

The Bandera PROPHECY

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When monuments come to life
Flying with Honor Flight San Antonio

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Across our great country there stand numerous monuments erected to the memory of men and women who served and often died for our country. Growing up in New England, I remember that every town had a monument dedicated to members of the community that served in a particular war or conflict. I often reflected upon the statue atop the monument of a warrior dressed in the uniform of that time and imagined who they were and what their individual story was.

Imagine with me for a moment standing in front of some of the most famous military statues and monuments in our country. Imagine the figure atop coming to life or the name on the wall taking form. Standing before you now is a Marine who fought at the battle of Iwo Jima or an Army Soldier who thwarted the Nazi push in the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. Maybe it's a Navy Medic with the Frozen Chosin or an 18 year old from Iowa who was one of the last gunners to ever fight as a member of a bomber crew in the Asian Theater. Picture the warrior being a Nurse from China Beach or a survivor of the Tet Offensive or a POW who became a prisoner fighting to make others free. What would you ask them? What stories would you hear? Who would they be and where would they come from? What happened to them after the war?

At 4 a.m., on Friday, 8 Sept. 2017, that image became a reality for me as I reported for duty to serve as a Guardian assigned to an Air Force Veteran of the Korean War who was being provided the "Trip of a Lifetime" with Honor Flight San Antonio. At the Airport I was introduced to 40 separate volumes of real American history. Each one

offered me a different perspective on what it was like to live through various battles and operations I had merely heard of in school or read of in books. They offered me chapters on events and battles known only to them, those who had served with them and hidden in secret government archives.

In addition to stories of war they also shared stories of love. They shared stories of high school sweethearts that married and remained faithful through years of absence and had celebrated 65 years till death did they part. There were stories of GIs restored to health by nurses that never gave up on them, and the GI who in return persisted in his pursuit of love till the nurse said yes to him in front of family and friends. With each passing hour and each story told, the statues of warriors I recalled from my youth became more and more real and alive. As we visited service memorials to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, I gained a new respect and appreciation for the service members of my own family had given.

While at the WW2 Memorial, the pillars took on the personality of men, like PFC John Valls of Laredo Texas who served under General George S. Patton and liberated Buchenwald Prison. At the Korean monument, the bronze sculptures spoke to me as I listened to Major Jim Creswell tell stories that led him to be awarded the Korean Medal of Honor with five stars. In listening to the stories of Lt Eleanor Bjoring, I could truly feel the emotion depicted at the Vietnam Memorials Nurses monument. Finally at the Tomb of the Unknown, I stood in silent reverence as I saw the emotion and memories come flooding silently back to these 40 veterans and heard from my Veteran SSgt Reuben "George" Harvey, who had been a gunner on a B-29 doing night time bombing runs over the Korean Peninsula, how it had taken him years to truly gain an appreciation for his own service due to the climate of a war weary country who had lost its respect for those who served that made those who sacrificed hide their service.

As the mission came to an end on Saturday evening, 9 Sept., with Honor Flight San Antonio's return to the San Antonio Airport, I watched as these heroes finally received the welcome home that had been denied

them for so long. It reinforced my own feeling that in these men and women lied the true embodiment of service and that it is they who deserve, more than I, the handshakes and thanks I had receive every day as a Veteran from a citizenry that once again has regained its appreciation for those, that in the words of Col Nathan R. Jessup from the movie "A Few Good Men", "...provide the very blanket of freedom we rest under each night." This experience inspired me to become a full member of the Honor Flight Family as part of the Welcome Home Team and has afforded me volumes of more stories from the mouths of granite warriors, and men and women fashioned in brass that bear a heartbeat I will never forget.

If you value the warmth of that blanket and wish to repay a little bit of gratitude owed to these living monuments of American history, then I challenge you to volunteer. Contact the Honor Flight Network to find a group near you and join what is truly the Trip of a Lifetime. Go on to their website and apply to be a guardian and experience for yourself this once in a lifetime opportunity to share the lives of these living storybooks.

However, do not stop there. Go down to your local Soldiers Home, VA Hospital, or nursing home. Drive down to your local VFW, American Legion, and just listen. You will hear stories you will find nowhere else that may soon be lost to time if no one will listen. We all enjoy telling our own stories, as is evident by the popularity of social media. Consider though that if we want others to listen to us we must listen to others as well and who better to hear from than those that have lived the lives depicted by and memorialized by statues in our nations parks. Provide for them that sense of appreciation that has been denied them for so long. I challenge you to be the tickertape parade at the end of the Honor Flight for just one living American statue.