

Flight of Honor

Local veterans flown to Washington, D.C.

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(McMinnville, Tennessee)

Military veterans Walter (W.M.) Bishop Jr., Levoy Leftrict and Bob Deal recently had a trip of a lifetime to Washington, D.C. on the 20th Honor Flight of Middle Tennessee.

Honor Flight is a non-profit organization dedicated to honoring America's veterans for their sacrifices. Their mission is to transport America's veterans to Washington to visit those memorials dedicated to honor the service and sacrifices they made during their military careers.

The Honor Flight Network was co-founded by Earl Morse, the son of a Korean and Vietnam War veteran, and Jeff Miller, a small business owner and son of a World War II veteran. Morse flew two veterans to Washington himself in 2004, and recruited assistance from other pilots, starting the Honor Flight Network in 2007. By 2017, there were 140 Honor Flight Network regional hubs across the United States.

The day of the flight started early for Bishop, Leftrict and Deal, arriving at the Nashville airport at 5 a.m. for a whirlwind trip to conclude at approximately 9:30 p.m. back in Nashville. While in Washington they saw many sites, visiting the World War II Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, the Vietnam War Memorial, the Marine Corps Iwo Jima Memorial, the Air Force Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

Leftrict, 75, is a U.S. Army and Air Force veteran serving from 1961-72. Due to Agent Orange exposure while in Vietnam, he developed cancer and received a medical military discharge. He graduated from Bernard High School, has a wife, Pauline, six children, 11 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He feels like it's an honor to be able to participate in the Honor Flight program.

"It was the best trip of my life," said Leftrict. "I was impressed with everything they did, and the coordination was unbelievable."

The trip was the first time for him to visit Washington, D.C., and like Deal and Bishop, he was very impressed with Arlington National Cemetery and the guards at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

"You have to see it to believe it," said Leftrict. "People travel to England to see the changing of the guards, and they should see our guys do it."

The honored veterans can bring someone with them, or a guardian will be assigned to them to make sure they get where they are supposed to be and enjoy the day to its fullest. The group enjoyed police escorts, were met at the airport by a Town Crier, enjoyed a water gun salute at the airport and support from other veterans and individuals throughout the day. Snacks were provided, and an end-of-the-day meal was enjoyed at Fort Meade before starting home.

"I was impressed with the details that went into the success of the trip," said W.M. Bishop. "We felt appreciated and that felt good."

W.M. served his country in the Korean War from 1952-54, earning the rank of corporal. He was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge for being under enemy fire for more than 30 days at Pork Chop Hill and Hill 200.

He was joined on the trip by his son Walter, who had heard about the flight and felt it would be a great opportunity for both of them.

"It was a fabulous time. For me getting to spend the day with Dad was so memorable and I recommend it," said Walter.

W.M. also marveled at the changing of the guards, remarking on their precision and the inspection of the weapons.

On this trip, they experienced a "mail call" at the airport, presenting the veterans with mail and packages. Family and friends had gotten the word and wrote letters of appreciation to them to enjoy during the day.

W.M. retired from Powermatic and currently owns and operates a company that makes and repairs replacement parts for Powermatic. He was married to the late Mary Ann Davenport Bishop, and has three children, six grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Bob Deal is an 86-year-old Korean veteran from 1950-53. He was an electronic technician, saying his training was cut short and ended with a cram session due to the start of the conflict.

"I like to say I joined the peace-time Navy to see the world and somebody had to go and start a war," said Deal. "I will have to say I have been able to get jobs based on what I learned in the service."

He worked at Cape Canaveral in 1956 before it became NASA, launching rockets and taking care of equipment showing rocket locations. This started a career of working on missiles and spacecraft all over the United States and Switzerland. He retired in 1992.

The Honor Flight was a life-changing experience for Deal, saying it made his service to his country seem more significant.

"To be honored in this way for just doing my job was humbling," said Deal. "I greatly appreciate having the opportunity to be part of this experience."

He and wife Dorothy moved to McMinnville from Florida 14 years ago and are enjoying retirement.

Applications from veterans are being accepted for the September 2018 flight. The emphasis is on terminally ill veterans, World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War veterans.

More information can be obtained by contacting Sgt. Major Larry E. Williams, U.S. Army/Retired at 931-224-3226 or tennesseans2@blomand.net.

Monetary donations are always needed and appreciated, and can be made to Honor Flights, P.O. Box 1926, Tullahoma, TN 37388.



Photos provided
Korean War veteran W.M. Bishop traveled to Washington, D.C. with his son Walter as part of the 20th Honor Flight of Middle Tennessee.



Veteran Bob Deal enjoyed visiting the many memorials in Washington, D.C. His volunteer guardian Lana Bradford helped keep him on schedule during the whirlwind trip.



All three of the veterans were amazed with the precision and dedication of the Honor Guard as they tend to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery.



Vietnam War veteran Levoy Leftrict was honored to be able to participate in the day-long trip and to be able to see the many war memorials around the city.



W.M. Bishop stands in front of the Korean War Memorial featuring 19 stainless steel soldier statues representing a platoon on patrol. The memorial was dedicated in July 1995.