

Honoring Veterans Day

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BKDer Mary Anne Parrish joins father, a Korean War veteran, on the 2021 Honor Flight Bluegrass trip.

At 17 years old, a young Howard Swartz enlisted in the U.S. Navy and soon became RD2 Radarman Howard Swartz, serving throughout the Korean War.

Howard's daughter, BKDer Mary Anne Parrish, recently had the opportunity of a lifetime to accompany Howard on the October 20, 2021, flight to Washington, D.C. as part of the **Honor Flight Bluegrass mission**.

The day began with a 5:00 a.m. check-in at the Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport, where veterans were greeted with coffee, doughnuts, and dozens of smiling faces thanking them for their service. The 15 World War II, 43 Korean War, and 22 Vietnam War veterans were accompanied by a guardian (family member or friend) or provided one through the Honor Flight Bluegrass volunteer network. As Howard's guardian, Mary Anne was responsible for ensuring his safety throughout the day.

"Guardians are there to meet the needs of the veterans, which could include taking photos for them, listening to their stories, or getting them bottled water," says Mary Anne.

After the group landed and was warmly welcomed at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, they were separated by bus and driven to each of the Washington memorials as part of a day of tremendous thanks and remembrance. The buses parked close enough at each destination so that each monument could be easily accessed by those in wheelchairs and those able to walk.



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Howard and Mary Anne started their journey at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, where they witnessed the **Changing of the Guard ceremony** and three of the trip's veterans were included to place a wreath of honor. Next, they traveled to the World War II Memorial, where they were greeted with cheers and flags upon arrival. There, Howard and Mary Anne's group had lunch at the World War II monument, enjoyed the energetic song performances of the Ladies for Liberty, and had their photo taken in front of the Kentucky monument at the site. The day carried on with visits to the Korean War Memorial, Vietnam Memorial Wall, Lincoln Monument, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, and the Iwo Jima Memorial.

Howard was both in awe of the beauty of the Korean War statues and memory wall and taken back by the number of young lives lost.

"My dad is a private man and never talked about his time serving while I was growing up. His experiences and the things he's seen are unimaginable. While he's traveled a great deal throughout the world, he's never visited the monuments in Washington. To share that opportunity meant more to both of us than you can imagine," says Mary Anne.

Mary Anne was humbled to be in the company of so many heroes, the oldest of which was 97 years old. The day's emotions varied from monument to monument, as tears were shed, memories of friends lost were shared, and a dose of laughter had as veterans remembered some of the antics needed to make it through the day.

"The most touching experience was visiting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier," says Mary Anne. "All you could hear were the birds chirping and the sounds from the ceremony when the Changing of the Guards began. Their precision was incredible."

While visiting the Arlington National Cemetery, they also witnessed a horse-drawn caisson traveling to its final resting place and learned the cemetery had purchased additional ground to meet the needs of our veterans.

After a full and emotional day, the Honor Flight crew returned to the Louisville airport around 9:45 p.m., where the veterans were welcomed by a 1000-strong group cheering and waving flags in their honor.

"It was the most unforgettable day. To experience this through my dad's eyes will live in my heart forever," says Mary Anne.

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