



UPDATE: Local World War II vets tour D.C.

By DENNIS MAGEE, dennis.magee@wcfcourier.com | Posted: Tuesday, May 15, 2012 12:45 pm

WASHINGTON, D.C. --- Veterans from Northeast Iowa are exploring the National World War II Memorial, taking photos and remembering events that played out around the globe nearly 70 years ago.

The experience is proving emotional for some, particularly guardians escorting their older friends or relatives who served.

"Man, this is something," said Herbert Krueger, 88, of Oelwein. "I tell you, I just can't believe it."

He served in the Army, first in Alaska and then Italy.

"We finished out the war there," he said.

Krueger remembered a friend who did not come home.

"I lost my radio man. He died about 2 feet behind me."

Alfred Steffen, 87, of Dunkerton, was also in the Army. He served as an aircraft mechanic in South Korea.

A daughter, Helen, 54, served as his guardian and helped get Alfred on the plane. The family also had wanted Alfred's brother, Joseph, to go as well.

"Joseph passed away in December and didn't get to come," Helen Steffen said.

That motivated Helen to make sure her father did take advantage of the opportunity.

"As it got closer, we just decided to do it."

Tom Crandall is accompanying a friend, Daryle Fox, 87, of Fayette. He, too, was remembering someone who could not participate, his father.

Crandall's father passed away years ago, but still served as inspiration for Crandall's trip.

"It's a tribute to him, and also to get Daryle here."

Earlier story: Local World War II vets take flight from Waterloo to D.C.

WATERLOO, Iowa --- Dozens of local World War II veterans fulfilled a long time ambition, taking off from the Waterloo Regional Airport this morning on the latest Honor Flight.

"I've been thinking about it for three years," said Cecile Rediske, 88, of Waverly.

She served in the Women's Air Corps during World War II and was among the 85 veterans gathering before 5 a.m.

"I'm so proud of her," said Julie Brunscheon, 55, Rediske's daughter.

Though the fourth Honor Flight organized out of Waterloo, Barbara O'Rourke said coordinators had little trouble rallying volunteers, donors and community leaders once again.

Two aspects are slightly different than previous trips, though. For starters, organizers used a different chartering company.

"So we have all new people we are working with," O'Rourke said,

The guest list is also somewhat unique in that nearly every veteran is accompanied this time by a friend or family member. Previous Honor Flights relied on volunteers who did not necessarily know the veteran they served.

"That's been really nice," O'Rourke said. "That's the special part, when they can go with friends or family."

There are exceptions. Cecil Kepler of Cedar Falls, an Army veteran, for instance, is traveling with his neighbor, Vicki Baldwin. And Richard Brom of Waterloo, also an Army veteran, is accompanied by a co-worker, Lynor Koch.

Dennis Meehan, 86, of Waterloo, served more than two years as a part of a crew on a U.S. Navy Grumman TBF Avenger, a carrier-based torpedo bomber. Sitting as he waited to board the plane for Washington, D.C., Meehan spotted a few familiar faces in the crowd. He also noticed many of the veterans needed a bit more help.

“Quite a few of them are in wheelchairs,” he said. “I guess I’m lucky to be able to walk.”

A fellow veteran was scheduled to go with Meehan on the Honor Flight, but fell victim to ill health and had to cancel.

“I imagine you get to this age, that happens,” he said.

The Honor Flight is scheduled to return to Waterloo at 10:15 p.m. tonight.