

Stars & Stripes Honor Flight - Sept 15, 2018

It took a few years for me to be accepted, but on Sept 15th 2018, I was finally selected to take part in the Stars & Stripes Honor Flight from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Washington, DC. Stars & Stripes Honor Flight Organization of Wisconsin has 6 flights per year and veterans are prioritized by conflict/war, i.e. WWII, Korea, Viet Nam, etc.. My Honor Flight, Alpha & Bravo, left Milwaukee airport (MKE) at 5am and all branches of the military were represented in our flight. Specifically, there were two WWII vets who stormed the beaches on D-Day, one of them even went all the way to Point du Hock under fire! Wow!! I was really humbled to be in the presence of these veterans!

There were two WWII escort planes on the tarmac waiting for our plane to pushback from the terminal. They both had pre-war emblems on their wings and took off about 30-seconds before our plane. Also, there were two airport fire department engines on either side of the taxiway and gave us a water salute as we were taking off. It was really quite an impressive send off from MKE!



The flight landed at 8:30am at BWI and what we faced as we deplaned, was two rows of people waiting with open arms, outstretched hands, with "WELCOME HOME" on their lips... something this Veteran did not expect. We proceeded through these two lines of caring people who greeted us, and this vet did not hold back my tears and returned the gratitude back to them. This is when I met Natalie, my DC Caregiver. Natalie is



Natalie and me at BWI.

an active-duty Navy 3rd Class Petty Officer who was one of the many caregivers that were assigned to us for the entire time we were in DC. We boarded one of many buses waiting for us at the terminal and we had a half-hour drive to DC with police escort in front, on both side and in the rear of this line of buses with us Veterans. When we stopped, nothing and no one could enter or break this line. Police cars cleared the path with no stopping at lights or stop signs... nothing got in our path. Cars were pulled off to the curb to let us pass. In DC, we had carte blanche, not to mention carte blanche at both airports, where all we had to do is show our ID's and boarding passes. No carry-on's were checked, no going through x-ray machines, and no questions were asked of any vets in our group.

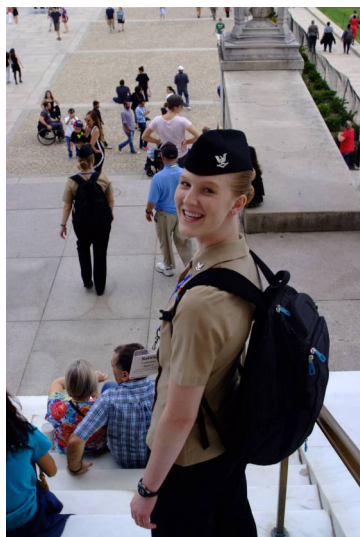


Honor Flight Group - Sept. 15, 2018

They fed us breakfast, we had lunch on the bus, and supper was supplied at the end of the day. We wanted for nothing! Anything we wanted was taken care of by our caregivers. We did not have to carry anything... our caregivers did all this for us. Everywhere we veterans went, most people greeted us with a hand shake or welcome



Salute from Natalie at the Viet Nam Wall...



Natalie at The Mall

home, a hug, a smile, it was unavoidable as it was everywhere. We moved from monuments to memorials with out stopping; from the Korean memorial, to the Vietnam Wall, to the Roosevelt and Martin Luther King memorials. We walked the Mall from the WWII memorial to the Lincoln Memorial.



... then a hug.

The stops at the memorials and monuments were short because of the limited time we had in DC however, as short as it was at each one, it was time well spent. The message was plain and clear... even a blind man could see it... these memorials were all built for us veterans as a way of saying thank you for your service, thank you for us and the freedoms we all share, and a special thank you to all those who gave it all.

The day ended in DC with a hug from the caregivers and the flight back to Milwaukee was short, quiet, and talk of the days events.

NOW comes the part I did not expect in any way shape or form. As we came off the plane, our caregivers took every-thing from us. They called it "Hands Free Egress" and I now see why.

Coming into the airport gate, we were greeted by bag pipes playing, a little sweetheart handing out poppies, Mary (my MKE caregiver) told me to turn to my right. As I did, all I could see were military personal on both sides of the walkway in full uniform. You name the branch of service, it was represented! All were standing at attention facing toward each other. Mary said, "This is for you Roger," then she stepped in behind me. As I walked through these two lines, they saluted me one at a time as I passed them all the way to the end of the line. They did this for each and every Veteran that went through, and this was only the beginning.



Me at the National Cemetery with Audie Murphy

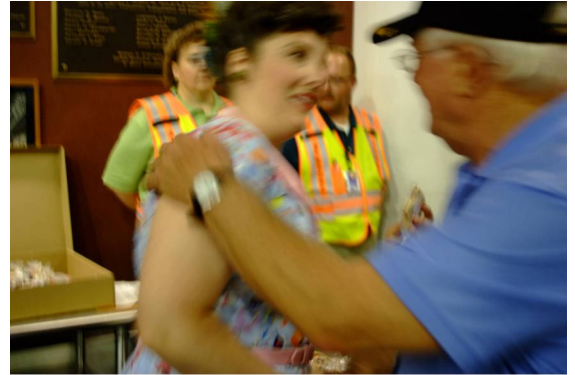


Caregiver Mary & Me at Milwaukee Airport (MKE)



Greeters at Milwaukee Airport...

As we entered the terminal, Mary stopped me. All I saw was people, people, everywhere, veterans of all wars and conflicts was all I could see. I told Mary, "I don't know if I can do this." She told me, "They are here for you." Try as I did not to cry, I passed through these lines of people and I could not hold back the tears. I looked a



A Very Special Greeter...

lady in the eyes as she made contact with me, she too was crying. I had stopped walking so I could see others and I told her "You are going to make me cry!" She smiled and said, "Welcome Home." In my entire 70 years on the earth, I have never felt what Honor was and now I know.

I could see it in their eyes as I passed. I could feel it, from a hug, in a hand shake, and in a kind smile. This Veteran says "Thank you." Words cannot be found in my mind how I feel towards my fellow man now. Now that I see, I too was wrong in feeling the way I did, at 70 years of age, I grew up 70 more.



Hundreds of Greeters!!

There are more people out there that care than there are who hate. My advice to any veteran that has not had the chance to have their day of honor bestowed upon them, they should take the time to see just how much we veterans do mean to others. It is a heart-wrenching experience to feel that when they say "Welcome Home" ... they do really mean it.

One more thing, "May God have mercy on those that carry the hate and bigotry for other humans".

DC3 Roger Faultersack, US Navy... and Proud Of It!!