

'Greatest generation' deploys again

A trip to WWII and Korea memorials with the veterans who fought is a moving honor



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It's not surprising that Honor Flight Long Island is so beneficial to the veterans whom the program takes to memorials built in their honor. Many of the World War II and Korean War veterans, now in their 80s and 90s, could never make the trip without the planning, competence and care the leaders and volunteers provide.

What was surprising Saturday, as the group executed its 38th such mission, is how beneficial Honor Flight Long Island was to its volunteers, and to everyone else the veterans came into contact with.

The worshipful attitude often adopted toward the "greatest generation," those (mostly) men who fought in World War II and Korea, then came home and built the post-war America, can feel like false idolatry. Certainly, they battled long and hard at war, and

worked long and hard in peace, but does that make them somehow better than the following generations, which also produced so many fantastic soldiers and wonderful citizens?

The answer came after nearly 20 hours with them, in airports and buses and parks and memorials, amid sweltering heat and the minor irritations of travel: Yup.

They are embarrassingly superior to the generations that have followed. Brimming with gratitude and patience. Easy to please and difficult to aggravate. And as concerned for the younger people on the trip to care for them as those younger people were concerned for the veterans.

The National World War II Memorial in Washington was completed in 2004. A veteran who was 20 when the war ended was then 79. The national Honor Flight organization and the Long Island chapter, which has served 1,455 veterans in 10 years, were created to help the veterans visit their memorial comfortably and safely and for free. Korean War veterans and their memorial are



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Ed Cartoski, 94, of Greenport, was an aviator in WWII and Korea. See more images of local veterans: newsday.com/opinion

a big part of the program's twice-annual trips, according to Honor Flight Long Island president Bill Jones. And the group is beginning to transition to serving Vietnam veterans, too.

Walking bleary-eyed into Islip's MacArthur Airport at 6 a.m. Saturday, I expected cavernous silence. I was greeted instead by an ebullient Jones overseeing a pre-dawn festival. Boy Scouts and current service members gave out handshakes and

cheers, and Girl Scouts offered up all that and boxes of cookies, too. Hundreds of people were there for the send-off, as there would be after 2 a.m. when we returned, three hours late.

Each veteran was pushed in a wheelchair as much as he or she would allow and escorted at all times by "guardians." One such volunteer was assigned to each veteran. Some were family members, but many were just strangers moved by the oppor-

tunity. Washington, with its monuments and memorials and the mall, always has a weight and dignity to it. Yet seeing the Arlington National Cemetery with veterans whose comrades lie buried there and the war memorials with the veterans they honor is a far more moving experience, and a treasure.

But so were moments spent with these old warriors in buses and planes and airports.

"What a sandwich!" Korean War veteran George Krug of East Farmingdale exclaimed repeatedly to his guardian, volunteer Melissa McNamee of Holbrook, as he ate his Arby's box lunch. Other veterans murmured appreciative agreement.

These veterans slogged through their wars and service, and then they came home to the daily grind of jobs and family. They put their backs into it, into life. They learned how to "hurry up and wait." And they made for us a life and a nation so much more comfortable and easy than the one that formed them.

We should be grateful to them. And far more like them.

Lane Filler is a member of Newsday's editorial board.



GETTY IMAGES/KOREAN CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY



AP/GETTY IMAGES/SAUL LOEB

North Korea's Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump tentatively plan to meet June 12 in Singapore.

tions in a thoughtful, rational manner.

Carl Borruso, Valley Stream

As I look at President Donald Trump's handling of the North Korea problem and Kim Jong Un, I'm reminded of the biblical King Solomon. He threatened to chop a baby in two as

two women fought over the child. He decided in favor of the woman who protested the most. Solomon's bluff worked.

Donald Trump pulled a bluff and at stake were some cities in the United States and the Korean Peninsula. Millions of lives were at stake. A nuclear holocaust was at stake. Yet, some people think this presi-

dent deserves a Nobel Prize!

Some people may thump their chests and say, "That's our boy. He was the tougher guy!" But this kind of toughness does not give life. Trump should realize that the world is not one of his failed casinos.

The Nobel Prize does not belong to a person who gambles with millions of lives.

Gordon Stewart Smithtown

Basketball Hall of Famer Dennis Rodman has visited North Korea five times, starting during the Obama administration in 2013. He last went in June 2017, ostensibly to promote basketball. Rodman, a friend of Kim Jong Un, claimed that he helped gain the release of Otto Warmbier, the American student imprisoned in the country who died of neurological injuries after returning home to Ohio. But U.S. officials in both administrations said Rodman did not represent the U.S. gov-

ernment during his visits.

I'm skeptical. I'm reminded of this year's film about Moe Berg, "The Catcher Was a Spy." The former major-league player spied for the United States during and after World War II. He reportedly was sent to Zurich in 1944 with instructions to shoot a German physicist if during a speech, the scientist hinted he was building an atomic bomb. No shooting occurred.

Has Rodman been working for the U.S. government? It took 20 years before Berg's exploits were revealed in a book.

Donard Pranzo, Port Jefferson

Why only one LI school in top 100?

The May 9 news story "LI schools make top 200 in U.S." reported that only one Long Island high school made the top 100 in the rankings by U.S. News & World Report. Jericho High School placed No. 98, a

drop of 31 places from last year.

We pay some of the highest school taxes in the country, so we should expect great results. Fifteen other high schools in New York State placed higher than our best high school. Frankly, I expected better.

Gary Anderson, Smithtown

A fairer way to assess homes in Nassau

In Nassau County, let's put aside property tax reduction companies and lawyers, and let's consider fairness ["A plan for property tax relief," News, May 6]. We need no studies, and we do not have to allocate money. Just charge each home 1.5 percent of the sale price. Easy, fair and equitable.

Len Masucci, Westbury

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