

Ridlen, Lawless return from Korean War Honor Flight

Written by Wauneta Breeze
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Bill Lawless, left, and Ray Ridlen traveled to Washington, D.C. last Tuesday on a Korean War Veteran Honor Flight organized by Patriotic Productions in Omaha. In this photo Lawless and Ridlen are wearing medals of thanks for their service in Korea. Lawless was presented his medal in front of the Korean War Memorial by South Korean Major General Shin Kyung Soo. (Sheri Hink-Wagner | The Wauneta Breeze)

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

Patriotism is alive and well in Nebraska. Bill Lawless and Ray Ridlen of Palisade traveled to Washington, D.C. last Tuesday on a Korean War Veterans Honor Flight organized by Bill and Evonne Williams of Patriotic Productions in Omaha.

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Ridlen and Lawless were two of 462 Korean war veterans who traveled to the Capitol to see their war memorial and other sights in Washington, D.C. A Patriotic Productions news release issued prior to the flight stated this Honor Flight is the single largest Honor Flight group in the history of the Honor Flight Network, which was established in 2005.

While at the Capitol Ridlen, Lawless and their fellow veterans visited the Korean War Memorial, World War II Memorial, Iwo Jima Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery for the Changing of the Guard and the Air Force Memorial.

“I really appreciated it, thankful they let us do it,” expressed Ridlen.

Ridlen’s favorite part of the trip was getting to see the Korean War Memorial and Lawless said the best part was, “getting to go on the trip.”

Each veteran traveling on the Honor Flight received a medal of thanks. The medals were made from barbed wire in Korea. The back of the medals were engraved with, “Thank you. In recognition of your dedicated services during the Korean War, this medal is specially crafted with a piece of rusty barbed wire from DMZ in the center. June 25, 1950–July 27, 1953.”

While most veterans received their medals in Omaha upon returning home, South Korean Major General Shin Kyung Soo presented Lawless with his medal in front of the Korean War Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The two Korean veterans served their country many years ago, but the thank yous they received as part of the honor flight were still very much appreciated.

Ridlen served in Korea from June 1953 until October 1954. He was stationed right behind Heartbreak Ridge where he worked in artillery.

Lawless was in Korea from October 1953 until August 1955. He was stationed at the 38th

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parallel for the first eight months and then was stationed at the headquarters in Seoul.

Long days

The Honor Flight consisted of long days, but Lawless and Ridlen said the experience made the following exhaustion worth it.

While on the trip, Lawless and Ridlen were able to catch up with an old friend, Irvin Fletcher. Fletcher attended school with Ridlen and Lawless, but Ridlen said he hadn't seen Fletcher since then. Fletcher now lives in Taylor, Neb.

The veterans gathered in Omaha on Monday, March 24 where they attended a banquet welcoming them to the trip. The evening featured welcome and thanks from several dignitaries including Governor Dave Heineman.

Tuesday morning, Ridlen arrived in the ballroom of the hotel shortly after 1 a.m. CT after sleeping for just a couple hours. The 462 veterans then traveled to Epply Airfield and took off for Washington, D.C. at around 5:30 a.m. CT.

While the veterans were in D.C. their family members enjoyed a day of activities around Omaha including a trip to the Joslyn Art Museum, lunch at Bella Terre, movies, massages and entertainment at the Ramada. They also made signs to welcome their veterans home and then traveled to the airport to greet them in person.

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Massive welcome home

After touring the Capital they arrived back in Omaha at around midnight where they received a resounding welcome home. The Chief of Police at the airport told Evonne Williams with Patriotic Productions there were approximately 4,000 people in the airport welcoming home the veterans.

“The welcome home was the icing on the cake for many of the veterans. It’s something they will remember for years to come,” said Evonne Williams with Patriotic Productions.

The trip was made possible by over \$500,000 in donations and arranged by Patriotic Productions. The 462 veterans were accompanied by 104 volunteer medical professionals and volunteers on the trip. The veterans and those accompanying them traveled from Omaha to the Capitol on three chartered planes—one red, one white and one blue. Lawless and Ridlen traveled on the red plane.