

## On Memory Ryan Eisenman

On the 10<sup>th</sup> Never Forgotten Honor Flight, everything went according to schedule. We visited each memorial in succession, spending one to two hours at each, and always returning to our appointed bus at the appointed time. But at the National World War II Memorial, there was a slight interruption to the schedule. This interruption, though, was beneficial to both the veterans and the guardians on the flight, because it offered proof that a remembrance of the past is often more important than a focus on things in the present.

The National World War II Memorial was the first stop of the day, and was also the site of the group picture. 99 veterans made their way off the bus and into memorial in anticipation of the picture, which would take place before they were given the opportunity to fully visit the memorial. They were put into order by local photographer Dave Junion, who has been on every Never Forgotten Honor Flight as official photographer. With everyone in place, cameras clicked, and the veterans and their guardians were then ready to explore the memorial. But first, someone had to be remembered. One of their own.

There were to be 100 veterans on the 10<sup>th</sup> Never Forgotten Honor Flight. But one, a Navy veteran of both World War II and the Korean War named Philip Schonfield, passed away before being able to go on the flight. But the organizers of the Never Forgotten Honor Flight made sure that Philip's memory was still brought to Washington D.C. To the sound of "Taps," a photograph of Philip and a folded flag were paraded in front of the veterans, who one by one raised their arms in a salute to their fallen comrade.

For Arnold "Mel" Gruening, the moment was especially poignant, as he had known Philip his whole life. "We went to school together, church together," he later remembered. "I was surprised. I didn't know that they were [honoring Philip's memory]. I was very surprised." As we sat on a carved bench in the crook of one the memorial's ramps, Mel talking about their chance meetings while in the

service, I glanced up toward the place that Philip's picture and flag had been placed. Within the National World War II Memorial, there are 56 pillars, each engraved with the name of an American state or territory from World War II. The Wisconsin pillar is located near the top of one of the spiral ramps at either end of the memorial, and next to the pillar was placed Philip's picture and flag.

What was even more astonishing was the line of veterans going up the ramp. One by one, each veteran in the line had their picture taken next to the pillar. To my knowledge, many of them did not even know Philip, but still, they came. Rather than meander through the memorial, or insist that their picture be by the pillar alone, they proudly stood by Philip. They chose to remember him.

And that is the purpose of our national memorials. Remembrance. And the purpose of the Never Forgotten Honor Flight is to make sure that America's veterans, specifically central Wisconsin's veterans, know that memorials exist for just that reason. They can return home knowing that, even after they pass away, there will always be a place for posterity to gather and remember their sacrificial actions. Our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, will too someday travel to Washington D.C., and view the 4,048 stars affixed to a wall representing the memory of the 404,800 American casualties of World War II. They will walk among the 19 larger than life statues of American soldiers in Korean brush, and catch a glimpse of their life in that war. They will gaze over the solid black wall engraved with 58,272 names and reflect on the time of the Vietnam War. And the memory of our nation's past, and the dedication of its individuals, like Philip Schonfield, will live on.