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YOU!

Friday, October 31, 2008
THE NORTON TELEGRAM
Page 5



One of the most awesome sights in Washington, D.C., is the memorial dedicated to the veterans of World War II. Three Norton area veterans were on the Sept. 10 'Honor Flight' that took them to see the memorial. It was a tearful but memorable journey. — Courtesy photo

A tearful but memorable journey

By BRANDY LEROUX
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"The World War II Memorial was absolutely wonderful to see," said Eugene Wiltfong, Norton.

"I was really touched by Arlington National Cemetery, overwhelmed by how many have sacrificed for our country," said Max Schmitz, also of Norton.

Both men, World War II veterans, were chosen to join the "Honor Flight" to Washington, D.C. on Sept. 10. The flight takes veterans to the nation's Capital to see the memorial that was dedicated to them for their service to the country.

The trip was organized by Pat Hageman, Plainville, his sister and brother-in-law, Kathy and Randy Geish, Natoma, and his brother, Tim Hageman, Hays. The entire trip, which cost about \$86,000, was provided to the veterans totally free of charge — thanks to donations from area businesses, individuals and fund raisers from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. One doctor and two nurses went along on the trip in case medical needs with the veterans arose.

These two men joined about 100 other veterans from northwest Kansas on the trip. "[Representative] Jerry Moran went out of his way to be cordial and welcome us to the Memorial. Pat and his family can't be praised enough for all the work they did, and Jerry Moran deserves a big thanks for helping plan the trip as well," said Mr. Wiltfong.

The veterans met 18 high school students from Plainville at 3:30 a.m. One of the students was Mr. Wiltfong's granddaughter, Jordann Wiltfong. They all boarded a bus to Hays, where they picked up more veterans and students going on the trip. From there, they rode the bus to Salina and boarded a plane to Washington, D.C.

When leaving the plane at Reagan National Airport, they were given "The Royal Treatment" by the airport staff. They were lining the way, cheering the veterans and handing out souvenirs.

They met Congressman Moran and former Senator Bob Dole at the World War II Memorial. They toured the site, as well as the Iwo Jima Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery and the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Bill Patterson, a Lindon High School teacher, had been to Wash-

ington, D.C. three times before and acted as the group's "guide" though the city.

The veterans landed back in Salina that evening at 9:30 to a big welcoming party. The South East Saline High School Marching Band was there playing patriotic songs, St. John's Military Academy students were lined up in the shape of a "V" and waving American flags, the American Legion Riders, about 800 Salina citizens, were cheering them as they debarked the plane.

"It brought tears to my eyes," said Mr. Wiltfong.

Mr. Schmitz agreed, saying "It was very emotional."

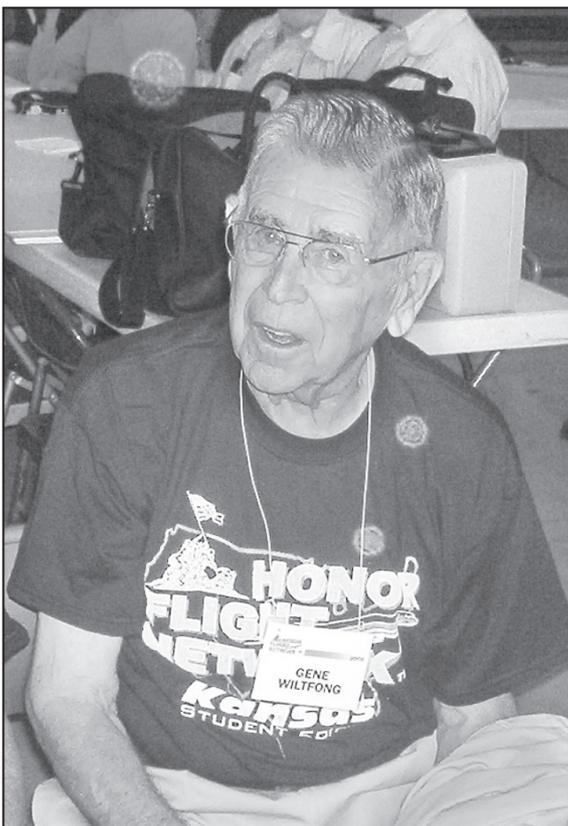
Mr. Schmitz had been stationed in Washington, D.C. during his tour of duty.

"I was amazed at all the changes from when I had been there last," he said.

Mr. Wiltfong served in the United States Army from August 1944 to August 1946, most of the time of which was spent in Japan during the occupation. Mr. Schmitz also served in the United States Army from 1942 to 1945.

The travelers. . . .

Gene



Eugene 'Gene' Wiltfong, Norton, viewed the WWII Memorial Sept. 10 with several other veterans from northwest Kansas.

— Courtesy photo

Max



Max Schmitz, Norton, was one of the northwest Kansas veterans on the trip to Washington to view the WWII Memorial.

— Courtesy photo

Charlie



Charlie Long, Stuttgart, was also on the Honor Flight that took World War II veterans to Washington, D.C. to see the memorial constructed in their honor.

— Courtesy photo