

WOMEN IN MILITARY SERVICE FOR AMERICA
MEMORIAL DEDICATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thursday; October 16 through Sunday, October 19, 1997

Before, including and after the above dates

As soon as information came concerning the WIMSA dedication, Mac and I definitely decided to attend. Reservation forms were mailed in during the summer months and hotel reservations were made through Bartelt Travel in Kalamazoo in July. At first we planned to go by bus, but changed to the Amtrak, and on October 13th, a good friend drove us, in the rain, to the Amtrak station in Dearborn. We "bussed" to the Toledo Amtrak station and connected with the Capitol Limited at 1 AM to Washington, via Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Our seats were in the coach; we sat, read, made our way to the dining car and lounged in the lounge car, viewing the pretty scenery in Pennsylvania. Around 2PM on Tuesday, Washington suburbs loomed into view and the train backed in to the beautiful Union Train Station. We paid the cab driver \$20.00 fare when we arrived at the Howard Johnson Hotel, Crystal City area in Arlington, VA; ~~our~~ our home for a week. The hotel was adequate, clean and their personnel helpful.

Mac immediately phoned her cousin, Jo Streit Stewart. She and her husband, Dana, came to the hotel in about 2 hours. That interval gave us ample time to unpack and shower. We had a nice visit and dinner at the hotel. It was fun to be with Jo again and to meet her husband. They left around 10:30 and as we walked into the crowded lobby, filled with a busload of nurses etc. veterans arriving from Kalamazoo, I saw someone I hadn't seen for some years--this kind and pleasant face belongs to Bob Hovis, my 2nd cousin (originally from California and now living with his wife Penny, in Centreville, VA, and working in Maryland (NIH). Bob had been patiently waiting in the hotel for 1½ hours. Bob, Mac and I crowded together on the end of a davenport and had a good hour visit--it was great! Bob presented me with a silver WIMSA medal, which I'll always treasure.

WEDNESDAY**

Mac and I hoped to tour the FBI Bldg on this free day and to get there, we had to go

via the Metro, a wonderful subway system. First, the courtesy hotel van drove us to the entrance, and underground we went. WITH HELP we learned how to ride the metro and to pay. --our fare. It took us 13 minutes to get to the exit nearest the FBI Building. We noticed one huge line and we were in another, only to be told there would be no more tours--"too early"--come back at 12:30, which we did--again they denied us admission--"too late"! We were disappointed. So--our next plan was to tour the Bureau of Engraving, so we walked and walked until we found the Bldg, where we joined the tour there----it was fascinating to go through "The Money Factory", noticing the processes of engraving, printing, plate making, examining the stacks of money, labeling and shrink wrapping. Security was tight and the glass walls were thick. One of the workers taunted us all by holding up a stack of money--so near, but not close enough! \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

The Smithsonian Institution was near so we viewed the Hope Diamond--beautiful--wish it could fit one or more of my fingers.. We then toured the Insect /Zoo--also viewed a huge whale--above eye level. We asked a volunteer for suggestions for lunch--she referred us to the Old Main Post office, an interesting building. We lunched and then found a metro entrance to flag the Metro and returned to our hotel--after we found a Beauty Salon (still underground) where we made an appointment for a shampoo on Thursday.

Wednesday night, Katie or Kate Hamann and husband, Brian Cohen, newly weds since August 31st, met us and drove us to another Marriott Hotel for dinner. We had a great visit and dinner (?) and then sat in the lobby to look at their albums of their wedding and honeymoon--great pictures of them and Fran, Bob and families. It was such fun to be with Kate again (she is the granddaughter of my friend, Mary Wertel and daughter of Fran Hamann LeVeque) and to meet her husband. Kate and Brian are a nice young couple--they each have much potential for their respective fields.

THURSDAY

We were bright and early on another dull day, weatherwise, and we were soon on our way to the beauty salon, where we were pampered with a shampoo and set and a manicure.

After leaving there, we found a food stand where we settled in for a bite to eat and to "people watch". We wandered underground back to the Marriott Hotel and they called the Howard Johnson Hotel van to pick us up and return us to our Hotel.

That night, we boarded a bus at 6PM and ended up at the National Guard Armory in Washington, D.C. for the WIMSA Dedication Gala. The Gala was a formal affair, with some personnel wearing their dress uniforms. The Armory and tables were beautifully decorated, each table set for 10 guests, each of us finding a WIMSA ribbon and a WIMSA key chain in boxes at our places at our table. I joined a congenial group of veterans at table 81 and Mac found her way to table 94. The armory was huge and at this point I wondered if I'd meet Mac at the program end or if I'd ever get to the right bus to get back to our hotel---luckily, it all worked out OK, even though Mac switched where we would meet so it was a game of chance! By the way, the steak fillets, plus salad etc. and dessert were very good and very excellent waitresses *SERVING US*.

The Gala Program included "Reflections" by several and more women, including Colonel Mary Hallaren, former Director of the WAC's, Nancy Giles, who played the character Frankie Bunsen in the TV series, China Beach, which dealt with the Vietnam War, and Connie Stevens, who, just recently, besides her film, TV recording and Broadway entertainment, finished production of "A Healing", a documentary feature film dedicated to women who served in the Vietnam war.. Loretta Switt or "HO" LIPS" was also present. Brigadier General Wilma Vaught welcomed the huge crowd. Remarks were made by General Joseph Ralston, USAF; Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Sheila Widmalm; Secretary of the Air Force and John Hamre, Deputy of Defense. A tribute was made by Tipper Gore and Kathy Mattea was a guest performer.

It was a wonderful evening for the Women in Military Service, past and present, all thousands and thousands..

FRIDAY- Friday was another rainy and dull day. This was a day of 2 big events. The first one was an ARMY luncheon, held in Hangar #3 at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland; (Navy, AF, Coast Guard and other services held their luncheons at other buildings or hotels). When our busses arrived at the Hanger, each of us was met individually by an enlisted AF man, who offered us his arm and escorted us under an umbrella into

the hangar. Well, we felt "up in the air"-----classy! The air force enlisted men were specially flown in to escort around 5000 nurses and others of us---the men were so young, tall, courteous and handsome.

Again, the hangar was all decorated, streamers hanging down from the ceiling to designate our war service area--WWII, Vietnam, Korean, Bosnia or whichever. The tables were set for 10--at our table were several CBI nurses, who related some of their experiences to us. Following the luncheon, there was a program--"Colors Presented", National Anthem, the US Army Chorale and US Army Band. The guest speaker was General Dennis Reimer, Chief of Staff, US Army. Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy welcomed the huge group.

We could not locate 2 friends, one nurse and one PT--and we looked and looked, walked up and down in between tables--it was impossible and disappointing.

After the program, it was some sight to watch all 5000 women depart and wait in line for the right bus. However, the army was well organized and we escaped the rain drops and before too long, arrived back at the hotel to get ready for the 2nd big event of the day.

FRIDAY EVENING was the dedication reunion held at the District of Columbia National Guard Armory. The armory was decorated with streamers, balloons, etc. and had many food and drink stations scattered around in this, another huge area. There were many booths (American Legion, DAV, Am Vets, etc)--all reunion exhibitions--one could visit--it was all so overwhelming! The other end of the armory had a stage, band area, ^{huge} huge screen, balconies, etc. Honorary CO-Chairs were Vice President Al Gore and Tipper Gore. Brigadier General Wilma Vaught welcomed all at this reunion--she is revered by all the women veterans.

We found seats way up in the balcony to listen and watch; Remarks were made by retired General John Shalikashville, former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and Mary Elcano, Sr. VP and General Counsel, US Postal Service. She displayed, for the first time, the first day of issue of the Commemorative Stamp, dedicated to the WIMSA, There was a roar of approval.

Mac and I worked our way down to the main floor and watched the all women,

alumni band --past and present members play some stirring music, They all looked so happy to be playing their instrument of choice--was fun to watch.

A high light of the evening was to see, at close range, the eight (?) Air Force pilots, all women, being introduced--they were so young and peppy. We were told they planned a "fly over" Saturday morning at the Dedication Ceremony at the Memorial. The pilots were greeted with many cheers.

The evening was quite an affair.

SATURDAY This was the Dedication Day, of the WIMSA memorial!

We were bussed to the Lincoln Memorial area and then walked and walked and walked to our seats--we carried a baggie filled with a light lunch--a thoughtful thing our group leader at our hotel did for us. It seems there must have been 25000 to 30000 veterans and guests present, filling all the chairs and bleachers. There was a long waiting time, of course--this gave one a chance to queue up for a pit stop at many "Port a John's"--4 can enter at once and each private room included a sink, soap and towels (slightly different from the latrines we frequented back when). While waiting in the audience, we viewed various goings on on the huge screen. Military bands played--many service academies, including VMI, marched down the center aisle. During the hours we waited, we visited with those near us--each had a story! A veteran next to me had been overseas 3 years, all over the world, and now is in the National Guard, working at a prison as a guard. Another conversation with someone near me went like this----

"Where are you from?"	I told her OHIO
Where?	Northwest Ohio
Where?	near Toledo
Where?	Gibsonburg

She was shocked and surprised as I was--she told me she had married a Dick Ottney (son of Jim Ottney ?) from Gibsonburg. We could hardly believe that 2 people, sitting next to each other in a crowd of 30000 ? had a common bond!

The dedication address was given by Vice President Gore and he, Tipper Gore, Brigadier Wilma Vaught, and 2 veterans performed the official ribbon cutting, followed by a

celebratory ringing of bells.

An announcement was made that because of the low ceiling, the women pilots would NOT make the "fly over" as planned. 2 helicopters, piloted by women, replaced them.

Closing remarks were made by ^{BRIG} ~~Brig.~~ General Wilma Vaught and the singing of "God Bless America".

Following the program, charter members were invited to a reception, hosted by Mrs. William Cohen, wife of William Cohen, Secretary ^{of Defense} ~~Cohen~~, in an area close by for soft drinks, cheese and crackers, chips, celery, dips etc. It was here I was approached and asked where I had served, etc--the young girl was looking for a clue to find someone who knew of the army unit her mother had been in --or at least lead her to a clue (I had no way of knowing). The girl's mother had died recently and so she came, with her aunt, for the dedication activities in honor of her mother. It was very difficult for the girl to speak as she was in tears during our conversation. Similar conversations were prevalent during the week--family members seeking someone who could possibly know their mother, aunt, sister, daughter or cousin. There were many somber moments!

SATURDAY EVENING At 5 PM we found the staging area near the Lincoln Memorial. Areas were roped off and all were seated with their branch of service veterans. The candlelight service march started around 6:30 or when it was dark--from the Lincoln Memorial across the bridge to our seats at the memorial site--probably 2 miles. Each veteran and or guest carried a battery operated flash light. This was an awesome sight as we looked forward and back to see thousands and thousands of flash lights waving in the dark and pointing them toward the many planes that flew overhead--a sight I never will forget. Along the sidewalks of the marchers there were many people standing, clapping and saying "thank you" as we walked in--goose pimples were present in us all.

The US Navy Band initiated the service of remembrance program followed by the Color Guard, the National Anthem, Battle Hymn of the Republic and a welcome by Brig. General Vaught. Remarks were made by Janet Reno, Attorney General and Lt. Col. Rhonda Cornum, USA MC. A rose petal ceremony followed: various veterans, 2 at

a tire, tossed rose petals in the reflecting pool in memory of a woman veteran. Kenny Rogers and friend flew in to sing "Let There Be Peace on Earth" for the program. Beautiful fireworks ended the service and then we all walked back to get in another line for our right bus back to our hotel. This was quite a day to remember!!

SUNDAY We were bussed to Arlington National Cemetery and were seated in the National Cemetery Amphitheater before 9AM for the "A Time to Give Thanks" program. The US coast Guard Academy Glee Club sang "America the Beautiful" and "Sometime". Remarks were made by Lt. Governor Frances Ulmer of Alaska and the guest speaker was The Honorable Robert Dole--he first sent his special greetings to the American Red Cross--it was a good beginning for a great speech.

To sit, with thousands of guests, in the beautiful amphitheater and to see the many American flags flying around the amphitheater and to hear the speakers and music was really special.

After the service we were bussed to the memorial where we stood in lines and lines of people----3 hours was our time to reach into the memorial. Again, there were queue's to view various exhibitions, to sign one of the three huge welcoming books, to view the flags of each state who contributed money to the memorial, the Hall of Honor, the "computerized "Register" and the gift shop. I did not get into the gift shop but I did see my picture and information on the computer screen. The lines at the memorial were so great--it was very difficult to view anything and take time----this means another trip to the memorial in the future!

This was another wonderful day and the end of a great experience and with a certain indescribable feeling of a veteran bond to each other.

We thought all the people in the hotels, busses, restaurants, Metro, museums, etc. were very pleasant and helpful to us all.

MONDAY -- our last day in the Washington, D.C. area started off with a "wake up" telephone call or so I thought after I grasped the phone and said "thank you"! Well, as soon as I put down the receiver, the phone rang again and I heard this voice saying "this is Bob and I'm in the lobby--I have ~~some~~ paper clippings for you". We jumped out of bed and before I had my glasses on, there was a knock at the door and there stood Bob--he came in just long enough to give me the WIMSA articles and to say goodbye and off he went to his pharmaceutical job--he had all ready dropped his wife, (a nurse --Penny-) off at her work. Bob must have laughed all day at the sight he saw--Gretch and Mac, greeting him in our pajamas! Bob is such a caring, good guy.

After Breakfast, we took a cab, hoping to go to the WIMSA Gift shop. We didn't know the address but expected it to be a recognizable bldg and that the cab driver would certainly lead us directly there--well, he didn't and repeated and repeated to us that it would be easy to get to if we knew the number. Finally, we asked to stop at a Shell station where a kind man called information--made several calls for us, only to find out the gift shop was closed on Monday. The Shell proprietor would not take any reimbursement. We climbed back in our waiting cab and ^{the driver} took us back to our hotel--this was an \$18.50 mistake. The last thing the cab driver said to us was " you have to know the number--" We closed the door.

Soon we rolled our luggage to the front desk, signed out and they called another cab, which we took to the Union Station, checked our big luggage through to Dearborn and then found a locker for our carry on, as we expected to do some sightseeing. It wasn't that easy to open the locker--Mac stood in line to get change and to get some dollar bills--the machine wouldn't take her dollar bill, so a man in line traded her dollar for his and this dollar worked. Back to the locker and with more help, the locker opened and stored were our carry-ons--We wondered if we would ever get the locker open again'.!!!???.?????

We discovered the post office was down a level, so we rode the escalator down and bought some brand new WIMSA stamps--first day of issue--on Oct. 18, 1997. This was

an unexpected happening!

We went back up to the station, bought tickets for the Tourmobile and were off on a sightseeing tour, ending up at the Lincoln Memorial. We walked to the Vietnam memorial (had seen it before and it still has a lingering, gulping effect and a hushed silence prevails). We followed the crowds to the Korean Conflict Memorial--the soldiers, made of stainless steel, all standing in various lookout positions in rice paddies--the wall to the side was covered with face after face, soldiers in helmets--very touching memorial.

The nurses statue was nearby--another sad and meaningful memorial!

At all these memorials there were many visitors--it was all silence.

We then tourmobiled to the FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL--a very expansive but still a feeling of seclusion memorial. This memorial took its place in Washington D.C. in May 1997. The memorial is divided into 4 outdoor rooms, one for each of FDR'S terms in office; each room conveying in its own way the spirit of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. One of the walls in many Braille explanations, marked on the wall--a great thing. Also, it is the first presidential memorial to honor a First Lady--a bronze sculpture of Eleanor Roosevelt as her service as a delegate to the United Nations. It is quite a wonderful memorial! I remember when President Roosevelt died April 12, 1945--we were stationed in Commercy, France at that time. When we heard he died, we all had tears streaming down our faces--he was our President!

Soon it was time to catch the Tourmobile and depart at the Union Station. We were hungry so we ate at one of the 100 plus eating places and then headed for our locker and we DID open the locker and dragged out our carry ons.

Soon it was time to line up to board the Amtrak to go home. We waited hours--we were told the Amtrak was waiting for a new part ??????????#####. We did board 2 hours late. We did get a seat in the lower level of the coach. For some reason there was room for just 16 passengers--liked that. Mac And I sat in the lounge car awhile but mostly in our assigned seats--eventually several passengers left and we then had 2 seats, so could curl up if we decided to do so. Sleep wasn't

to be as there was a man and woman directly across from me and they took turns snoring--if only they had done this in cadence!

Pittsburgh looked like a booming city early in the morning. After Pittsburgh we were told we would have to move back to our original seats as 5 passengers would be boarding at Cleveland. The party of 5 included a little boy of 2, who was very vocal (cute and bright), his older brother, seven years old and an invalid--he appeared to be a quadriplegia--seated in a wheelchair. He was completely helpless, and had to be fed through a tube into his stomach. His mother and grandparents took turns being with the children and were so nice and patient. This was sad but good to witness as well. They were on their way to Denver--on the coach.

Soon we left the train in Toledo and bussed it to Detroit and Dearborn--the bus driver passed every car and truck on the way. I was glad to arrive safely--a cab ride home ended our trip to see our memorial. The whole trip was wonderful, awesome, unbelievable and one that will always linger in my memories. It also renewed that bond between veterans and made us all proud of our country.