



Compass Pointe Veterans on the Cape Fear Honor Flight

By Tom Peters and Gayle Pfeiffer



The inaugural Honor Flight of the Cape Fear area took wing on April 30th, carrying nine Compass Pointe military Veterans from Wilmington to Washington D.C. The Compass Pointe Veterans were John Field, Bob MacFarland, Craig Park, Tom Peters, Gayle Pfeiffer, Winston Robotham, John Rupp, John Simmons, and Rik Williams. There were a total of 75 veterans from the Cape Fear area, including four WWII Veterans.

The planning for the entire trip was monumental. The send-off from ILM included remarks from local dignitaries, scores of volunteers, fire department water cannons over the aircraft, and so much more. We flew on a chartered airplane and toured D.C. in buses. Our day included a tour of Arlington National Cemetery for the Changing of the Guard. Each Veteran received a U.S. Flag and a blankets inscribed with Honor Flight, and each Veteran had a personal guardian for the entire day.

We were just starting to settle in for the plane ride back, when the cabin lights came on and Ruth Smith, president of The Cape Fear Honor Flight, said, "We have some unfinished business." She said it was known that soldiers who were away from home loved to get mail more than anything else. At that point, each Veteran received their own manila envelope with lots of mail!

Arriving back at ILM after a 16-hour day, we disembarked and were welcomed by bagpipes and buglers as we made our way through the narrow corridor. Reaching the hallway, we were greeted by flag bearers with the message: "Welcome Home! Thank You For Your Service!" Sailors saluted as we passed by. Entering the main terminal, the volume increased from the hundreds of people who had gathered to greet our arrival, holding signs that said, "Thank You, Veterans." They shook our hands, they cheered, they clapped, hooted, hollered, patted us on the back, and said "Thank You!"

Here are recollections of our trip from some of the Compass Pointe Veterans who attended this memorable event.

Craig Park

"I have to say it was an extreme honor to be selected for the inaugural Honor Flight of the Cape Fear Area, taking our Veterans and Guardians to the nation's capital to tour all of the war memorials.



In hindsight, the trip could have taken at least another day to allow for more time at each of the memorials, but given the time constraints, it was tremendous that we were able to visit as many memorials as we did.

"Our day started off at "O-Dark-Thirty," with arrival at ILM and the initial boarding process, which at first reminded me of a military operation with everyone grouped together, trying to get their boarding pass and get through the TSA security check. Once inside the terminal, everything seemed to run fairly smoothly for the remainder of the day. The leadership team of the Honor Flight of the Cape

Fear Area (HFCFA) did an excellent job making sure that everyone's needs were met, and everyone was made to feel extremely special.

"Each of the Guardians did a yeoman's job to ensure that their Veteran lacked for nothing and kept us on schedule.

"All of the mementos that we received, and there were several, will be greatly cherished in years to come as I reflect back on the trip and all the people that made the trip so special.

"People that are close to me and know me well, know that I do not get excited over most things, but when I entered the terminal after we deplaned, I was almost moved to tears at the sight of all the individuals from the community and Compass Pointe that turned out to greet us. I will always remember the trip to Washington, D.C., but the most treasured moment will be the faces of all those greeting us and thanking us for our service to the country—that was priceless."



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Bob MacFarland

“The whole experience was one I will never forget. I must admit, though, that the reception line at ILM and the mail call we got were what got to me the most. I realize much of the expression there was directed more to those more directly involved in conflict than I, but I did what I was asked to do and am proud to be connected with all the Honor Flight honorees.”

John Rupp

“It was my first time visiting Washington, D.C. and I feel truly blessed to be a part of the inaugural Honor Flight from Wilmington. I felt like I was walking on sacred grounds when visiting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, World War II Memorial, and Vietnam Wall. It was



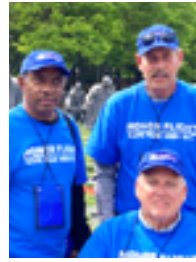
a very, very special day. I would like to thank the Cape Fear Area Honor Air Leadership Team for their time and effort in putting together this flight for the area Veterans.”

Tom Peters

“The Honor Flight experience far exceeded my expectations. It was gratifying that so many people did so much to show their appreciation for our service. The genuine expressions of gratitude were very heartwarming. Visiting the memorials in itself was inspiring because we shared commonality with those that went before us. Some folks called us heroes, but as Dick Winters said in the HBO series *Band of Brothers*, ‘he was not a hero, he served in the company of heroes.’ The reception at the airport when we returned was unbelievable. So many people with such enthusiasm was overwhelming and very emotional for me. It was a day I will never forget!”



Rik Williams



“I had the very unique experience of being a part of the recent Cape Fear Area Honor Flight. I’m not exactly sure what I was expecting, but I was truly blown away. We had nine veterans including myself from Compass Pointe, and each of us was assigned a guardian to watch over us and to make sure we didn’t get lost. The experience for me was powerful—not just due to the many Washington memorial sites we visited, but more so for the many friendships we developed. The other veterans and the guardians made our trip so memorable. Yes, the memorials themselves, the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, these were awesome. But the one-on-one talking with others and the camaraderie was so amazing. We shared our stories and re-lived many experiences. This was a day I will long remember.”

Gayle Pfeiffer

“The entire day was truly exceptional. The planning, organization, attention to detail and above all, the heart, which went into this Veteran’s Honor Flight experience, is beyond a few words.

“While having lunch at the Air Force Memorial, I was approached by a younger woman who called me a “bass!” I said, ‘Thank You!’

“During the flight back to Wilmington, the cabin lights were turned up. The Cape Fear Honor Flight President, Ruth Smith, started describing when each of us was overseas, in a foreign land and how, way before the Internet and cell phones, mail call was the most important event of our day. That thought then initiated the passing out of thick, large envelopes—with mail inside—to each of us. It was impossible to hold back the emotions upon opening up cards from my best friend of over 50 years, my brother, sister-in-law, my niece, and

her family. Cards from firefighters, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and hand-drawn pictures and words from school kids were literally stuffed into these manila envelopes.”

