

Morton veteran Bill Evans selected for honor flight



Courtesy photos

Honor Flight recipient Bill Evans was accompanied by volunteer guardian Kary Gibson of Graham on his weekend trip to visit veterans' monuments, museums and memorials in Washington D.C.

BY CATHY KANE
The East County Journal

Since the Honor Flight Network was founded in 2005, the nonprofit organization dedicated to providing veterans with honor and closure has paved the way for over 200,000 veterans to visit and reflect at the 17 military monuments, museums and memorials in Washington D.C.

Last month, 80 year old Morton resident Bill Evans, who also lived in Mineral, was one of 110 Washington state, Texas and Colorado veterans chosen for this once in a lifetime experience.

"It was a great honor to be selected – absolutely wonderful, emotional, overwhelming, more than I expected," Evans said. Evans said his experience began with meeting the 22 World War II, 19 Korean War, and 10 fellow Vietnam veterans from Washington state for the 5:30 a.m. Alaska Airlines flight from Sea-Tac Airport to their hotel accommodations in Baltimore, Maryland.

Each veteran was assigned a volunteer guardian for assistance during the weekend, he said. His guardian was Graham resident Kary Gibson.

"The weekend was grueling, but we were in wheel chairs and the guardians made it as easy as possible. We were treated like royalty. There were fire trucks on either side of us and people waving flags when we arrived in Baltimore," he said. A police escort with sirens led the way during the subsequent trips to Washington D.C.

While the weekend was full of poignant experiences, Evans said, one of the most memorable for him was watching a 100 year old World War



Selected Washington state Honor Flight recipients wore red shirts while volunteer guardians could be identified by blue shirts during their visit to Washington D.C.



PHOTO BY CATHY KANE/The East County Journal

Honor Flight recipient Bill Evans with his Great Pyrenees service dog, Dugan.



The Vietnam Veterans Memorial includes the names of 58,000 servicemen and women who gave their lives during the Vietnam conflict.



The Iwo Jima Memorial is the largest bronze statue in the world and depicts the photograph of six American soldiers raising the American flag after the battle of Iwo Jima during World War II. Sixty thousand American soldiers fought in the battle with 6,821 killed and 20,000 injured.

II Navy nurse push the wheel chair of a 97 year old survivor of the Bataan Death March during a memorial viewing.

"There was also a 97 year old on the trip who was shot down over Normandy. I was one of the younger ones there," Evans said.

For Evans, whose 20 years career in the Navy included 13 months in Vietnam and exposure and re-exposure to the herbicide and defoliant chemical Agent Orange, it was the visit to the Vietnam Memorial Wall that impacted him the most. While he had been in the area before, he was never able to emotionally handle the visit to the wall until this trip, he said.

"Most guys try not to be emotional, but it was easier with the group. Everyone around me was emotional so I did not try to hide it. I had two names I wanted to look up, but I just couldn't do it."

Back home in Washington state and reunited with his bride of three years, Betty Trembley and his faithful Great Pyrenees service dog Dugan, the father of four daughters, grandfather of three grandsons, and great-grandfather of three great grandsons, said he will never forget the Honor Flight as he continues to live as a viable community member and citizen. From delighting kids in Mineral in his role as Santa Claus to serving on the elder board at the Longview Presbyterian Church to helping fellow veterans and enjoying an occasional fishing trip, Evans is making the most of his life and his opportunities.

"We recognize our mortality. We don't know how long we have, but I make the most of the time I do have. I am a religious person. If it wasn't for Him..." he reflected with emotion.

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