



## With My Most Sincere Thanks

Several weeks ago I had the privilege of joining about 100 military veterans from the Korean War through the Vietnam War on an honor flight to Washington D.C.

There are no words to properly describe how moving and wonderful that trip was. Every person I met had great stories, some had harrowing memories. Some were heavily infirmed by age and, I suspect, the damage a war does to a survivor most of which isn't visible.

My experience of being a submarine sailor fulfilled a childhood dream for me but the thousands of names on the Korean and Vietnam Memorial are a terrible reminder of what time in the military meant to so many others.

The day started early but we all made it and got to the airport on time. Those who greeted us were very kind and our greeting was wonderful. After about an hour and a half flight we landed and walked off the plane to hundreds of applauding and cheering people in Reagan International Airport. Unknow to us, the airport had announced our arrival upon landing and the greeting was spontaneous. I doubt there was a person in our group who wasn't overcome with the emotion of it.

We spent the day visiting sites such as the Lincoln Memorial, World War II Memorial, and the Korean and Vietnam Memorials with their vast black panels of names of those lost or deceased from those wars. It's an amazing thing to see hundreds of people at a monument being so quiet, sad, and respectful.

We also had multiple school age groups who came up and thanked us once their teachers realized who we were. I hope they never have to know the pain and sacrifices so many of us gave. Those smiling, young faces will hopefully be spared those memories.

Our return flight was very quiet as our average age was probably in the late 70's but I don't think anyone slept. It had been a day to remember and the memories of the day and the experiences of the time in our youths when those events happened were far too strong to sleep.

When we arrived at the Mosinee airport each person was announced separately and walked out to amazing applause and had the chance to walk with loved ones and be greeted by a huge number of local veterans and non-veteran supporters alike. I now think I know what it feels like to be a politician shaking hands except that this was such an honest expression of thanks.

If you know anyone who would be eligible to take this flight, please push them to go. They are now getting through those from the Vietnam era and are in their mid to late 70's. The organization has over 150 groups working to give back to those who gave so much and got so little thanks.

Mike Sheehan (aka Bear) - former (1967 – 1973) Navy Submarine sailor and Honor Flight recipient