

SW Elks and Joe Handerhan Escort Veterans to D-Day Memorial

On Thursday June 4, The Elks hosted a contingent of veterans from the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Salem Virginia and the Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke Virginia at the National D-day memorial in Bedford Virginia. We toured the memorial and then ate lunch at Liberty Lake Recreation area. Though the weather started out ominous, it turned out to be a really nice event and I think everyone enjoyed the visit. I'd like to take a moment to thank the following Elks for their support in making this event a success: From Lodge 197, Jim Wiles, Mark Castillo, Donna Castillo, and Dallas Jarrell. From Lodge 2348, Bob Burwell; from Lodge 2656, Karen Burwell; and from Lodge 2844, Keith Campbell. A special thanks to Keith Campbell who was instrumental in helping to find us lunch and a venue at which to eat it. Thanks Keith! In addition, I would like to thank the Staff at both facilities for helping to coordinate things and get the Vets safely to and from the memorial.

I had a fantastic time and look forward to visiting the memorial again. We had the opportunity to visit with some very interesting people including Mr. John Kessler. Mr. Kessler was a First Lieutenant and a paratrooper attached to the 29th infantry division, 509th parachute infantry regiment during WWII. His unit was the first unit to make a combat jump during the war. He participated in multiple campaigns including North Africa, Anzio, The invasion of Normandy, Belgium (The Battle of the Bulge) and France (Bastogne.) His awards include the Combat Infantry Badge, Two Purple Hearts, Two Bronze stars and five Battle Stars.

I snapped the photo to the right just prior to embarking on our tour. On the left is our tour guide Mr. Bob L. Vandelinde. Bob is a veteran of the Korean War and was attached to the 187th Airborne. Bob was a Sergeant First Class and participated in several critical battles of the war including Wonju, Kaesong and "The Bloody Inje" among others. His awards include the Silver Star, Three Purple Hearts, Two Battle Stars and the Combat infantry badge. He has written three books about his and other soldier's experiences in the Korean War. His titles include "A Tribute to Lincoln County Veterans", "Respect: Forgotten Heroes" and finally "Korea, Why were we there? What were we fighting for?" Bob is a fascinating man and gave an excellent tour. His knowledge of the history of D-Day was unsurpassed. I was also proud to meet him and look forward to seeing him again in the future. Sitting to Bob's left is Mr. Kessler.



One more Veteran I would like to mention is Mr. Bud Brody (Right). Bud is a WWII Veteran of the coast guard. Many people don't realize the instrumental role the coast guard played in the invasion and other theatres during the war. They drove the Higgins Landing Craft that brought the soldiers to the beach. They also pulled over watch while the Higgins craft made their way to shore. Bud served his time in the Pacific Theatre from 1942 to 1946. His unit was attached to the fifth fleet out of New Guinea. Among the other invasions he took part in while hopping across the pacific was the invasion of the Phillipines. I was equally proud to meet Bud. I'll never forget the story he told of the Kamikazes smashing their aircraft into the Higgins craft in a last ditch effort to make an impact. He and I both had tears in our eyes. Mr. Brody is 91.



Finally, I'd like to take a moment to say a bit about the invasion: In the early morning hours of June 6th 1944, the invasion began. The invasion required the coordination of 5,000 ships, 11,000 aircraft, and over 150,000 service men from 12 countries. When the battle was over approximately 4,413 Allied soldiers lay dead. This number is an estimate as many of them were never accounted for. The invasion was the turning point in the war. Never again would Hitler's army have the dominance over Europe that they had prior to the invasion and it was only a matter of time before the Allies would March into Berlin. The sacrifices that these men and women made should never be forgotten, lest we once again find another evil tyrant knocking on our door.

Thanks to all of you for your service. There is an inscription at the foot of the Overlord arch (right) that reads "In Tribute to the Valor, Fidelity and Sacrifice of Allied Forces on D-Day June 6 1944." The Photo below shows the memorial to the fallen soldier in the foreground with the top of the sculpture "Over the Top" which depicts the 75th Ranger Battalion climbing over the top of Pont Du Hoc. The inscription is barely visible carved into the granite floor in the foreground.



I highly recommend that everyone visit the Memorial.
As always, thank you for your service to our veterans