

Honor Flight...

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Eldon said that the Iwo Jima Memorial was his favorite because it salutes the Marines during the time that he served. Allen said it's quite an optical illusion as you drive by... it looks as if the flag is being raised.

"The Price of Freedom Memorial was very moving," Eldon said. "There are 4,000 stars, each representing 100 Americans who were killed in combat."

And of course, there was the long-awaited WWII Memorial. Congressmen Bruce Braley and Dave Loebsack came to greet the Veterans as they came to see the memorial for the first time.

"I can't get over how well organized it was," Allen replied. "There were three buses and each bus had a captain. Those captains followed us pulling coolers on wheels filled with water."

He continues, "They gave everyone a disposable camera with free development by Hy-Vee. And the Cedar Rapids Corvette Club gave each WWII veteran a plaque with their name on it, thanking them for their service and as a reminder of their Honor flight. Talk about royal treatment! I just can't express how grateful we are."

Unfortunately, Allen didn't get to spend a lot of time at the Vietnam Memorial. It was late in the afternoon and they had 40 minutes before they had to board the buses. He told his Dad to sit down in the shade and enjoy himself. He said he ran by the Lincoln Memorial and snapped a couple of photos and made it to the Vietnam Memorial in time to snap a couple of photos. But, as he said, this was his Dad's day.

Eldon said he talked to seven different people while he was waiting for Allen to return. Everyone was there for the same reason and they were all equal. He explained it quite well...

"Nobody is different. It's like sitting here talking to you like I've known you for 20 years. You put them all in the same bag and everybody comes out at the same time."

And talk about deja vu...

Eldon ran into an old Central City classmate, Clifford "Junior" Henderson, whom he hadn't seen since they were sophomores in high school.

When Alan got out of the service, he went to UNI, and a classmate across the hall had just gotten out of the Marines. And yes, you guessed it, they ran into



The Cedar Rapids Corvette Club gave each Veteran a plaque commemorating their flight and service to their country.

each other on the trip. His friend, Dale, was taking his father-in-law on the Honor Flight.

All the while we were talking we were looking at the photos of their trip. There was a photo of Eldon with a lovely woman with a crown, so I had to ask...

"Now who is this you're with?"

"Oh, that's Mrs. America," Eldon grinned. "I have two photos with her. I don't have to worry about anyone being jealous," he chuckled.

What a great guy, I was sure having a lot of fun. He is quite a character.

Alan told me about the greeting they received upon arriving at Dulles International Airport.

**"...Spending time with your Dad... priceless."
Allen Akers**

"There was this little old lady (he showed me the picture); she was a WAC in WWII and she had her uniform on. I couldn't help but go up to her, gave her a hug and thanked her for her service. It was just so emotional."

After a whirlwind day, it was time to board the airplane for their flight back to Cedar Rapids. And there was also an Honor Flight there from Missouri.

As soon as everyone was on board, it was time for mail call. Family members were instructed to write letters to their veterans to be read on their way home.

"I was so darn broke up," Eldon recalls. "The guy sitting next to me said, 'You're not very damn tough are you?' I said, 'No, and you're not either, are you?' We were both sitting there crying."

"I talked to a guy across the aisle," Allen said. "He was shaking his head and had tears in his eyes. It was a very emotional

time for all of them. That generation was so modest about what they had accomplished. You didn't hear much about it growing up. The outpouring of emotion on the plane coming home was just something else. This was their day and it was just great."

Allen said he was talking to one of the ladies from the Honor Flight organization earlier in the day. She told him that a veteran who had taken the April flight had anonymously donated \$50,000 to the organization because he was so impressed at how well things were done, and so that they could get another flight going.

"That was really cool," Allen said. "There are so many WWII Veterans; I just hope that they all get to go."

When they finally arrived at the Eastern Iowa Airport, Eldon said that he and Allen were the first through the doors of the terminal.

"There were rows and rows of people," Eldon explained. "And my family was right there in front!"

Allen said there was such an outpouring of emotion and support, it was very emotional. The crowd included the Knights of Columbus, family members, members of the patriot guard, police officers, firemen and reservists... it was just amazing... and also members of the community. It's just hard to put your feelings into words.

I hope I conveyed to you how Eldon and Allen felt as they made this wonderful trip together. I know from talking to them that it was very emotional for both. They were both very jovial and made me so very welcome in their home. Thank you so much, Eldon and Allen, and thank you for



Eldon at the Price of Freedom Memorial... 4,000 stars, each represents 100 American killed in combat



It was an emotional welcome as they entered the Eastern Iowa Airport.

your service to our great country.

I will finish by leaving you with one thing that Eldon and Allen each said.

"If anyone here doesn't think that they live in a great country, they should walk down the streets of any town, and be very thankful for the freedom you have."

Eldon Akers, WWII Veteran

"It reminds me about those commercials... Spending the day with your Dad... priceless!"

Allen Akers, Vietnam Veteran

Every time I talk to someone who has gone on an Honor Flight, it gets more and more phenomenal. Maybe I should put it on my bucket list?

Eldon and Allen also want to thank the Linn County Fair for their part in making this trip possible. If you get the chance to donate to the Honor Flight Or-



Eldon and Congressman Dave Loebsack in front of the World War II Memorial.

ganization, please do so.

For more information on the Eastern Iowa Honor Flight e-mail them at

info@eihonorflight.org; or write to them at: Eastern Iowa Honor Flight, P.O. Box 10704, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52410.

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