

2023

ANNUAL REPORT
HONOR FLIGHT CHICAGO



10,000 VETERANS ... AND BEYOND

HONOR FLIGHT CHICAGO BECOMES THE FIRST HUB IN THE NATION
TO RECOGNIZE MORE THAN 10,000 SENIOR VETERANS

OUR JOURNEY TO 10,000



June 11, 2008

Honor Flight Chicago's first flight (all WWII veterans)



August 7, 2013

50th flight



April 13, 2016

First Korean War veterans fly



October 6, 2021

Operation HerStory flight with all female veterans



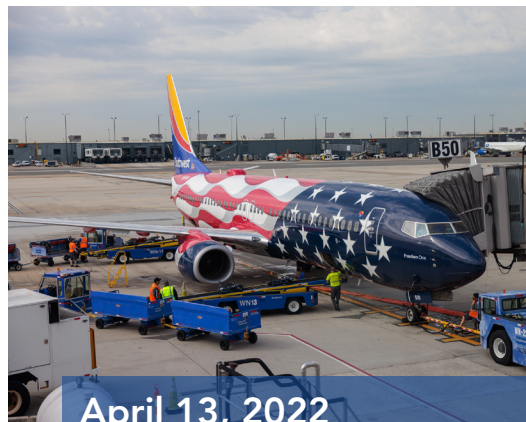
June 5, 2019

First Vietnam War veterans fly



May 10, 2023

10,000th veteran flies



April 13, 2022

100th flight

OUR JOURNEY TO 10,000



10,523

Total veterans flown
Most of any hub in the nation



6,346

WWII veterans flown
Most of any hub in the nation



2,206

Korean War veterans flown
Most of any hub in the nation



1,971

Vietnam War veterans flown
Most of any hub in the nation



681

Veterans flown this season



6

Flights flown this season



1

Postponement this season



“I needed the Honor Flight. I needed that void filled. I was finally and properly welcomed home from war.”

That was the message we received soon after HFC106 from Vietnam Veteran Bill Starr. He was one of 113 Veterans aboard our season finale, and one of 790 total veterans we honored over seven flights in the 2022 season. Each and every one of those heroes needed their Honor Flight Chicago experience, and we are so deeply proud of our entire organization from top to bottom for providing it.

One WWII, 8 Korean War and 104 Vietnam War veterans flew to Washington, D.C., on an unseasonably chilly day to close out our 2022 campaign. With their Welcome Home at Midway, we flew 12 WWII, 64 Korean War and 714 Vietnam War veterans all told this year. That’s nearly 800

lives directly impacted by the sincere and heartfelt love and gratitude our volunteers bestowed upon our heroes. It’s also the most veterans we have honored in one year in a decade!



“I will tell every veteran I see that they MUST go. I felt like I was going to the Academy Awards, like a walking, talking Elvis Presley.”

MARTIN FOLEY

VIETNAM VETERAN



Honor Flight Chicago's 107th Flight — carrying our 10,000th veteran to Washington, D.C., — was at the end of the runway, ready to depart for our nation's capital. That's when a developing weather situation hit critical mass, and a Chicago-area ground stop forced us into a delay that ultimately led to the postponement of our first flight of 2023.

Thank you to everyone who made our season-opening flight HFC107 possible. We checked in 111 veterans and loaded the plane in record time. As the delay stretched into hours, we made the difficult decision to postpone the flight until May. We wanted to ensure that our heroes experience the day they DESERVE, and not a shortened version of it.

We want to specifically thank our partners at Southwest Airlines and Midway International Airport for the love and respect they showed our heroes as we returned to the gate and deplaned.



Despite the unfortunate delay, we still experienced a significant moment of Honor Flight Chicago magic. Vietnam Veterans Rogelio Arredondo and Dante Plata grew up going to church together. In 1960, the families went their separate ways. 63 years later, Plata was browsing the Veteran Summary during check in and immediately recognized Rogelio's photo. Our volunteers wasted no time facilitating a reunion.



As the 113 veterans aboard HFC107 deplaned at Dulles International Airport shortly before 9:30 a.m. ET on May 10, Co-Director Doug Meffley commented to a veteran that we had landed a few minutes early. His smiling retort: “Well technically we’re about five weeks late.”

The first flight of the 2023 season did indeed push back from the gate April 5 on time, but before we could get airborne the weather took a turn for the worse and a FAA ground stop delay eventually led us to postpone the flight. Of the 111 veterans on board, 94 accepted our invitation to fly in May. The rest accepted invitations for flights later in the season. To those 94 heroes, we added 19 new invitees for a total of 113 comprising two WWII, 16 Korean War and 95 Vietnam War veterans.

Among that group was the 10,000th senior war hero Honor Flight Chicago has brought to our nation’s capital since our inception in 2008.

We are extremely proud to be the first hub in the entire country to reach that milestone, but we are more proud in knowing that we have changed the lives of 10,000 individual veterans, their families, and their communities.

With more than 80 percent of the veterans on board having gone through the morning process at Midway the month before, we had an experienced and jovial crew on HFC107 last week. The weather could not have been more beautiful and the trip was as smooth as can be. Washington was full of students on end-of-the-year field trips, and our veterans were inundated with gratitude, handshakes and even some questions at our various stops.

Everything culminated in a spirited Welcome Home that capped a celebration that was – as the veteran stated in the morning – five weeks in the making.

HFC 107

Southwest Airlines once again showed their incredible generosity and support of our mission to honor our senior veterans, not once, but twice. On April 10, when HFC107 was supposed to take off, they shared their “Tennessee One” plane with us. When the flight had to be postponed until May 10, Southwest decided to increase their visual recognition of our heroes. Those who flew with HFC 107 that day rode in style aboard Freedom One, the same plane Southwest provided to us in 2022 when we flew our 100th flight.

TENNESSEE ONE

Special plane for our veterans on April 5, 2023



FREEDOM ONE

Special plane for our veterans on May 10, 2023



HFC 107





HFC108 on Flag Day featured 119 veterans traveling to Washington, D.C., matching the most heroes Honor Flight Chicago has transported on a single flight. Eight Korean War, one Korean and Vietnam War, and 110 Vietnam War veterans comprised that total.

With that many veterans to honor, we also packed the plane with as many Guardians as physically possible. Southwest Airlines even allowed us to travel with four Employees as Guardians, including two who flew in “jump seats” to give us as much support for our veterans as possible.

This flight was dedicated to the memory of longtime volunteer Jack Walsh, who passed away in 2022. Jack and his wife, Ellen, have been members of our volunteer family for years. Jack’s leadership and deep generosity – most recently as Welcome Home Coordinator, but also across many other areas of our organization including as



“To go from being told not to wear our uniforms in the airport to the welcome we received everywhere ... well, that was pretty special.”

JACK KUHN

VIETNAM VETERAN

a veteran interviewer and with Operation Locate a Hero – have been instrumental to the success of our mission. We were thrilled to welcome Ellen as a Guardian to represent their family on the flight.



On a sultry day in D.C., 111 veterans comprising one WWII, eight Korean War, and 102 Vietnam War heroes dodged raindrops in Chicago to receive their long-deserved Day of Honor, Thanks, and Inspiration in our nation’s capital.

The oldest veteran aboard was actually the oldest Vietnam War veteran we have honored to-date: 97-year-old Air Force Captain (O-3) Rev. George Kane, who served from 1959-63 as a chaplain stationed at Kimpo in Korea and at Eglin AFB in Florida where he ministered and supported fighter pilots preparing for combat duty in Vietnam.

We often see school groups or vacationing families with children approach our veterans to thank them for their service, and these interactions are often highlights of the day. This flight was no different. At the Air Force Memorial, a group of students got off a bus as we exited the Memorial and made a bee-

line for the “gray shirts,” unintentionally extending our time at that stop with their gratitude. Later, on the Mall, young children actually boarded our buses to make an announcement of thanks over the PA systems before we continued on our itinerary!



“I am proud to have served this Nation, especially when there are so many grateful people, like the ones whom I have met and been surrounded by all day.”

RICHARD WAGNER

VIETNAM VETERAN

HFC 110



Washington D.C. has traditionally emptied during August to escape the heat and humidity of the Tidal Basin. For the 109 senior veterans aboard HFC110 on August 23, we flipped that script! While Chicago scorched under a triple-digit heat index, it was a relatively cool and comfortable day in D.C. in the low 80s for our one WWII, seven Korean War, and 101 Vietnam War veterans.

We witnessed a poignant moment at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial when Raymond Ariaz staged a small personal ceremony to honor his brother, Edward. They both were stationed in Vietnam, and when his brother was killed in action it was Ray who accompanied his body home. After setting out some materials near Edward's name, Ray sang God Bless America with the help of a VVMF Volunteer.

We also welcomed aboard 19 members of VFW Post 1337 out of Mount Prospect, a group put



“That was one of the best days I have ever had. Being treated with respect and the homecoming was off the charts. It was a lot better than when I came home after service.”

LES DUROV

VIETNAM VETERAN

together by our very own long-time volunteer Jim Parker. Jim exchanged his orange shirt for a gray shirt and by all accounts this group turned the Purple Bus into a day-long salute to camaraderie.



September 20 was the penultimate flight for our 2023 Honor Flight Chicago season with 116 veterans traveling to yet another gorgeous weather day in our nation's capital. This 111th flight comprised one WWII, seven Korean War and 108 Vietnam War veterans receiving their long-awaited Day of Honor and Welcome Home.

Among these veterans were 21 that our attentive medical team identified as needing extra time and assistance to board the plane, the most such veterans we have traveled with in a long time. It is a testament to our volunteer corps that we are able to safely and comfortably serve these heroes whose physical challenges might otherwise prevent them from receiving this honor they so richly deserve.

Aboard the flight itself, we were honored to fly our very first Tomb Guard! Joseph Varanauski served as a Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from

September 1956 to July 1957. While our itineraries do not typically include a visit to Arlington and the Tomb due to our size and the timing of our day, we were deeply humbled to have this sacred American landmark represented on HFC111.



“After 55 years of isolation I feel I don’t have to hide that I enlisted and volunteered for Vietnam thanks to people like you and all the volunteers.”

FRANK LoPRESTI

VIETNAM VETERAN

HONOR. THANK. INSPIRE. AN HFC PODCAST

“Honor. Thank. Inspire.” is a podcast where we sit down with senior war heroes and hear — in their own words — their experiences in service to our nation. The podcast captures living history via first-person accounts from the men and women who served and sacrificed. Meet some of the heroes who appeared on the podcast this season.



EPISODE 57

David Mann's father was in Vietnam for only a short time when he was killed in a rocket attack months before his namesake son would be born stateside. The younger Mann has spent his life getting to know his dad, recently becoming involved with a group of Gold Star children called Sons and Daughters in Touch. David flew with us on HFC111 to honor his father's legacy and brethren, and share his own experience in this powerful episode.



EPISODE 53

As a WWII flight engineer on a B-29 Superfortress following Japan's surrender, **Howard Cain** was aboard a reconnaissance flight over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What he saw has stuck with him to this day.



EPISODE 49

WWII Veteran Rev. **Hank Roberson** celebrated his 100th Birthday at his West Side church on Easter Sunday. Podcast host Paul Meincke joined the celebration as the community came together to honor this hero.



EPISODE 46

Howard Levinson became a B-24 pilot in the Pacific at the tender age of 21. Though his crew feared he would be a “coward” because of his Jewish religion, he taught them a lesson in heroism they would never forget.



EPISODE 44

Jerry Warren was placed in charge of a unit in Vietnam comprising all white soldiers. Though they functioned well as a team, there was a prejudicial undercurrent that could not be escaped.

OPERATION EDUCATION

At Honor Flight Chicago, not only do we honor and thank our senior war heroes, but we inspire future generations by sharing veteran stories and demonstrating the power of gratitude and respect. *One of the most impactful and enjoyable ways we do that is through Operation Education.*

This year, the Operation Education team partnered with more than 100 schools for programming that ranged from veteran visits at schools to helping out with our powerful mail call. The Operation Education team also facilitated more than 440 signups for a school-centered 5K.



Charles Nichols
United States Marine Corps
Vietnam War

Charles Nichols
Staff Sergeant Nichols served in the United States Marine Corps from 1966 to 1969 as a Squad Leader and Platoon Leader in Da Nang.

Conflict: Vietnam War
Branch: United States Marine Corps
Rank: Staff Sergeant
Served: 1966-1969
MOS:
Training: Infantry Rifleman
Flight Date: July 10, 2019

"I look at that wall and realize that 58,000 of my comrades were left with nothing on this wall for all the sacrifices that they made."

RESOURCES



Operation Education offers unique resources for educators and an invaluable forum for sharing ideas. One new initiative is that the teachers of Operation Education created resources and printables for other teachers to use in their classroom and school.

These resources include exclusive trading card for veterans to pass out to help tell their stories. These cards can be created either by teachers or the Operation Education team. Another printable created by the Operation Education team is a set of conversation cards that students can use to ask questions of veterans who visit their classroom. There also is a worksheet students can use to conduct an interview with a veteran.

The Operation Education team also curated a themed content calendar that teachers can leverage throughout the school year.

The Operation Education 5k began in 2021 as a student-led initiative to raise funds for the Honor Flight Chicago mission.

Operation Education kicked off its 2022 fundraising efforts in early October with the 5k Run at Morton College. We offered several other opportunities to participate leading up to Veterans Day including a virtual option allowing even more people to support our fundraising efforts.

MISSION NEVER FORGET



Mission Never Forget has grown to over 350 volunteers who send birthday cards to our most senior alumni veterans aged 95 and older. This year these volunteers sent birthday wishes to 447 alumni over the age of 95, including one veteran celebrating his 103rd birthday!

The impact of Mission Never Forget can be tremendous. Consider this reaction from the wife of one of our heroes:

“Melvin received so many birthday cards from all of the Honor Flight Chicago volunteers that you helped organize when he turned 100. He is now in his last days of hospice, before his great journey begins. I want you to know what those cards meant to him every day in his room at the nursing home. He was so proud of them - and would point them out as they were hanging on ribbons on his walls. Thank you for your care, and how you and others brightened this veteran’s life in this last year.”



447

Veterans who received birthday wishes

350+

Mission Never Forget volunteers

103

Age of oldest veteran honored

LAW ENFORCEMENT HOCKEY CLASSIC

We had an amazing night at the tenth annual Law Enforcement Hockey Classic! Thanks to both teams from the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and the Chicago FBI and to all the fans who came out to support the teams and our senior veterans.



FINANCIALS

REVENUE	
Contributions	\$943,334
Grants	\$166,100
Guardian Reimbursements	\$108,459
In-Kind Revenue	\$2,297,655
Special Events, Net	\$177,962
Other Revenue	\$43,492
Total Revenue	\$3,737,004
EXPENSES	
Program Services	\$3,331,172
Management and General	\$97,770
Fundraising	\$31,915
Total Expenses	\$3,460,857
NET ASSETS	
Net Assets, Beginning of Period	\$2,277,174
Net Assets, End of Period	\$2,553,321
Change in Net Assets	\$276,147



96 cents of every dollar spent went directly to honoring veterans

SPECIAL THANKS

- Our current active duty military for their service and sacrifice
- 115 Bourbon Street
- Abt Electronics
- Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center
- American Taxi Dispatch, Inc.
- ANB Café Inc.
- Andrew and Alice Fischer Charitable Trust
- Arnie Daxe, Chair Welcome Team at Dulles Airport
- Assurance Caring Together Foundation
- CFBA “Honor Flight Band” and its Director Geoffrey Seffens
- Chicago Bears
- Chicago Blackhawks
- Chicago Cubs
- Chicago White Sox
- Chicago Community Foundation
- Chicago Department of Aviation
- Chicago Fire Department
- Chicago Fire Department Pipes and Drums
- Chicago Park District
- Cless Family Foundation
- Colliers International
- Crown Point Community Foundation
- Dave Benbennick and Jeff Smith, Oxygen Coordinators
- DC Guardians and Volunteers at Dulles Airport
- DC Logistics Team
- Debicki Foundation
- Deloitte
- Diamond Communication Solutions
- DM Merchandising, Inc
- Dough Guys Bakery
- Dresden Generating Station Employees
- National Air and Space Museum—Stephen F. Udvar Hazy Center
- Dulles Airport Operations and TSA
- DuPage Veterans Foundation
- Employees and Volunteers of Midway Airport
- Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
- Fairfax County Police Department
- Firefighters Highland Guard of Naperville
- Flying Tigers Surplus
- George M. Van Cleave Family Foundation
- Gotta Swing, LLC
- Herndon (VA) Police Department
- Jewel Osco
- Joint Service Color Guard
- Karen Pride, Director of Media Relations (CDA)
- Kevin Willman and Video Expressions
- LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry
- Legacy Foundation
- Libertyville Sunrise Rotary Foundation
- Lutheran Life Communities and Lidia Rincon
- Masonic Family Health Foundation
- Medical Guardians and all of our front-line medical workers
- Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority
- Midway Airport Firefighters, Paramedics, Police Officers, MATCO and Prospect
- Midway Partnership—SSP America
- Midway Transportation Security Administration (TSA)
- Minuteman Press, Morton Grove
- Mission BBQ
- Motorola Solutions Foundation
- National Park Service Police Escorts and Volunteers
- Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management
- Operation Education, partner educators and schools
- Our motorcycle groups
- PEL/VIP and Ray Kalinsky
- Pipes and Drums of the Chicago Police Department
- Radio One, Dallas, TX
- Red Poppy Creative, Graphic Designer
- Rob Williamson, Photographer and Photo Manager
- Southwest Airlines
- Standard Parking at Midway Airport
- Stephen R. Brown, Photojournalist and Publisher
- U.S. Congressman Sean Casten
- U.S. Congressman Dan Lipinski
- U.S. Congressman Mike Quigley
- USO Dulles Airport
- Village of Bensenville
- Virginia State Police
- Wintrust Financial Corporation
- Women in Military Service for America Memorial
- U.S. Navy Sailors and Officers, Naval Station Great Lakes
- Honor Flight Chicago’s Board of Directors
 - John Ptak, President
 - Bonni Pear, Vice President
 - William Hassett, Secretary
 - Mary Pettinato, Treasurer
 - Alan Garfield, Director
 - Paul Meincke, Director
 - Captain Mark Meskimen, Director
 - Cyndi Greenglass, Director
- The Honor Flight Chicago volunteers



FOREVER
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