

## Honor Flight “Because of you, I became free...”

In November of 1962, I was deer hunting with Joe Piette and the Meyer family in Tripoli, Wisconsin, where I was a guest in their hunting party. I was nearly 21 years old and as I was walking in the woods, I started thinking about what I should do with my life.

Surprise! That next Monday morning, I went to Wausau, Wisconsin and signed up with the U.S. Army. I opted for Army Engineer, selected Germany as my preferred location and put my signature on the dotted line.

On December 31, 1962, 13 of us were sworn in live on Channel 7 TV in Wausau. We were given a three-day pass and left home on January 3, 1963. After 33 months of service, I returned home, got a job, got married, raised three children and eventually retired after years as a plumber/pipefitter.

I really never thought much of what I did in the Army.

Fast forward to October 9, 2017 and the Honor Flight. While I was in Washington, D.C. with the Honor Flight, I was talking to Vladislov Legner, a WWII veteran. As we were talking, a woman came over with her two grandchildren. She had a foreign accent. From the bottom of her heart she said to Vladislov, “I want you to see my two grandchildren. Because of you, I became free!” I finally understood why I had joined the Army 54 years ago. It had always been a puzzle to me.

It gets better. When we arrived home from the Honor Flight, we were greeted by hundreds of people in a welcome line at the Wausau airport. That was the frosting on the cake — and of my life. I am the proudest veteran there ever was because of that woman who said, “because of you I became free.” I will walk taller for the rest of my life.

Thank you, Honor Flight. You have finally helped me understand why I joined the Army and why it mattered.

— Rodney Rothmeyer