



BADGER HONOR FLIGHT MISSION #35
APRIL 20, 2019
EARLY FRIDAY AM TO LATE SATURDAY PM and BEFORE

It Was A Terrific Day

A Badger Honor Flight mission starts with caller training. The volunteer callers contact the veteran, guardian and alternate contact to invite them on a Honor Flight. They also update veteran information. I am proud to say the file accuracy was excellent. Kudos to Lauren, her team and all of our Badger Honor Flight callers for getting the first part of the Spring flight season off to a great start.

The next big part of our mission preparation was guardian training and the veteran meet and greet. Mike, John and their team warmly greeted the veterans and guardians. Volunteers were on hand to register the veterans and guardians and check the accuracy of our records. Bev, Cate, Julie, Dr. Sanford and the medical support team reviewed information with veterans, guardians and observed. Our physical therapists and students provided the practical training to the guardians; a critical contribution for a successful honor flight. Shari and her team made sure the veterans and their guardians had the proper size jacket and shirt for the flight. Doug and his team did the planning for our return to Cuna, and prepared materials for the guardian training and veteran meet and greet. Jody, Courtney, Cheryl and Steve B conducted classroom training for the guardians while Steve D interviewed the veterans for future Facebook posts.

Friday, the day before the flight, the "wheelchair crew" begins their work at 8 am. The crew inspects, repairs and cleans the wheelchairs then moves the chairs out of the BHF room to a predetermined area on the terminal floor for inspection by TSA. At 9 am Marnette, Hazel and Ann arrive to prepare the mail call. They also are preparing for the Saturday morning registration of our veterans and guardians. At 10 am 500 chairs arrive. The wheelchair crew begins setting up 200 chairs for the Saturday morning Send Off, and store the remaining 300 chairs for the Welcome Home. The wheelchair crew knows where to put the chairs because Shari and Eileen have marked the spots on the floor with blue tape. At approximately 11 am the wheelchair crew departs for lunch (a very important part of the preparation). They rotate between Slices and Villa Tap; two great supporters and sponsors of BHF.

During the noon hour more volunteers arrive. This includes AT&T volunteers, flight coordinators, members of the BHF Board, the medical team members and others. They are there to make sure all the items that are going on the flight are prepared and stored in totes. They sort the water into coolers, fill the swag bags, and make sure the veteran and guardian jackets and caps are in their proper pouches. During this time the make-up guardian session is held and airport personnel have been putting up banners, hanging the large US flag, setting up tables and chairs, and responding to requests of BHF staff. By mid-afternoon things are pretty well taken care of, and all items are put back in the BHF room.

On Saturday morning people began arriving before 4 am. AT&T volunteers are ready for registration, Maria and the Red Cross volunteers are setting up the morning refreshments, and I'm enjoying my requested jelly filled bismarck. Ann is registering the volunteers at the check-in table while Rachel and Darcy are getting all the Send Off volunteers prepared at their assigned posts. Shortly after 4 am the bus captains and medical volunteers are receiving their briefing. Don M is handing out assigned radios and providing instructions to those who need it.

By now the veterans and guardians are arriving and getting registered. They're greeted outside by Don S and a group of volunteers including the American Legion Riders, Waunakee Boy Scout Troop 46, and numerous BHF volunteers. The veterans and guardians are directed to the proper line for registration by Manny and his

AT&T assistants. They are then registered by AT&T volunteers. Once provided their jacket and cap the veteran proceeds to have his/her picture taken. The veteran and guardian then proceed to get some refreshments, and find their assigned zone for seating. At this time folks are milling around, visiting with the veterans and guardians, and answering questions.

The Send Off program began with the playing of "Reveille" by Misty Johnson, the presentation of Colors by the Waunakee American Legion Post 360, the singing of our national anthem (by two veterans and a guardian who are going on the flight), an invocation by Sister Georgeann Roudebusch, and a welcoming speech by Brigadier General Gary Ebben, Deputy Adjutant General for the Wisconsin Air National Guard. Past President and Chairman emeritus Brian Ziegler was presented with Wisconsin flag, and a certificate from his old unit, the 147th. The flag was flown over the Wisconsin Capitol in a UH-60 Blackhawk. Brian was a crew chief on a Blackhawk in Iraq and he will also be presented a US flag that will have been flown over the US Capitol on April 20, 2019. Both of these flags and the certificate were in recognition of Brian's 9 years of service to Badger Honor Flight. Shortly after 6 am we began loading the plane, and we were wheels up at about 7:20 am.

This flight to Washington D.C. was unique since we had entertainment from the Badger Honor Flight "Vet-Guardian Trio". Veterans Art Carson, Dave Dybdahl and Guardian Tom Bennett (who had sung our National Anthem at the Send Off) gave us a lovely rendition of "Oh What A Beautiful Morning".

We landed at Ronald Reagan airport and were greeted by a band, our D.C. based Badger Honor Flight volunteers in their "Bucky" red BHF volunteer shirt, and many well-wishers. We loaded the buses with our supplies and passengers and our day in D.C. began. It was a perfect day in Washington D.C. Our bus drivers and Park Police provided safe transport throughout the day. We visited the Iwo Jima, Lincoln, Korean, Vietnam and WWII Memorials as well as Arlington Cemetery. We observed the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The afternoon was filled with blue sky, fluffy clouds. There was lots of color provided by thousands of tourists, green grass and green trees. The cherry blossoms were gone, but the flowering crab trees were plentiful. If you were unable to travel with us in person, you were still able to be there by following us on Facebook. Steve D and Alexis were posting pictures and video throughout the day.

Before we knew it we made our last stop at the Air Force Memorial. It is a beautiful setting overlooking the Pentagon and Washington D.C. skyline. Then it was back on the bus and back to the Ronald Reagan Airport. With the plane loaded and after a light meal, it was time for mail call. During my past flights by the time we had mail call it was dark outside and was pretty quiet on the plane, but not this time. We were happy to have bright sun, blue skies, and more billowy clouds. Inside the plane the sound of happy conversations filled the air all the way home. It was early evening and we would be arriving home, at 7:15 pm, instead of the normal 8:45 pm.

We arrived home and our veterans and guardians began leaving the plane. They were greeted by some of the staff who had been on the trip with them, and other volunteers. After a short wait they proceeded out of the secure area. Our veterans were welcomed home by Brigadier General Gary Ebben who shook their hand, and presented them with a Badger Honor Flight coin. Our veterans moved toward the escalator or elevator to make their way down to the first floor where they were greeted by thousands of people. Jaclyn, Sasha and the Welcome Home Team had prepared the airport terminal area for a thunderous Welcome Home. *Ladies Must Swing* set the tone with military and swing music. Bucky Badger, Maynard the Mallard, Badger Honor Flight Alumni, family, friends and thousands of well-wishers greeted our veterans. I can't estimate how many thousands of people welcomed home our veterans. I can say it was one of the largest, if not the largest, Welcome Home crowd I have seen.

I was adjacent to General Ebben as he welcomed home our veterans. One of the Veterans, a Vietnam Veteran, looked me square in the eyes and said, "**Thank You, We Needed This**".

Thank you all volunteers, supporters and sponsors.....**They needed this !!!!!!!**

Sincerely,

Tom Cantwell, Interim Chairman
Badger Honor Flight
April 24, 2019