

There has been a lot of interest in my flight so I thought I'd tell you a bit about it. Trust me - there were a lot more stories.

Diane and I arrived in Wausau (my friends Jim Campbell and Mike Thompson started the Never Forgotten Honor Flight program in Wausau [all private funding - no government money] so I wanted to fly with them) on Sunday and there were dozens of volunteers to attend to literally anything and everything we needed or wanted. Boy Scouts (so precious) carried our luggage to our room. Wouldn't allow us to open our room door - they had to do it. Carried our luggage into the room and asked where we wanted it placed. Volunteered to go back downstairs and get us water or coffee. Kids you can be proud of and some barely big enough to carry a piece of luggage. Leia had already been there for a 2 hour Guardian training session and told us that Campbell had everyone in the room in tears relating stories about vet's on previous missions (which is what they called a flight). So Vet's received a Never Forgotten baseball cap, a golf type polo shirt and a light wind breaker and a fanny pack along with a box of goodies (soaps, sunscreen, bars, lotions, etc.) to take home. The shoe box was completely filled and provided by an organization named Operation Gratitude which began in California. They have distributed over 2,000,000 shoe boxes all over the world to Veteran's. www.OperationGratitude.com

We did some visiting and then met together in the main hotel ballroom (about 160 vets and guardians and Never Forgotten Honor Flight personnel) and enjoyed a 5 star steak dinner, lots of entertainment and a welcome speech by the head of Veteran Affairs for the State of Wisconsin. It was pretty moving and pretty awesome. Since I had to be up at 4 the next morning we got to bed as early as possible but it was still 11:00 PM and I didn't sleep well so I was up for good by 3:30 AM. We were bussed to the airport (Diane slept in) by 5:00 and Leia had already been at the airport at 4:30 AM (Brian slept in too - the boys were with grandma in Fox Point). We checked through TSA without having to be searched and headed to Washington. Bad weather in D.C. forced our plane to Pittsburgh (a first ever) for refueling where we sat on the plane for 1.5 hours waiting for the weather to clear. Which it did. When we landed in D.C. there were hundreds of ordinary passengers waiting for flights that lined up to greet us, thank us for our service and shake our hands. It was awesome and quite moving. Leia was surprised.

We had a police motorcycle escort wherever we went in the city and these cops did not mess around. One cabby guy was not doing what our 6'5", 350 pound motor cycle officer told him to do and the officer knocked the guys driver side mirror right off his cab! Each motorcycle had double the number of lights, a siren twice as loud as normal and the baffles removed from their Harley Davidson mufflers. They were loud and fast! We probably ran two hundred red lights during the day and these guys stopped traffic on expressways to let us through. They even drove in the wrong lanes facing traffic without any fear. Absolutely nothing got in our way the entire day! And there is a lot of traffic in Washington, D.C. !!

The highlight of the day was not planned for. We got to see a full blown ceremony at the Tomb of Unknown Soldier honoring a soldier that had recently been killed in Afghanistan. His mother was there. Quite moving and sad. After that we witnessed a ceremony honoring the two original men that started the Honor Flight programs nationwide. That ceremony was complete with the United States Army band

and the entire contingent of guards for the Tomb + a two star General! It was awesome! No other Honor Flight has ever been allowed to see a ceremony presented at the Tomb - much less two of them.

The other firsts were that because of the timing of everything we got to see the Iwo Jima and World War 2 memorials at night - all lit up. And the Washington Monument was gorgeous. We drove past the White House and Capitol and a hundred other spots like the Bureau of Engraving and the Jefferson Memorial. We did not arrive back to Wausau until 11:30 PM and the airport was completely filled with people and organizations to welcome us home. They were literally lined up from our arrival gate to the exit leading out of the building and then motorcycle clubs gave us an escort back to the hotel.

Leia was awesome all day long and was responsible for myself and a retired Army Military Intelligence Officer that lived in Rhinelander. She enjoyed herself too and I think enjoyed the trip a lot. A number of lecherous vet's could not take their eyes off her (still gentlemen though) but I don't think she noticed - or maybe I was being an overprotective dad? It took me over an hour to read the mail I received for Mail Call on the plane on the way back. Thank you everyone that contributed to my mail call.

They fed us all day - our guardian's (Leia) were awesome and tended to our every need and it was truly a trip of a lifetime. Kevin and Kimberly and Diane and Brian were at the airport to welcome us all back home.

If you know a vet that has not signed up (including Reserve personnel - Uncle Paul) - please encourage them to do so. The Honor Flight out of Milwaukee is the Stars and Stripes Honor Flight program. In Wausau it is the Never Forgotten Honor Flight Program.

Thank you all that have kept us in your prayers and those that sent mail or telephoned me about the trip. I really appreciated it.

Love to all,

PTO

