

## Local WWII Veteran Takes Nostalgic Trip to DC

Each year, over 600 World War II veterans die each day. In late 2004, physician assistant Earl Morse wanted to help his aging VA patients to visit their memorial before it was too late for them to travel. He wanted this to be done completely free of cost to the veterans and their families. The program quickly grew into the tremendously heartwarming and successful organization it is today. Each year, over 95,000 World War II veterans join each other & family or friends in flying to Washington D.C. to visit the WWII Memorial. These flights are made possible by the selfless and determined folks running the Honor Flight Network out of Springfield, Ohio. This month, one of our own local veterans got the chance to fly from Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport to visit the WWII memorial.

Richard Jacobs, 92 served in the US Navy from November of 1944 to June of 1946. Mr. Jacobs described “two lucky breaks” on why he believed he survived WWII. The first came in second grade at St. Mary’s K-12 (at the time) school when Sister Antonita kept him in second grade two years in a row. This meant Richard did not graduate high school until he was 19. This also meant he could not join the military until he graduated high school which was 1944 instead of 1943, a year in which he believed he surely would not have made it home alive had he been in Okinawa then. After graduating, he worked on Henry and Elizabeth Hilgert’s farm south of Bird Island until he was drafted in November of 1944. After two other duty stations, Richard eventually received orders to Okinawa midway through 1945. To get to Okinawa, he and nearly 3000 other men (Skylighters.org, 1945) spent their summer traveling from Port Hueneme, CA on the SS Sea Devil. While en route to Okinawa, the war ended and Richard distinctly remembers the smell of gun fire and having to “duck below deck while dodging bullets, rockets, tracers, and anything folks could their hands on to celebrate.” His second “lucky break” came while he was stationed in Okinawa just weeks after the war ended. Richard happened to break his leg after only a week in port. He was put to work in the Duty Office and required to stay in a quonset hut (“which was much safer than the tents the other seabees were in”) and he’s darn lucky because only a couple weeks later the island was hit with a typhoon that injured dozens of folks and damaged dozens of boats as well. Richard left Okinawa in May of 1946 by boat to San Francisco, then by bus and train he arrived home to Bird Island to settle down and raise his family of 11 children, 33 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren with his late wife.

Only two weeks ago, Richard Jacobs took his Honor Flight out to our country’s capital with his daughter Betsy. They experienced a full day of memorial and monument visits. The group got to see many memorials and monuments including the Women’s Memorial, the Korean War Memorial and Arlington Cemetery, but the most emotional and exciting for Richard was seeing the World War II memorial. Richard was incredibly impressed and emotionally overtaken by the beauty and care that has gone into this memorial. The memorial takes up about “eight blocks of Bird Island” and Former Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole greets hundreds of people there everyday. The veterans are near and dear to Dole’s heart and Richard beamed with gratitude and pride when describing that the former senator posed for photos and chatted with vets throughout their visit. The veterans sang many songs together throughout the day, sharing in

the strength and comradery that remains after so many years, even with strangers. The lyrics of “Anchors Away” took Richard and his fellow veterans back in time as they sang loud and clear,

“Blue of the Mighty Deep; Gold of God's Sun  
Let these colors be till all of time be done, done, done,  
By Severn's shore we learn Navy's stern call:  
Faith, Courage, Service true, with Honor, Over Honor, Over All.”

Richard still has most of these songs memorized and maybe if you ask nicely and share some popcorn with him, he'll serenade you as he did for me. The Honor Flight was “very emotional and we enjoyed the Honor Guards everywhere throughout the day.” Richard recounted that his experience in Okinawa and seeing “the terrible devastation” of war and combat up close came back to him that day but because of the amazing job the Honor Flight folks did, he was able to create new memories associated with WWII at the beautiful memorial with family and new friends.

If you know a veteran from WWII or the Korean War and would like them to join the ranks of those taking Honor Flights every year, please visit their website for more information or you could always stop and chat with Richard Jacobs when he's doing one of his 2-mile-long strolls through town and ask him about his experience.