

DESTINATION: D.C.



World War II Memorial - Rick Latoff/American Battle Monuments Commission

HONORING THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SAVED THE WORLD

Veterans, students share memorable experiences

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Staff Writer

LYNDON—It was the biggest war, the deadliest conflict in human history, involving 100 million military personnel, and led to the death of more than 70 million, mostly citizens.

Around 16 million Americans participated in World War II, which never reached the continental U.S., but very well could have.

More than 11 million served in the U.S. military between 1939 and 1945 — 671,000 came home wounded; 450,000 didn't come home at all.

Many that did return slipped right back into their daily lives, saying little of their involvement in the most monumental and devastating global conflict ever.

Ves Koehler, 85, Wellington, did just that for more than 60 years after serving in World War II, sharing nothing of his experiences and his feelings.

"He didn't talk to anybody about any of it," Brian Spencer, Koehler's nephew, said.

That changed when Koehler and his family visited an open house at McConnell Air Force Base in 2007, where he encountered the bomber he flew in as a tail-gunner in the war.

"He just started telling grandkids all these stories," Spencer said. "That's some family history that needs to be passed on."

Spencer came across an article about the recently completed WWII memorial in Washington, D.C. That

helped him plot a course.

"The article was about it being built, and that most of the people it was built to honor will never have a chance to see it," Spencer said, thinking of his uncle who had recently suffered a stroke at a family gathering, but had forgone treatment to spend more time with his family. "These people, this generation, is dying, and we need to pay tribute to them."

The First Trip

Spencer began planning a family trip to take his uncle to the memorial. He was planning logistics for taking more veterans when he got the idea to get high school students involved.

Spencer, who serves as superintendent of Lyndon Schools, soon held a meeting for those interested in going. Thirteen students and their parents attended the initial meeting.

"We started planning and didn't have any idea where we'd get the money," Spencer said. "We had a couple meetings and fundraisers. It fell into place when we got some television coverage."

The school had delayed asking veterans until they were sure they could send them, but went ahead and asked two veterans whom the students knew, to appear on the show, Harold Lusk, of Osage City, and Edna Meyer, of Burlingame.

"They showed up and gave the best interviews," Spencer said. "That ran [on TV] and it really took off. Money started to flood in a bit."



The school now had funds, students and veterans to take a flight. Working out the logistics on the other end of the trip was a whole other problem.

"I turned on the radio in the car, and Dr. Dobson was interviewing Earl Morse about a program called Honor Flight," Spencer said. "I wrote down the number and called. Morse called me back an hour later. After that, I was ready to buy airplane tickets."

The trip began organizing veterans, student chap-

ones, adults and medical staff to go on the trip.

"We always travel with a doctor and two medical staff," Angie Payne, veteran coordinator for the Lyndon flights said. "You have to have appropriate staff. You have to have as many wheelchair pushers as wheelchairs. We don't want to overwhelm the group."

Planning included the need to complete the entire trip in a day, which included a non-stop flight from Kansas City to Baltimore.

"You can't make a change-

over with 35 85-year-old people running down the concourse," Payne said.

The group was to leave for their first flight at 3:30 a.m. on Nov. 7, 2007. Payne arrived at the school early, but wasn't the first at the site.

"We pull into the parking lot an hour before we were to leave, and there were veterans waiting then," Payne said. "You could get there an hour and a half before that, and there would be veterans sitting there with their coffee yelling, 'What took you so long?'"

The veterans arrived in Baltimore and took buses the last 30 miles to the WWII Memorial in Washington, D.C. The Lyndon group was joined at the memorial by former U.S. senator Bob Dole, U.S. Representative Nancy Boyda and U.S. Representative Jerry Moran, all on hand to honor the veterans.

The group spent a few hours at the memorial before bussing back to Baltimore and flying back to arrive in Kansas City at 11 p.m. The final leg to Lyndon

was by bus.

"They're long days, but nobody feels it in the morning," Payne said. "They don't even stop to think about it. The excitement's so high, and the veterans are having such a great time talking to students and other veterans. No one feels too tired until we get off the plane in KC."

For the veterans, the excitement can begin well before the trip, and last long after.

"Most of them don't sleep the night before because they're so excited to go," Payne said. "And they don't sleep the night after because they're excited to talk to their families."

Despite the long night, Bill Patterson, student coordinator for the trip, woke up at 5 a.m. the next morning to meet a group of Lyndon veterans at the coffee shop in Melvern with a copy of *The Kansas City Star* which featured the previous day's trip.

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12/99 - 12/00	4.79%	30.5%	3.39%	-0.06%
12/00 - 12/01	5.30%	30.5%	1.56%	2.12%
12/01 - 12/02	1.92%	30.0%	2.38%	-1.04%
12/02 - 12/03	1.46%	28.0%	1.88%	-0.83%
12/03 - 12/04	1.15%	28.0%	3.26%	-2.43%
12/04 - 12/05	2.00%	28.0%	3.42%	-1.98%
12/05 - 12/06	3.30%	28.0%	2.54%	-0.16%
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**Sources: CD rate averages from The Wall Street Journal. Internal Revenue Service inflation rates are based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) a measure of change in consumer prices as determined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
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