

# HAAO

HUMANA ACTIVE OUTLOOK® MAGAZINE  
FALL 2008

- ◆ The Healing Power of Friendship
- ◆ 7 Tips for Writing in Retirement
- ◆ WWII Veterans Honored Through Flight

## Don Fightmaster The King of Single Swing





# ★ HONOR FLIGHT ★ SERVES WORLD WAR II VETERANS

BY RENEE BRINCKS



## NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

The WWII Memorial opened in 2004 to recognize the 16 million who served in the United States Armed Forces during the war, as well as the 400,000 who died and all who supported the war effort from home. Set upon 7.4 acres between the Washington and Lincoln monuments, the memorial features two pavilions, 56 granite pillars, and the 84-foot Freedom Wall with 4,000 gold stars honoring the fallen. For photos and information, visit [www.wwiimemorial.com](http://www.wwiimemorial.com).

**H**umana member Melvin J. of Norfolk, Nebraska, was on a ship to Japan when the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. He was in Tokyo Bay when the subsequent peace treaty was signed. During six years in the U.S. Army, he also escorted the remains of fallen soldiers back to America and served in the Philippines.

Still, when he visited the National World War II (WWII) Memorial in Washington, D.C., through the Honor Flight Network, Melvin was overwhelmed. "I got some tears," says the 81-year-old veteran. "I didn't expect it to be that big or that beautiful. It was just a pleasure to be there."

Melvin and his twin brother, Marvin, were among 102 Nebraska and Iowa veterans traveling to the memorial free of charge in May with the Honor Flight Network. The national organization takes WWII veterans to see the monument built in their honor.

## ★ HONOR FLIGHT HISTORY

Retired Air Force Captain Earl Morse was a physician assistant for the Department of Veterans Affairs when the WWII Memorial opened. He was struck by his patients' desire to visit but recognized that most lacked the resources to get there. He decided to help.

When Morse, a private pilot, offered to fly two patients to the memorial, their tearful gratitude inspired him to seek additional volunteer pilots and donations. In May 2005, 12 veterans traveled to Washington, D.C., on Honor Flight's first tour.

Today, the organization has 73 hubs in 31 states and expects to carry 10,000 veterans to the capital this year alone. "It's incredible. I had no idea that it would become this big, this emotional, or this moving," says Morse.

Volunteer escorts and medical professionals accompany each group with wheelchairs and oxygen tanks available for veterans in need. Each Honor Flight journey is covered by local donations; the cost per participant ranges from \$275 to \$800.



## ★ A TRIP TO REMEMBER

At least four flights are slated to leave Nebraska in 2008, thanks to the support of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), various public and private donors, and Humana, which sponsored two fundraising concerts there.

The night before the first Omaha flight, participants enjoyed a celebratory dinner complete with WWII-era music by Omaha's Avi8ors Ensemble and Patriot Guard escorts. The event was "a box-of-Kleenex moment," according to Humana MarketPOINT's Connie Emanuel.

"Some of the veterans were spry. Some were in wheelchairs. But the moment they saw those flags, their shoulders immediately went back and they were at attention," she says. "It was just amazing." The veterans from the Omaha area landed in Washington, D.C., at 10:30 the following morning and headed for the WWII Memorial.

Two hundred schoolchildren greeted them there. "They shook our hands, hugged us, and thanked us for our service," says Melvin. "It was outstanding." Humana member Harlan H. of North Platte, Nebraska, also was impressed with the memorial's Freedom Wall.

"There were 4,000 gold stars representing the 400,000 people who died," says 82-year-old Harlan, who served in Okinawa, Japan. "It's a tremendous thing to see."

After meeting Senator Bob Dole and the entire Nebraska congressional delegation, the group visited the Korean War, Vietnam, and Marine Corps War (Iwo Jima) memorials. At Arlington National Cemetery, they viewed the Tomb of the Unknowns and the changing of the guard.

At 7:00 p.m., the veterans left for Omaha, sharing war stories all the way home.

## ★ FOREVER GRATEFUL

Harlan is quick to thank all who made his trip possible. "It took a lot of work to get us all coordinated, and they are to be commended," he says. "We had outstanding service."

"I can't thank Humana enough for what they've done for World War II veterans," adds Melvin.

Trip sponsors are just as happy to be involved. "This generation is one of the greatest," says Emanuel. "To give back in such a meaningful way gives all of us a sense of pride."

For Honor Flight founder Earl Morse, it's simply about showing gratitude. "On the flight back, every one of those veterans has a personal realization of how revered, cherished, honored, and loved they are by this nation," he says.



PHOTOS: Jon Golden



★ Opposite Page: Melvin holds an American flag the Nebraska veterans brought for the wreath ceremony at the memorial. Above: Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska welcomes Melvin and Marvin to the memorial. Below: The Avi8ors bring back fond memories of WWII-era popular music.

**① FOR MORE INFORMATION** The Honor Flight Network Website, [www.honorflight.org](http://www.honorflight.org), includes information about the organization plus upcoming flight schedules, photos, merchandise, and instructions for donating or sponsoring a flight. Interested veterans and volunteers can access application forms on the Website or by calling Honor Flight at **937-521-2400**.