memorial, remembers his time of service in that conflict.

The Air Force Memorial includes three 270 foot tall stainless steel spires. Which represent the "bomb burst" pattern flown by the Air Force Thunderbirds Precision Flight Team.

Three veterans stand under the three spires.

"HERE WE MARK THE PRICE OF FREEDOM" reads the placard at the Freedom Wall at the WWII Memorial. The wall consists of 4,048 gold stars. Each star represents 100 American military dead or missing.

Mosinee's Vic Barth and daughter Sandy Young as they arrived at Washington's Reagan Airport.

Halder native Clem Boehm and his grandson Justin Boehm at the Marine Corps Memorial. Boehm said when he witnessed the actual raising of the flag on Iwo Jima, he was closer to it than he could get to this monument.

Three Mosinee Vets on Next Week's Honor Flight to Washington D.C.

Three United States Navy veterans from Mosinee, Frank Kramer, Victor Barth, and James Riedel, along with 89 of their brothers and sisters in arms will be honored next Monday with a trip to Washington D.C. on the ninth *Never Forgotten Honor Flight*.

This flight will consist of 69 World War II, and 23 Korean veterans.

Frank Kramer enlisted in the Navy in 1942 and served battleship *Massachusetts*. That ship was instrumental in the Battle of Casablanca in Morocco, and ultimately positioned herself off the coast of Japan, shelling the coastline for the anticipated invasion which never occurred. During this time Kramer applied and was accepted for Naval Air Force pilot training at Ottumwa, Iowa. He was in training there when the war ended.

Kramer was originally scheduled to be on last April's Honor Flight with his brother Robert who now lives in Colorado. However, an unanticipated medical situation forced him to postpone until this flight.

Victor Barth served in the WWII Pacific theater as a medic aboard the aircraft carrier *Takanis Bay*.

James Riedel, a Korean War vet served on the *USS Flechter*, a destroyer who's duties were primarily to escort aircraft carriers. Trained as a



Frank Kramer



Jim Riedel



Vic Barth

personnelman, he handled the transferring of men, and served as a lookout, watching for floating mines. The honorees will begin arriving at the Central Wisconsin Airport around 5:00am and are scheduled to take-off at 6:30am. They will return to CWA at about 9:30pm the same day.

Anyone wishing to see the vets off will have to pass through TSA Security. No security screening will be required for the return as the airport concourse will be open to the public.

More information on the flight can be found at www.neverforgottenhonorflight.com.

Editor's note: Mosinee Times photographer Paul Nelles will accompany the veterans on this flight. Watch for coverage in next week's paper.