

To my Guardian & Friend, Pat Puyleart,

Pat, I want to thank, you my Guardian (angel), who looked after me during the Honor Flight.

Everything was so well planned from the moment Marge & I stepped into the lobby of the Howard Johnson. The pre-flight diner was wonderful and the entertainment was...WOW! It sure brought back old memories. I sure enjoyed the flight down to Washington D.C. and all the stories I heard on the plane. The lunches were good but I was too nervous to eat that much.

On to the Memorials...I thought I could walk around at the Iwo Jima Memorial but was relieved when you came up with a wheelchair and said "sit down". You wheeled me right up front and center for a group photo. Pat, you did the same at the WWII Memorial. You even found "*Kilroy was here*" for me. Then we went onto the Vietnam Memorial where you pushed me alongside the Black Marble Slabs as we followed three of your friends. You said the one carrying the picture frame was Kelly, and he was looking for his Dad's name on the wall. Your two friends stopped at stone #57 and I heard one of them as he counted down "10...20...30..." and stopped at 70 or 80 and went across the row until he found it. There it was etched in the Black Marble, Kelly's Dad's name [JOHN KELLY]. You told me Kelly had written a poem for his Dad; that was what was inside the picture frame he carried all this way. As he began to read the words out loud to his father's name on the wall, his two friends put their arms around him. He was sobbing so hard that when he was not even half way through it he collapsed to a sitting position. The two friends attempted to comfort him with their hands on his shoulders and he tried to read the rest of the poem. You then pushed my wheelchair up a little closer at which point I realized you wanted to put your arms around him as well to console him along with the other two. Kelly tried so hard to finish his poem; I nearly reached out to help. I was close enough that I had read the poem twice. I could see Kelly's image reflected in the cold black marble stone just as if he was sitting behind his Dad. I could see myself sitting right beside him and tears began to run down my cheeks. I realized what a good friend he was to you and that you wanted to reach over my wheelchair to help ease his pain just as the other two friends strived to do. One of the men took out a piece of paper and made an impression on it of Kelly's Dad's name [JOHN KELLY] and gave it to Kelly. Kelly then placed the picture frame against the marble stone. He said he wanted to leave it there. Pat, I was never so touched, never so emotional in my life. And I'm pretty sure you felt the same way. Thank you for pushing me there - I will remember that moment the rest of my life. The remainder of the trip seemed calm after we left the black wall.

The 'Mail Call' sure made the fight back seemed short. I really enjoyed reading the letters from all those school children and Marge. My buddy next to me even shared his box of cookies with me. It was a great flight home.

Now for the welcome home at the airport...As I walked down the ramp off the plane and saw the large crowd waiting to greet us, I didn't know what to say or do. My first thought...I raised both my arms, a green bag in one hand & my cane in the other and yelled as loud as I could "IT WAS A WONDERFULL TRIP!!" I then started shaking the hands of the people. One of the first hands to come out of the crowd belonged to my wife, Marge, but she was too far back to actually get to me. I continued walking and shaking hands as I moved down the line. I heard a woman say "Thank you Ed", then her husband followed "Thanks Ed" - they must have read my name tag as it was still hanging around my neck. Then I heard a little voice "Thank you Ed" and looking down I noticed their 5-year old son. He was dressed in an army uniform and he raised his little hand to the tip of his little

army cap and saluted me. I stepped back and returned his salute. That is when it hit me and my stomach did flip flops. All those people there were thanking me for something that happened 65 years ago. I could hardly make it to the end of the line...as I continued saying "Thank You for the trip" I had tears running down my cheeks.

The next morning Marge went to check us out. I came into the lobby to meet her and express my thanks to the desk clerk for the two lovely nights we enjoyed there. He took my hand and said "Thank you for what you did for us." I broke down, the tears began to fall and I couldn't say a word. Marge took me to the car. On the way home I tried to recall the memories of the great trip but I couldn't talk about the emotional moment at the Vietnam Memorial or the greeting I received at the airport - I was too overwhelmed. It took me three days before I could talk about those two events. All I can say is it was all very touching, moving and emotional for me.

I just have to mention the only downside of the trip. I didn't realize the freedom we lost since 9-11. With my belt-shoes-wallet-coins-keys and cane aside, I still managed to make the buzzer go off with my pacemaker & knee! I sure hope that someday things go back to normal...like maybe when the Vets return from Afghanistan and the war is truly over. And maybe when the war is over and all the Vets return home maybe we can put prayer back in the schools instead of cops. Amen to that.

Thanks again Pat for watching over me on that wonderful trip.

Sincerely, one of your "NEVER FORGOTTEN" Buddies,



Ed Peltier

P.S. THANK YOU, PAT, FOR FINDING AND PUSHING ME
TO ALL THOSE RESTROOMS