

# **World War II, Korea and Vietnam War veterans get hero's welcome at Baltimore airport**

LINTHICUM - As the orange glow of sunrise breached the horizon at Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport Oct. 21, waiting travelers watched a Southwest Airlines jet taxi beneath a water cannon salute from the airport's fire department.

"Good citizens of Maryland, travelers from afar," announced Fred Taylor, a St. Mark, Catonsville, parishioner and City of Annapolis town crier. "I bring news of great importance! Now arriving in the airport terminal: Honor Flight Cleveland, carrying veterans from World War II, Korea and Vietnam!"

Well-wishers, volunteers and active military personnel cheered, waved flags and held thank-you signs. Many in a crowd that numbered hundreds deep reached out to shake the hands of beaming military veterans as they came off the airplane from Ohio.

The flight's arrival was the first of seven scheduled for "Super Saturday," a day when four or more flights carrying veterans travel to the region for a day visit to Washington, D.C.

Honor Flight Network is a non-profit organization whose mission is to sponsor and coordinate trips for aging veterans to see the monuments built in memory of their dedication and sacrifice.

Charles R. Cole, a Purple Heart recipient, was overcome with emotion as his son, David Cole, rolled him in a wheelchair past the cheering crowd.

"My dad was shot five times, and now he has five kids," said David Cole, his voice cracking.

The trip was vitally important to Robert Dunn Jr. The Vietnam war veteran was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer, and plans to make what will most likely be a final visit to see the grave of his father, Robert Dunn Sr., at Arlington National Cemetery.

David Branstetter, a Navy special operations sniper and multiple Bronze Star recipient who served in Vietnam, wore his green military utilities complete with a beret, combat boots and numerous ribbons, pins and patches spanning his 30-year career from 1961 to 1991.

Conts Booth served with the Navy Seabees at the Battle of the Coral Sea in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War. His grandson, Scott Mills, said his grandfather was making his first plane ride at 101-years-old.

For veterans who travelled alone, Naval Academy midshipmen acted as their companions.

"You never know what they've gone through until you hear their stories," said Naval Academy junior Evanne Gillert, who serves as a companion.

Gillert remembered a Korean War veteran she accompanied last year to Washington who cried when he found his friend's name on the Korean memorial.

Carrie Carter, a St. William of York, Baltimore, parishioner, volunteers with the ground crew. She also volunteers with the United States Organization (USO), welcoming home military personnel from Iraq, Afghanistan and other tours of duty.

Some 200 Honor Flights arrive at BWI between March and November, Carter said, with a break in the summer to avoid the intense heat.

"It makes me smile for the rest of my day no matter how bad it's going," she said of her service. "This is my passion."

Carter was inspired to be a ground crew volunteer because of her former husband's experience in Vietnam.

"We have a lot of bad memories," Carter said, as she talked about how the aftermath

of war took a toll on her marriage. It's her objective to make sure all veterans feel welcome.

Taylor, the town crier who adds his talents to the arrival ceremonies, recalled an Honor Flight a few weeks ago in which he met 91-year-old Marine veteran, Judd Lebowitz, who served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, F-Company. From just yards away, Lebowitz said he watched his countrymen raise the U.S. flag on Iwo Jima during World War II.

"I was awestruck," Taylor said. "It was hard to imagine meeting someone like that."

The arrival ceremony ended with the town crier ringing a hand bell as he led veterans to waiting tour busses near the baggage claim area. Approximately 100 Naval Academy midshipmen and military personnel saluted as the U.S. Park Police led an all-day escort for the veterans.

"It's all worthwhile," Taylor said, acknowledging the smiles and tears evident on the faces of the veterans.

*For more information, visit Honor Flight Network at [HonorFlight.org](http://HonorFlight.org), or on Facebook by searching Honor Flight BWI.*

*To view more photos, visit our Smugmug gallery **here**.*