

Honor Flight takes vets to their memorial

By Gary Swanson

More than 65 years have passed since 16 million men and women left their homes in the United States to serve around the world in Uncle Sam's military during World War II. Many of them had never left their farm or their county before they were called to fight thousands of miles away in places they had never heard of.

Recently, 40 of these veterans, mostly from Johnson County, participated in the first Kansas City Metro Honor Flight to visit the World War II Memorial and other monuments in Washington, D.C.

Honor Flight is a national organization, based in Springfield, Ohio, that finds local partners to promote flights of World War II veterans to Washington to visit the monument. The local flight was sponsored by Americans Remembered and the Jackson County Historical Society and funded by Norman Polsky, a Johnson County Marine veteran, and his wife, Elaine. The Honor Flight was free to participating veterans.

A busy day it was, and long, as the 40 vets, accompanied by 15 "guardians" with wheel chairs, oxygen, and a physician, boarded a 6:10 a.m. flight to Baltimore, where

they were met by Honor Flight volunteers and 200 other folks who cheered and waved flags as the vets came out of the jetway.

Then they boarded a bus, enjoyed a box lunch, and drove right to the World War II Memorial, where they were greeted by Sen. Bob Dole, a Kansas World War II veteran, and Rep. Dennis Moore. Wreaths were placed at the Kansas and Missouri pylons in remembrance of those who died in the war. Moore presented a flag that



Above: Mel Mallin, of Overland Park, had the plane rocking at 6:10 a.m. as the Honor Flight song leader.

Left: Hans Liemen, of Fairway (in chair), with Mike Niday, of Overland Park, who was a "guardian" on the flight.

had flown over the Capitol to Dorwin Lamkin, president of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, to fly over Pearl Harbor Park in Mission. A ceremony is planned for VJ Day, Aug. 15, to raise that flag.

After taking many photos, the veterans then visited the Korea and Vietnam memorials and the Iwo Jima monument and drove by Arlington National Cemetery and other Washington landmarks.

Arriving back in Kansas City at 10:30 p.m., the vets were greeted once again by a cheering crowd of family and friends. All agreed it was a long but wonderful day.





Ralph Burbridge, of Overland Park; Rep. Dennis Moore; Lafe Bauer, of Prairie Village; and Roque Riojas, of Kansas City, Kan., in front of the Kansas soldiers' memorial.

From the heart

What did the vets and guardians think about the trip?

"It was one of the greatest days of my life," said Creed Conwell, of Mission, a Purple Heart veteran who went ashore at Omaha Beach on D-Day. "I appreciate being able to go."

Jack Brooks, of Leawood, who also served in the Korea and Vietnam eras, said, "Vivid memories of my time as a young infantry officer at North Africa, Sicily, and Omaha Beach on D-Day came to my mind as I was involved emotionally at the monuments."

The only woman on the Honor Flight, Marjorie Rees, of Prairie Village, a WASP pilot, said, "I was amazed at the great reception we got from everybody in Kansas City, Baltimore, and the memorial. It was gratifying and pleasing to know that people remember and wanted to honor us."

Naval aviator Ralph Burbridge, of Overland Park, said, "It was an amazing experience that recalls lifetime memories. One of my fellow vets on the trip was Lloyd Grady, of Kansas City, Mo., whose best friend was a young man killed in the war. Lloyd and I had an emotional first meeting after 60-some years."

Army vet Dub Spilker, of Overland Park, said, "I was very mindful at the World War II Memorial that, while I was honored by being there, we were really honoring those American

as surviving veterans."

Army Air Corps navigator Mel Mallin, of Overland Park, said, "The trip was most inspiring and brought back many fond memories of comradeship and close bonds that I developed with my bomber crew."

Mike Niday, of Overland Park, who participated as a guardian, said, "It was a great privilege for me to assist these veterans. I've since had lunch with guys in my group, and I'm glad to have them as a friend."

Guardian Harold Distler, of Overland Park, a Vietnam vet, felt the same way. "These guys helped change the course of history for America, and I was honored to help these great vets," he said.

"I felt privileged to go and assist in honoring our vets who have done so much for our country," said Ken Noegel, of Leawood, another guardian.

"This was a wonderful trip that enabled me to be with my peer group of more than 65 years ago," said Lamkin, of Mission, a Navy corpsman on the USS Nevada at Pearl Harbor. "We celebrated with different emotions and feelings, but we were bound together by our collective experience."

To philanthropist Polsky, "It was the best money I've ever spent helping others."

The trip meant something different to each vet, but unanimously they agreed that it was a special day. Testimonials could fill up this paper if the editor would only agree!

Sponsor a vet in honor of your loved one

Americans Remembered, Inc., and the Jackson County Historical Society are sponsoring a second Honor Flight of World War II veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit war memorials.

For \$375, in honor of a World War II veteran, you may sponsor a World War II vet to be part of an Honor Flight for free. This is a wonderful way to honor the memory of a loved one or friend. Your contribution will pay to fly a local veteran who has sent in an application to Honor Flight headquarters in Springfield, Ohio, and is on a waiting list. The veteran you choose to honor will be remembered by an Honor Flight "guardian," who will stand in front of the pylon representing your veteran's state at the World War II Memorial and remember reverently his or her service and life story.

Two notes: No contribution will

be accepted from a World War II veteran or family with the provision that a specific veteran fly on an Honor Flight. And if sufficient funds are not raised for a future flight, your contribution will be returned to you.

Additional flights to Washington depend on raising funds to send the veterans for free. Contributions in *any* amount may be submitted.

Applications for veterans wishing to be considered for an Honor Flight may be printed off the Honor Flight Web site, www.honorflight.org, or mail a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Gary Swanson at the address below.

**Americans Remembered
c/o Gary Swanson
12217 Wenonga Lane
Leawood, KS 66209**

JOHNSON COUNTY HONOR FLIGHT PARTICIPANTS

World War II Veterans

COUNTIES

Lafe Bauer	Prairie Village	Army
Don Boyer	Shawnee	Army
Jack Brooks	Leawood	Army
John Brownlee	Overland Park	Army Air Corps
Ralph Burbridge	Overland Park	Naval Air Corps
Don Carter	Overland Park	Army
Rex Conley	Overland Park	Navy
Creed Conwell	Mission	Army
Bob Fallert	Overland Park	Army
Orvis Fitts	Overland Park	Naval Air Corps
John Hanaway	Overland Park	Army
Norm Hudson	Lenexa	Army
Bob Johnson	Roeland Park	Coast Guard
Jim Karnes	Overland Park	Army
Dorwin Lamkin	Mission	Navy
Hans Liemen	Prairie Village	Army Air Corps
Mel Mallin	Overland Park	Army Air Corps
Floyd Mock	Mission	Army
Norm Polsky	Leawood	Marines
Marjorie Rees	Prairie Village	Army Air Corps
Dub Spilker	Overland Park	Army
Bill Stuck	Leawood	Army
Harry Wilson	Lenexa	Army Air Corps
ROQUE RIVAS	WYANDOTTE CTY.	ARMY

Guardians

Paul Black	Fairway
Harold Distler	Overland Park
Mike Niday	Overland Park
Ken Noegel	Leawood
Gary Swanson	Leawood

I WAS THE ONLY
ONE FROM
(ONLY MEX. AMER.)
- WYANDOTTE
COUNTY
KS. CITY, KS