

In The Presence Of Greatness

By Dale Marach, Territory Manager, Reinders Inc.

The soldier announced that everyone must stand for the playing of Taps. They slowly lifted themselves out of their wheelchairs and let go of their walkers. Hands that were crippled with arthritis and stiffness were lifted to their foreheads to salute. As the notes were slowly played, their fingers seemed to straighten and their posture seemed to be more erect. These men were no longer in their twilight years. They had gone back to those days in the 1940's when they became part of the greatest generation. These were the 18, 19, 20 year olds that were asked to do a job for the United States and gladly went about doing what was asked of them.

Two years ago I first saw a television report about the Old Glory Honor Flights. My wife and I talked about it briefly. I told her that I thought it would be something I would like to do. That Christmas she gave me the application to become a guardian for a veteran on the Old Glory Honor Flights as a Christmas gift. As it turned out it was one of the most memorable gifts I ever received.

We left on July 27th from Wittman Field in Oshkosh. Yes and for those of you who are into flying and planes, that is at the end

of the week that the Experimental Aircraft Association uses the whole airport for their convention. There are planes, campers, people and tents all over the grounds. All of the guardians and veterans were supposed to be there by 6:15 A.M. All of the veterans had their individual pictures taken and then all the guardians were then supposed to meet them to get acquainted. The two gentlemen that I was caring for beat me there by 15 minutes. It took us a fairly long time to board the 80 veterans. Some were in wheelchairs, some had canes and a few could beat many of us in a foot race. The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh football team was on hand to assist with pushing the wheelchairs or helping in any way they could. It was hard to know who enjoyed it more, the athletes or the veterans. Many of them rode in golf carts from the terminal to the plane. The whole team soon realized that when you are 89 it takes longer to get where you want to go.

Once we were in the air we were served breakfast and were told of the activities of the day. I used that time to get to know "My boys". The hour and 1/2 it took to get to Washington DC went by very fast with talk



and general getting to know everyone.

Don, who is 89 years old, flew with a crew of men in a transport plane. On D-Day they had a plane load of paratroopers and were towing gliders. After they had their troops where they needed to go, then they would land and bring the injured back to England. At this point he got very quiet because of the memories of all the injured were still fresh in his mind even after 70 years. If he was pressed, he would tell you more but the tears were in his eyes.

Hank who is 88 was in the signal corps. He went over on D-Day and when the troops began their march to Berlin, his group was brought back to the United State for rest and then in roughly a month they were shipped to the Pacific. He saw fighting in the Philippines, Luzon, and the Leyte Gulf. The guy survived all that fighting only to get in a car accident 2 years ago and have crushed ankles.

Both gentlemen were married for well over 50 years and have lost their wives. One recently married a younger woman of "74".

We landed at Reagan International Airport to an amazing welcome. As we pulled up to the gate, two of airports crash truckers made an arch of water spray over the plane as a tribute to the veteran. When we deplaned and walked out of the Jetway, military personal lined both sides of the aisle. Red, white, and blue balloons were everywhere. There even was a gentleman dressed in red and white playing the Wisconsin fight songs. The whole time we were walking through the airport to the bus people were coming up to the veterans and shaking their hands and saying thank you.



T. J. Emmerich Associates, Inc
 Irrigation Consultants
 W28620 Beverly Lane • Hartland, WI 53029
262-538-2776
 Golf Course • Commercial • Master Planning
 System Evaluations • GPS Services
 Thomas J. Emmerich
 Certified Irrigation Designer

MISCELLANY

The buses arrived at the World War II memorial at 12:15 local time. We quickly got all of the vets around to the side that featured the memorial for the European Theater for a group picture.

One of the most touching moments of the day came when we pulled up to the drop off area. One of the ladies that were a guardian for her father was standing alongside of me looking out of the side window. She said to herself, "Wow he is wearing his Class A uniform." I looked out the window to see a young soldier walking down the sidewalk next to the bus. She told me that was her son and her father did not know he was going to be there. On top of that he had graduated from Ranger School the day before. This young man had his felt beret, long sleeved dress coat on and spit shined jump boot on. It was only 94 degrees that day. At the end of the day after he had pushed his grandfather around all of the memorials, he brought him to his bus and kissed his grandfather goodbye. The people that knew the story didn't have a dry eye. After the WWII memorial, it

was on to the Iwo Jima memorial. We were behind schedule so we only had a 15 min stop. The guardians who wanted a picture quickly got off and ran over to get a few pictures of the memorial. There was a veteran with us who was a cousin of John Bradley, the corpsman in the army and one of the six men that raised the flag. He was not going to come 1000 miles and not get a good look at the memorial.

After a few pictures the buses left there and quickly drove over to the Tomb of the Unknown and the Arlington cemetery. The bus driver was full of interesting facts about the Old Guard that is entrusted with guarding the tomb. The men that are given this honor are of a certain height and weight and background. They are given a badge for doing this honored service and if they do anything to dishonor this unit, (DUI, swearing, etc) the badge is taken from them. This is for life. They do this 24/7 365 days a year, in any weather, heat, rain, snow or even a hurricane. A few years ago a hurricane was coming through Washington D.C. and

they were told to stand down. Their response was a resounding "Hell No" Literally, this is how high an honor that they consider this duty of guarding the Tomb Of the Unknown. This is where the veterans heard the bugle playing Taps, and when for a few minutes were transported back in time.

We left there and headed back to the Reagan International Airport. Through the day many of the other sights that we saw were the Pentagon, including the side where the terrorist flew the jet into the building. The Air Force Memorial, Korean Memorial, the Martin Luther King Memorial and the Lincoln, Jefferson and Washington Memorial were all seen in passing.

We boarded the plane after we were escorted through the security check points. There were no pat downs or x-rays for these men. After the plane reached 10,000 ft. the veterans had mail call. They received letters and cards from any family members or friends who wanted to send them a kind word or words of thanks for what they had done.

Design-BUILD

- ♦ Single-point responsibility
- ♦ Full project management
- ♦ Onsite problem solving
- ♦ Continual value engineering
- ♦ No lengthy bidding process
- ♦ Efficient field modifications
- ♦ Direct client participation



*Blackstone Golf Club, #11
Marengo, Illinois*



www.lohmanncompanies.com

MARENGO, ILLINOIS
815.923.3400

LOHMANN COMPANIES
DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION & PROJECT MANAGEMENT

MISCELLANY



Dale Marach served as a Old Glory Honor Flight Guardian for Don and Hank. The Honor Flights Allow World War II Veterans to Fly to Washington DC to See their War Memorial.

The sight of these men who had seen some pretty horrible things, reach for their tissues and handkerchief made everyone get lumps in their own throats. After a light lunch was served, many of them reread the letters again.

The reception we received when we landed at Wittman Field was something that will live in their memories forever. We were the last act of the day for the day's activities at the fly-in for the Experimental Aircraft Association and what a finish it was. After they had reenactments of aerial battles, we came flying in. The taxiway was lined with people in period uniforms of the mili-


tary. There was everything from sailors, pilots, infantry, signalman, tankers and even a USO troop singing songs.

As we walked off the plane the UW Oshkosh football team was there to help out again. The way to the reception area was lined with current military personnel. After that family and friends lined the walk with signs that read Thank you or We Love You Grandpa. I honestly have never seen so many smiling faces on people who have just landed at an airport. It is a day that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

After an experience like this you cannot help but learn something from these

men. To this day even after 70 years some of them still cannot talk about a lot of what they saw. If they do, it is with tears in their eyes. We are losing 1000 of these men a day. They are people who went about doing what they were asked to do and asked nothing in return.

If you have a father, grandfather, uncle, friend or even mother or grandmother that had served in World War II, I would encourage you to enroll them and take them on an Old Glory Honor Flight.

As the motto of the Old Glory Honor Flight says "It is never too late to say Thank You" 



Bayer Environmental Science

John M. Turner
Sr. Sales Specialist - Golf
Bayer Environmental Science

Cell Phone: (630) 215-6110
Office: (630) 443-7807
Fax: (630) 443-7839
Email: john.turner@bayercropscience.com



The Veterans From The July 27th Old Glory Honor Flight At The World War II Memorial
(Photo by Valley Camera)