

HonorFlight EVV13

HonorFlight of Southern Indiana plans and executes the most heartfelt and compassionate day honoring our special veterans! October 29, 2022 will forever be etched in my memory as a special day spent with my 94 year old father, Gearld E. Mourer, and 85 other deserving WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam era veterans.

Each HonorFlight begins with a “meet and greet” dinner on the Thursday prior to takeoff. This is the time to meet other veterans traveling with you on this flight. We were identified by the color of the bus we were assigned. Red, white, blue, and gold. We were escorted to the gold table and met another veteran, his guardian and wife. This evening was filled with information and special entertainment to relieve some anxiety about the coming flight. Our drive home was filled with even more excitement for our flight.

Saturday morning at 5:00 AM we arrived at Evansville Regional Airport. We were served breakfast as we waited to board the plane. Boarding was an experience. We boarded the plane from the back to the front by sections. Never did you have to wait for another passenger to be seated to find your seat. It was smooth and efficient! As we pulled away from the terminal, the sun was peaking over the horizon, and we were saluted with water cannons from the airport fire department.

Landing at Dulles International Airport in Washington DC we were once again saluted with the water cannons! We later learned this was the highest honor given by the fire department. It was very touching. As we left the plane and made our way to the buses, we were greeted by clapping, salutes, and handshakes from passengers and airport personnel. It was an emotional greeting for many of our veterans and guardians alike.

Once we were on our buses, we were joined by a local tour guide. She talked to us the entire day about sights we were seeing and gave background on each site we visited. We drove past the Washington Monument and learned the difference between monument and memorial. A monument is dedicated while the person is still living. Our first stop was the World War II memorial. Here all the veterans were gathered for a group photo all holding a photo of themselves when they were in the service. It was such an honor to be able to see all these veterans standing or sitting together at the newest memorial to our military. As are all memorials, the symbolism behind each section was so interesting to learn. Dad and I spent time at both the South Pacific and Atlantic ends of the memorial and the Freedom Wall. There are 4048 gold stars each representing 100 Americans who died in the war. The message in front reads: “Here we mark the price of freedom.” Many veterans stopped under the Indiana pillar for pictures.

Back on the bus we were given box lunches and headed to the Lincoln Memorial. Here we were given two hours to visit the Lincoln Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, and the Vietnam Wall. Our only disappointment of the day was learning that the elevator to the Lincoln Memorial was out of service and dad could not climb the many steps leading up to his statue. We turned our attention to the Korean War memorial. Here you see statues of 19 warriors from all branches of service are “on patrol” in the cold. The reflection of the 19 on the black wall, with etched faces of those soldiers who did not make it home, makes a total of 38 soldiers to represent the 38th parallel. A wall listing 36,000 names of Americans killed in Korea surrounds a Pool of Remembrance. The reverence with which visitors treat this memorial was impressive.

The bottom steps of the Lincoln Memorial gave us a place to sit in the sun to rest and warm up before heading to the Vietnam Wall. Once again, the quiet reverence of the visitors at the memorial was poignant. Watching the faces of the veterans as they found names on the wall was an emotional experience. A female sergeant from the US Army was in the area giving Vietnam pins to the veterans and thanking them for their service.

I believe the highlight of the trip for most of the veterans I spoke to was to witness the changing of the guard at Arlington National Cemetery. The veterans were positioned around the patio where the guards march back and forth guarding our Unknown Soldiers from WWI, WWII, and Korean War. We also witnessed the pageantry of placing wreaths

on the tomb. It was emotional and exciting to feel you are part of something bigger than you. We were fortunate to witness the first female guard!

Everywhere we went people came up to us to shake dad's hand and thank him for his service. Each time he sat up a little straighter and thanked them. To be acknowledged and thanked is such a simple thing but means so very much to these men and women.

Back on the bus we drove past the White House, Capital, and Pentagon. We passed the "United States Navy Memorial" and made a short stop at the "Airforce Memorial" on our way back to the airport. At the airport, we were given box lunch dinners and had a little time to visit prior to boarding our plane for Evansville. Once we were in the air, the veterans were given packages of letters that had been sent to them from family, friends, and strangers. The remainder of the flight was spent reading the letters, shedding a few tears, and enjoying the gratitude that the letters expressed.

Little did we know that landing in Evansville would not be the end of our wonderful emotional day! We were greeted by over 3,000 people all waving flags, holding up signs to thank our veterans, and cheering for them as they paraded out of the airport! One of my dad's special memories is a little girl about 5 years old holding a flag and wanting to shake his hand. He held out his hand and she grabbed his finger and squeezed. The look of happiness and love in her eyes will stay with him for the rest of his life. He was excited to see his son, daughter-in-law and so many of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren waiting for him. The band and bagpipers added to the festiveness of the atmosphere. As his guardian, I was emotional and had a difficult time keeping the tears in check just seeing and feeling the love and respect shown to our veterans.

I will forever be grateful to them for allowing my father to finally feel as if he deserved to wear the hat of a Veteran and be recognized for his service to our country during the Korean War. Dad served in the 151st Infantry Division K Company of the Indiana National Guard. His division was never called into active duty, and he received an honorable discharge after three years of service. For this reason, Dad never qualified for veterans' benefits and didn't feel he was a true veteran. Both of his older brothers served in WWII and saw active duty. In his mind, THEY were the true veterans. After receiving the gift of going on HonorFlight EVV 13, he now stands up proudly when veterans are asked to stand and be recognized.

If you know of a veteran from WWII, Korean War, or Vietnam Era please have them go to HonorFlightSI.org and register to go on this flight. There is no cost to the Veteran. If you are interested, you can register to serve as a Guardian for a veteran. I was fortunate to go as dad's guardian, but many met their guardian for the first time at the Meet & Greet dinner.



HonorFlight EVV13 Veterans at World War II Memorial
With poster of them in service.



Geard E. Mourer holding poster of himself in
Army National Guard Korean War



Terri Branson with her father in front of Lincoln Memorial.



In the Welcome Home Parade