

INDY HONOR FLIGHT 4

Leonard Schlamp

I had the privilege to participate in an Honor Flight.

I was notified a few weeks prior that I was scheduled to make such a flight on April 5, 2014.

At noon on Friday, April 4th a gentleman I had never met, Dave Potter, drove down to Evansville to take me to Indianapolis. He became my guardian for the entire event. We arrived about 4 PM in time for a "Greet, Meet, and Eat" gathering at an American Legion Post. Granddaughter Michelle drove down from Lafayette, IN and attended this. We were given box lunches and heard several speakers talk about the sponsoring organization, its history, what to expect and instructions to follow. A small military band provided music. We were issued "ditty bags" to put what very few items we would want to take along. Dave then took me to a nearby hotel where they had made reservations for me.

He picked me up at 6 AM and drove to the airport. Wheelchairs were made available and we entered the baggage claim area where some tables had been set up for breakfast for us. Getting through security was the easiest it has been since 9/11. No one had any checked luggage, we had mailed photo copies of our drivers licenses so we breezed right in.

We boarded the charter American/U.S. Air flight that was filled. There were 70 World War II veterans (66 male, 4 female), 70 guardians, and 9 other Indy Honor Flight personnel, including a doctor.

Leaving about 8:15, as the plane taxied across the tarmac there were two fire trucks that we passed between and they shot a salute of a stream of water over the plane.

The flight to Washington DC took about one hour and fifteen minutes. The welcoming we received in the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport was completely unexpected and amazing. Fire trucks did as those in Indianapolis. We walked through a welcoming committee of over a thousand people. Some military along with civilian adults and many children. They were all thanking us for our service and shaking our hands. Lotsa flags. I must admit it brought tears to my eyes. We then boarded buses and were escorted to the World War II Memorial by a Rolling Thunder motorcycle group. There we were free to move about and take pictures. It is very impressive and almost awe inspiring. I recall that prior to the construction there were some protests against it. The weather was quite cool but thankfully sunny. A group picture was taken of us holding large photos of each of us that were enlarged from old pictures in our military uniforms we had submitted.

More about my guardian. Dave Potter has done accounting work for several companies but now buys old houses, fixes them up, and sells them. He used to live in the St. Louis area and once when there was a charity auction he bid on, and won, a trip on a river towboat. He was truly my guardian. If he had to leave me for a few minutes he would make sure someone else was watching me. I used a wheelchair much more than I had expected. They kept us well supplied with box lunches, sacks of goodies, bottled water, soft drinks, etc.

From the World War II Memorial we went (by bus) to the Korean War Memorial. I had seen photos of this and wasn't too impressed but to actually see it I thought it was very appropriate and well done.

From there many went to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall and to the Lincoln Memorial. I had seen these in the past so I decided to return to the bus and try to catch a nap. Upon departing that area we took a quick tour of the city with the various building being pointed out to us. The last stop was in Arlington National Cemetery where we observed the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This ceremony lasted a little longer than I had envisioned as they also changed the memorial wreath. Each movement was precise and respectful.

We boarded the buses and returned to the airport, boarded the plane and departed a little after 7 PM. Soon after departing they announced "Mail Call". Each one of us was given a package of letters and

cards. Mine contained over eighty. Many of the letters were from family and friends but there were quite a number from people I had never heard of. It was obvious that some school teachers had told their students about the event and offered them the chance to write to us. One of my favorite such cards read:

“Dear Veteran from Luke. Thank you.” and on the inside it read: “Dear Veteran. Thank you for serving our Country. You are really brave. I think serving our Country is the most unselfish thing you can ever do. Going away from your family and fighting, risking you life. That is really cool. I hope you have a happy time with your family, friends and anybody else. I can't thank you enough for serving our country. Someday I hope to grow up and be like you. You Rock! You're the best ever!!! You're my role model!!! I want to grow up and be like you. From: Luke, Zionsville, IN. Stonegate Elementary.”

I would like to respond to some of the letters but most did not have a return address.

Arriving around 8:30 we entered the airport to a most fantastic welcoming. A bagpipe band led us to a crowd of about 4000 people who were lined up forming a corridor about 3 or 4 deep on each side and it went on and on. They were all eager to shake our hands, thanking us for our service. I hope I didn't miss shaking hands with any of those extended by so many children. My friends Dan & Diane Krupp were the first people I recognized and then there were the Kreinbrooks – Greg, Michelle, Kameron, Konnor and Kyrissa. My cousin Dr. Allen Schlamp came up from Nashville and was there. It took a while for things to settle down and then Dave took me back to the hotel. He picked me up there at 8 AM Sunday morning. Stopped at Cracker Barrel and we arrived 2911 Rugby shortly before noon. My only expense for the entire event was the tip I left the hotel maid.

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My sister, Marylee, asked about making contributions for future flights. If interested, make checks payable to Indy Honor Flight and mail to Indy Honor Flight, 9093 S. SR 39, Mooresville, IN 46158. It is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. They made no requests for contributions but I am sure they would welcome them.