

My Honor Flight
Lynn Timgren
Ex. Specialist 2nd Class (E-5)
U.S. Army

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On May 2nd, 2022 thru May 4th, 2022, it was my privilege to be on a free airplane ride for veterans from Phoenix, AZ to Baltimore, MD and back. Referred to as the Honor Flight. The purpose of the trip was to give veterans the opportunity to see the memorials in the Washington D.C. area that serve as a tribute for their service to our country. This document describes my experiences and impressions of that excursion.

All the traveling veterans (approximately 180) on this flight initially met at Phoenix Sky Harbor airport at 6:00am, Monday, May 2nd, 2022. A ceremony for about 2 hours acknowledged the veterans, with speakers and songs, like America the Beautiful, Amazing Grace, and the Star-Spangled Banner. Also in attendance was a flag honor guard standing at attention as each veteran boarded the airplane.

The flight time from Phoenix to the Baltimore-Washington airport was about 4½ hours. Upon landing and taxiing to the gate, the fire department gave the airplane a water salute to honor those aboard the aircraft. That event made the local evening TV news. Departing the aircraft and walking the hallways to the baggage pick-up encountered many welcoming people saying "thank you for your service." A very sincere remark by a large crowd at the airport. While walking towards the exit, a double row of about one hundred high school students were standing on each side of the path welcoming each veteran to Baltimore and also thanking us for our service before we exited the building and went to our respective busses. Luggage was picked up and would be at the Hilton hotel before we arrived. Roll call was taken on the bus and departure to the Hilton hotel resulted in about ½ hour of travel.

That evening, veterans met their roommates for the first time, dinner was at the hotel, and many veterans were tired and early to bed.

Incidentally, about 50 of the veterans required wheelchairs as they were unable to walk any distance.

My roommate was George Smith, and from California before moving to the suburb of Mesa, AZ a few years ago. He was not very conversant, but friendly, and got around with a walker in the hotel room, but had to use a wheelchair elsewhere.

Everyone was required to wear a name-tag and yellow Honor Flight t-shirt at all times.

That was the end of Monday.

On Tuesday morning at breakfast, it was announced that as planned, everyone would have a guardian for the day. Well, my name was the first one called, and I got two guardians! Midshipmans Peyton xxx, and xxx Chi, both volunteers from the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. "So raise your hand Lynn and they will join you for breakfast." Raise my hand I did and proceeded to thankfully meet two friendly, pleasant, and enjoyable personalities. They were dressed in their white clean Naval Academy uniforms, hats and shoes. We got acquainted and Peyton, a 20 year old young lady, intends to be a submarine officer for 5 years after graduation, she is in her 4th upcoming & final year at the academy. Chi (of oriental origin) age 21, intends to further his education in science. Both were extremely intelligent in their own way and had considerate mannerisms. I told them I could walk okay without assistance, but might need help for my safety on any stairways without railings. Wow, did that get their attention and they were both on guard every step for the entire day.

We boarded the bus after breakfast and drove toward Arlington Cemetery. On the way, we saw the marine memorial which has 6 bronze marine statues putting the American flag on the top of the mountain on Iwo Jima.

Seeing all the grave sites at Arlington Cemetery was unimaginable. Then we stopped at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We watched a single Army soldier in full uniform and rifle marching back and forth in front of the tomb, doing an about face at the end of the path, then port arms and back to right shoulder arms, and march back to the end of the path to repeat the same maneuvers. Then we saw the change of the guard with another soldier taking his turn to do the same maneuvers. Everything here was to the complete attention and silence of the visitors. I understand this is guarded 24/7 by order of the president.

Our next memorial was the WWII memorial which I have not previously seen. This is on top of a windy high hill that overlooks Washington D.C. The pentagon, Washington monument, and capitol building were clearly identified in the distance. Then we had a box lunch and water before leaving for a 2:00 P.M. ceremony at the end of the long water mall in front of the capitol.

The ceremony consisted of many speakers, including Senator Elizabeth Dole, Chairman of the Honor Flight Network 250K Event, Nate Gatten, an American Airlines executive, Donald Ramey, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Meredith Rosenbeck, CEO of Honor Flight Network, Senator Jerry Moran, and Senator Mark Kelly, a prior astronaut. The ceremony lasted almost an hour.

So now it is getting later on Tuesday afternoon and we went to the Korean memorial. The memorial has 6 or 7 US soldiers in infantry dress with a raincoat on, and a rifle. Everyone walked through the edge of the large center area with green grass. Very typical of my experience during my first summer in Korea in 1954. As we depart, I say to the man standing at the exit door, "anya hash a meka." Which means in Korean, "Hello, how are you?" Now an old memory of years ago when I served as an MP in late 1954 and early 1955. The exit doorman did not speak the language and simply gave me a puzzling look. So I told him what it meant and then said goodbye in English.

My guardians chose not to attend dinner at the hotel restaurant in Ft. Meyer, but rather to catch another bus to return to the Naval Academy in Annapolis. So we said a rather sad goodbye with a hug. And off the bus it was for them. It was a long drive to Ft. Meyer for a light dinner of spaghetti. Not my favorite food. The invited speaker at the dinner was a veteran who was captured in Viet Nam and a POW for 6 years. Very interesting talk about a sad experience. He received a deserved standing ovation upon completing his talk. Now back to our hotel to start our last night at the hotel. That meant a 10:00pm happy hour until the bar closed at 11:00pm. And met a number of other veterans that we had things in common and enjoyed the conversation.

Next morning was Wednesday and early rise to pack up, have breakfast, leave our luggage downstairs and get on the bus to go to Ft McHenry. That morning trip was the most meaningful, interesting and learning experience of all the excursions. Maybe because I had never been to Ft McHenry before. Upon entry to Ft McHenry, we had a brief talk in the bus by a ranger in uniform and hat. He told us briefly that this was the home of the star-spangled banner and we would see a brief movie, then meet outside and hear a short talk about the history of Ft McHenry and then could walk up the sidewalk to see the canons which fired at the British ships in the harbor. And also see the mortars and rockets used by the British ships to return fire. This was the war starting in 1812 and ending with an American victory while the British had already burned the white house and was now attacking Baltimore. There were 14,000 people living in Baltimore and when the British attacked Ft McHenry, those people needed Ft McHenry to defeat the British in order to save their homes. So those people sat on their roofs and watched the battle for 24 hours. Only to wait and see if the flag was still there in the early hours of daylight. So the words "Oh say can you see, by the dawns early light...gave proof through the night that our flag was still there," written by Francis Scott Key during the battle of Baltimore on September 12 to 14, 1814. This was an extremely interesting memorial and well worth the time and visit on which to end my honor flight.

So now It is Wednesday noon, time for lunch, and then time to put luggage at the door to the bus and go to the Baltimore airport and get on board our return trip to Phoenix.

One last surprise. On board the airplane about halfway to Phoenix, one of the veteran leaders announces. "Remember when we were in the service, and everyday we would have mail call? It was always a delight and exciting to get a letter from home. Well, today we are going to have mail call, and every veteran has a letter." Then he read off names and I get an 8 ½" x 11" folder full of letters. To my surprise, I had a letter from everyone. That proved to be an emotional and happy occasion to receive those letters. As I sat and read, a new tear would come with each letter. And as I opened the letter from Sophie, I showed it to some of my fellow veterans sitting nearby, I said "this letter is from my 2 ½ year old great granddaughter." That did not bring laughter, it brought happy smiles in return. One of them said, "Lucky you," and I said, "I agree."

Upon arrival at the Phoenix airport, us veterans got the same kind of welcome back as when we left. It shows that people care and there was another salute to the flag bearers in the hall too.

Finally, the Honor Flight will be an excursion that I will never forget and immensely. Anyone that can qualify should not hesitate to take this journey. Or just take a vacation on your own to Washington D.C. to see our capitol and memorials. Now I look forward to telling my relatives, friends and anyone that will listen about those three wonderful days and nights.

Thank you for your mail.

Lynn



Lynn and George



Plane they flew in