

Aug 18, 2024

John Howerton

As I sit on my porch drinking my coffee, I am reflecting back on the awesome week I just had. I will give a few highlights so you can understand how awesome it was. The real awesome part was the fact that I was allowed to be a part of the week. Then came "early" Wednesday morning. It started around 1:00 a.m. as I had to be at the Springfield Airport at 2:30 for roll call at the [Honor Flight of the Ozarks](#). Some of you may not know what this is, but, it is 81 veterans and their guardians, plus a number of volunteers and coordinators boarding a chartered plane for a trip to Washington DC to tour a number of monuments. This is a special honor and I made it. This plane was filled with 77 Vietnam vets and 4 Korean vets. We all know that most WWII vets have all passed. But, we can't forget that they were the greatest. God Bless them all. Some of you won't understand how boarding a Freedom Bird in Vietnam for your flight home feels. Excitement, joy, happiness until you land back in the U.S.A. There you are met with protesters calling you names, spitting on you and throwing obstacles at you. We had soldiers were only doing our duty. Back to the present. When we started marching down the hall of the airport we were met by a JROTC group that gave us a special salute and sendoff. It was an awesome feeling. Once on the plane and it started taxiing down the runway, firetrucks on both sides gave us a water salute, that was also awesome. The same thing happened in DC once we arrived, firetrucks with their salute, hallways lined with people waving flags and welcoming us. We boarded four buses and got a police escort from the airport straight to the WWII memorial. Again, awesome. People standing on the sidewalk waving and cheering us through. The WWII memorial is a beautiful site. Of course, the one that struck me most was the Vietnam Wall. There are two Monett High School men on that wall. I found them both and they are heroes. We visited a number of other monuments and came to the Tomb of the Unknown and watched the changing of the guards. That was an incredible viewing. Those guards are so precise and disciplined. Once we finished, we again boarded the plane to head home. On the trip back, we had a mail call. Some may not know what that is, but, a soldier does. We had an envelope packed with letters from family, friends and even some people I did not know. It was an excellent way to spend the last hour of flight. Yes, there was a lot crammed into one day, but, it was worth every minute. Arriving back in Springfield after 10:00 we were once again greeted with a band and honor guard, plus around 2000 people who lined the walkway as we walked through. You will never know the chills that creep up your spine through all of this. I did not mention all the monuments of this trip but they all had a special meaning. Now you know why my past week was such a blessing. From a Vietnam veteran of 1968 returning home and being spit on, called names and obstacles thrown at them to the wonderful tribute is amazing. I urge ALL veterans if you have not signed up for this flight, do so. You won't be disappointed. Check out Honor Flight of the Ozarks, a great organization. I need to say thanks to a number of people who made this possible for me and I am thankful from the bottom of my heart. The Honor Flight of the Ozarks and all their volunteers, Bill Cox of Springfield who helped me sign up for this trip, my family(they were all behind me all the way, start to finish, special thanks to Kathy as she put up with me during this time of preparing), my coworkers, as they supported this trip with enthusiasm and gave me a departure party before I left, friends all over who wished me well, and also everyone who took the time to send a letter or card to the mail call. I also want to say thank you to Tim Holmes as he was my guardian for the trip. I hope I am not leaving anyone out. Now you know why I have had such and incredible, awesome week.