



Students on tour of Washington, D.C., stop to thank veterans from Honor Flight of Central Oregon for their service.

# Never Forgotten

*Korean War veterans receive trip of a lifetime to Washington, D.C.*

By Courtney Cobb

Upon returning home, few, if any, Korean War veterans received ticker tape parades or public proclamations of gratitude. Honor Flight of Central Oregon wants to correct that oversight and ensure those veterans receive their long

overdue recognition.

"They never had a welcome home, closure or the recognition because it was the forgotten war," says Deanna Lynn Neilsen, HFCO Administrator. The Forgotten War—waged from 1950 to 1953—was so labeled due to being overshadowed by World

War II and its official characterization as a police action.

Honor Flight works to change this oversight through free once-in-a-lifetime trips to visit our nation's capital.

## A Trip of a Lifetime

In June, Honor Flight took 23 Korean War and two World

War II veterans and their guardians on a whirlwind of Washington, D.C. The began with a parade of P and Circumstance through Portland International Airport accompanied by hearty applause from fellow travelers to Washington, D.C. They were greeted with a



Top, from left, veteran Leonard Zierlein, guardian Katherine Zierlein and veteran John Meyer read their mail call packet of letters from area school children, friends and family.

Photos by Clint McAuliffe

brehtaking scene of patriotic pride upon arrival at Reagan National Airport.

"It's overwhelming emotionally," Deanna says. "It's beautiful to see how (the veterans) are welcomed and appreciated. It's a pretty amazing scene with little kids smiling and giving high fives or saluting them."

The tour's first stop was the WWII memorial where the veterans were greeted by Rep. Greg Walden and his staff. "Each veteran was presented with a flag flown over the capital and a certificate thanking them for their service to our country," says Deanna.

The veterans toured several other memorials including the Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, FDR Memorial, Air Force Memorial, and finally the Korean War Memorial. "It was priceless for the veterans to see their memorial," says Deanna. "It

meant so much to them."

The trip also included visits to the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, as well as the viewing the changing of the guard and wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

Another highlight for many on the trip was a visit to the Capitol for a private tour.

"I really liked the congressional building," says Neil Chase, HFCO attendee and Army Korean War veteran. "I liked being where it all happens, seeing the statues, the rotunda and all the heroes that were there."

Everywhere the veterans went, they were greeted by applause, salutes, and gestures of gratitude. Deanna and Clint McAuliffe, HFCO photographer and Navy corpsman, recalled a moment when they entered the Old Ebbitt

Grill and everyone in the entire restaurant stood up and applauded the veterans.

"It was something else," says Clint. "It was neat to see all the veterans welcomed so warmly as we wound our way around the restaurant to our tables."

The marching bands, rifle brigade and precise synchronization of the Marine Corps Sunset Parade at the Marine Barracks at 8th and I streets also made a lasting impression.

"It was one of the most outstanding things I had ever seen," says HFCO attendee Bill Jensen. "There were 1,000 Marines in full dress uniform doing drills."

The Air Force veteran laughed as he recalled the event and says, "They were really impressive and made me want to join the Marines instead."

Deanna explained prior to going on the trip, HFCO gathers letters to thank the veterans from kids, church groups, and friends. On the flight home, each veteran received a packet of the letters.

"This is a pretty emotional part of the trip," Deanna says. "It brings tears to their eyes because they didn't have that thank you or welcome coming home from the war."

She says veterans, guardians and volunteers alike come back with much more than memories—each feels a deep desire to relive the experience.

"The trip was so worthwhile and a great experience,"

says Neil. "I'm telling everyone I know what I have experienced and I have been encouraging them to sign up."

Bill echoes Neil's sentiments and says, "It was a trip of a lifetime and it was so impressive. Jump at the chance if you can go because it's well worth the time."

### How to Get Involved

HFCO trips are five days long with three days reserved for traveling between Central Oregon and Washington, D.C. The group has two full days to tour many sites around the capital. Up to 25 veterans and their guardians can go at a time.

"If they don't have a friend or family member to go with them, we can match them with a volunteer," says Deanna.

HFCO holds fundraisers and solicits donations from local businesses to make the trips cost-free for the veterans. For this trip, Central Electric Cooperative sponsored two veterans.

Guardians and volunteers pay their own way. The cost per veteran is about \$1,250, taking care of airfare, hotel, meals and incidentals.

"For those five days, veterans are treated like royalty," Deanna says. ■

*The next HFCO trip will be in May 2019. There are a variety of ways people can get involved with the nonprofit and help local veterans. For more information on HFCO, go to [www.honorflightofcentraloregon.org](http://www.honorflightofcentraloregon.org). The website includes applications for veterans, guardians and volunteers.*