



# NEWSLETTER

Volume 13 • Issue 1 • January 2023

## VETERAN SALUTE: STEVE LEWIS

BY CHARLES DeROLLER



For decades, Vietnam veteran Steve Lewis of Nunda didn't have much to say about his experience in the service of his country. Why would he? He was drafted, served in a war despised by the media, and his "welcome home" was an early honorable discharge with a piece of metal permanently lodged next to his heart.

Steve is typical of the Old Breed, the silent type - you take your knocks and move on. While many men avoided the draft by moving to Canada, Steve, even though drafted, saw

military service to his country as an honor. Arriving in Vietnam with the Army infantry in July 1968, Steve faced a very different Vietnam, since the Tet Offensive had been only months earlier. As a rather large young man, Steve was selected to be an M60 machine gunner - the perfect target.

Yet Steve didn't shirk his duties, but rather the opposite - he volunteered for Reconnaissance, which meant two or three man patrols off base, in the jungle. This was a very dangerous role, one in which Steve served less than four months before the Viet Cong detonated a mine near him. Steve was Medevaced out on a helicopter, almost dead, with that chunk of steel in his chest. To Cam Ranh Bay, then Tokyo, then on to the famed Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and to Fort Devens. After some level of recovery Steve moved to Fort Meade, where he was assigned to pulling weeds and poison ivy. It was from Meade that the injured Steve Lewis was discharged to the care of his parents - no fanfare, no thank you, no welcome home.

The Army "was happy to see me go, I wasn't too pleasant" reports Steve. And with his near-fatal injury, generally poor experience in Vietnam, and the anti-veteran sentiments in America, Steve stayed that way a long time. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Steve kept it all to himself - or what he could, anyway. Through all this, his lovely wife (married since 1969) rolled with the impact it had on Steve, and was his rock.

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**WE LEAVE NO  
VETERAN BEHIND**

Honor Flight Rochester volunteer Steve Rapp was the one who convinced Steve to join a Mission. Steve's friend Gary Gelser, also from Nunda, had previously joined an HFR Mission. But COVID hit, and during that period Gary passed away. Fittingly, when finally Steve joined HFR Mission 74, Gary's son Steve Gelser was Steve Lewis's guardian.

Steve had been to the war memorials in Washington, D.C., but the Honor Flight Mission eclipsed that. From the all-volunteer motorcycle club escort, to touring the monuments with other veterans, to the evening meal, Steve felt welcomed. Wanted.

But it was the homecoming arrival at the Rochester, NY airport that really drove it home: the warmth, the cheers, the flags. The Nunda Masonic Lodge was there, as was the Nunda Fire Department. The community, HIS community, was there to welcome him home.

"It broke the ice" reports Steve. Those decades of disrespect, dishonor, and his anger began to melt away. This was the proof - society is respecting Service veterans. He hugged his wife of more than fifty years, the first heart-felt hug he'd delivered in his entire marriage. "This", Steve says, "was my welcome home."



Today, Steve Lewis proudly wears a cap embroidered "VIETNAM VETERAN" and "PURPLE HEART." On this cap is affixed Steve's Honor Flight Rochester pin. To Nunda's son Steve Lewis from everyone at Honor Flight Rochester: Thank You for your service, and Welcome Home.



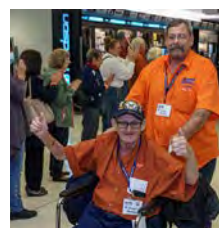


# MISSION 73 • SEPTEMBER 10 – 11, 2022





# MISSION 74 • OCTOBER 1 – 2, 2022





# MISSION 75 • OCTOBER 22 – 23, 2022





# WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO!

To all of Honor Flight Rochester's hundreds of volunteers – THANK YOU! HFR had an incredibly successful year of Missions after more than two very long years off, and none of it would have been possible without all of you. Together this year we gave several hundred veterans the trip of a lifetime and the homecoming that they have always deserved. Thank you for your selflessness and dedication – it does not go unnoticed, particularly by our veterans and their families. Below are just a few examples of “Why We Do What We Do.”

Happy New Year and we look forward to a successful 2023!

Jim Goggins M70

First of all let me apologize for not writing sooner. I wanted to thank everyone, and I mean every volunteer, from every area of the organization. Putting together these flights, itinerary, ground crew, road crew, motorcycle groups, airports, airlines, and everyone that welcomed us with open arms deserve a special thanks. If I missed anyone, it isn't intentional.

I was always a bit cynical about the “welcome home” moniker. I've since changed my outlook. The staff, volunteers, and those from the public greeting us at each airport, displayed a genuine appreciation for us, and what we did for our country.

Having returned (Vietnam) expecting greetings for a “job well done”, instead were booed, spit on and told get rid of our uniform in our past. This trip, the people, companies, and all those I met that greeted us, demonstrated their enthusiasm for all we did. It brought tears to my eyes. I truly felt honored and appreciated, even though it took years. I'm proud to be an American serviceman, and this Honor Flight changed my perspective.

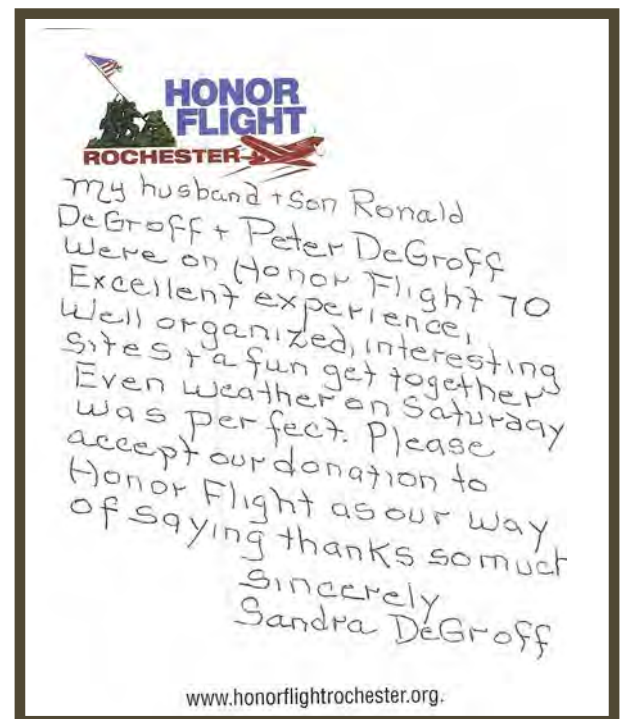
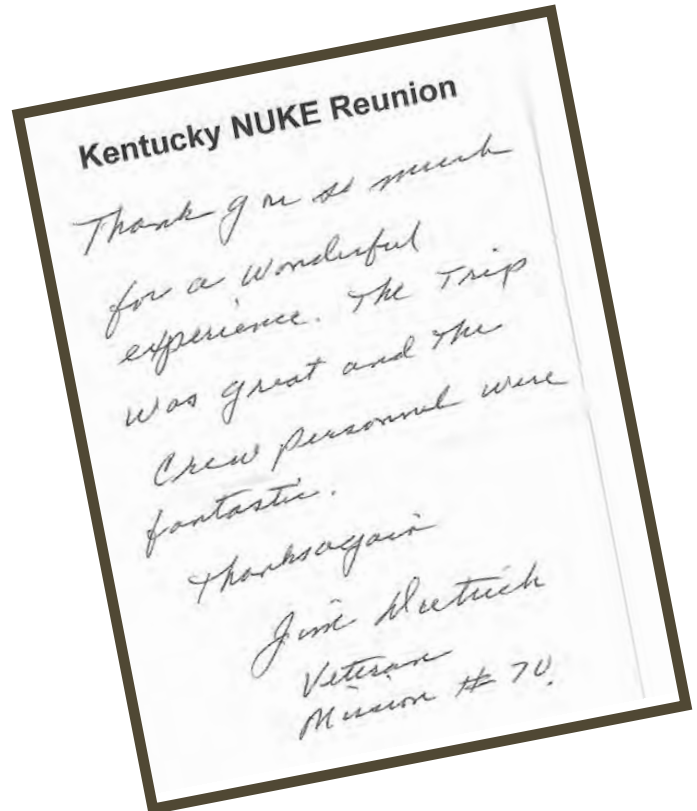
I can't express enough, my thanks to all of you for your time, hard work, time away from your loved ones, and jobs, to make my trip to Washington DC a highlight of my life. I was assigned to bus 3. All of the staff were impeccable. Their friendliness, knowledge, and assistance is to be commended. Also; please let the teachers and students know their letters were appreciated. I responded to each child that wrote to me.

Thanks again for a memorable experience.

Sincerely,

The only veteran (paraplegic) with his own chair.

Jim Goggins



October 8, 2022

Thank you for all you do for the Veterans with the Honor Flight. My husband is so emotional when talking about all that was done for veterans during the weekend of Honor Flight #74.

It will surely be something he will always remember.

His favorite stop was the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

His father's name is engraved on the WWII wall as a civilian contributor to the war efforts.

Please thank all the volunteers that made the Honor Flight possible for my husband and other Veterans. It makes quite a difference.

Enclosed please find a donation to help other Veterans to share such a memorable venture.

Sincerely,  
Joanna Cooper

April 13, 2022

Hello Peter:

I just want to "thank you," to you and your excellent staff for the memorable time I experienced this past weekend. As we discussed, my Vietnam era military experience was not a favorable one. I remember the public degradation and verbal abuse I received just for publicly appearing in uniform. Vietnam vets were treated as pariah, at best. It took me 20+ years to even admit that I was an Army veteran.

About 6 years ago an acquaintance of mine encouraged me to enroll in Honor Flight. I did apply and was informed, understandably, that it might be a few years before Vietnam era veterans would be eligible to be on a flight.

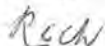
About 2+ years ago, I was informed that I would be on an Honor Flight, and, as we also discussed that flight and the subsequent 9/11/21 flight were cancelled.

I was very happy to hear that I would be on this April's Honor Flight. Being part of Mission 70 will be forever in my memory, because of my experience with you and your excellent staff! Please thank one and all for everything I experienced on this adventure.

Enclosed is an unsolicited donation that can be used to help other veterans gain the same Honor Flight experiences and memories as I did.

All the best to you, and please let me know how I might actively participate in keeping Honor Flight moving forward.

Sincerely,



Rich Sperduto  
Mission 70 Veteran

Hello Angels

This is Bruce Jones from Honor Flight 75, 22-23 Oct.

I need to write to you so you can have a better understanding of what you do, and at least did for me.

July 1973, upon I made it home. One year of loading Bombs on B-52's 12 – 14 hours a day, but it was for my country so I felt a little special. We were transported to San Francisco international airport and told that there would be protesters and that we were forbidden to hit any of them. Unfortunately we had to travel in our dress blues so we were spotted right away. They would call us vile names and then started spitting on us so we quickened our pace giving them all the finger and found the sanctuary of going through security where they could not follow. Okay were safe, isolated incident we thought. But being in a military uniform off base for the next 7 years was always met with dirty looks and snide remarks. Once this guy came up to me and said your useless, you couldn't even win a war. As he left my buddies came to me and said, hey Jonsey, just think you may have to go back to war and die for that loud mouth ahole. Not a pleasant thought. This continued until the 80's and people started tolerating us a bit better. But the scars of serving my country were being continually opened up.

We all enjoyed the trip to Washington DC and we were reminded we were a part of a very special breed of Americans. We walked through that door in the airport and just couldn't



believe it. I was in shock. I was able to keep the tears back until we went downstairs and continued our special welcome home. I think of it as I write this and I have to keep stopping to wipe the tears from my eyes. All the wonderful people with genuine smiles and welcomes and handshakes of coming home. it was just the most incredible thing I ever experienced in my entire life. I still can't believe how many people came to Honor us and made us realize we were lousy people. I can only hope that every single person that came out for us Sunday, some day realizes just how much more than they could ever understand of what that meant to us. I know I have because as we sat down in the meeting place at the end of the walk and just like that, I realized all the scars of the seventies just melted away and the memories now mean absolutely Nothing. Last Sunday I finally did come home from southeast Asia...Thank you all so very very much

Bruce Jones

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce Jones". The signature is fluid and matches the printed name above it.

Mission 75: Absolutely fantastic!! THANK YOU. Couldn't have been any better. It was very emotional and being able to share it with one of my sons made it even much more memorable. Words can't express my heartfelt thanks for this once in a lifetime experience!!!!!! We'd go again tomorrow. Hats off to your wonderful group. The airport reception was over the top!

Mike Henneman



Dear Eric,

I cannot say enough about the fantastic experience my son Lance and I had on Rochester Honor Flight Mission #70. We expected an enjoyable experience in joining the trip to our nation's war memorials, but we never suspected the extent and breadth of the trip.

My most sincere thanks go to Nancy Damore, who convinced me that I deserved to participate in Honor Flight. I spent 6 years in the Air Force reserves from 1959 to 1965, and originally considered myself unworthy to participate in a recognition program for "real" veterans; i.e. those who fought in actual combat. Nancy insisted the Cold War veterans were as deserving as WWII, Korea, Vietnam, etc. veterans. Thank you, Nancy!

From the moment we arrived at GRIA, it was apparent that the trip was very well organized. The number and efficiency of the volunteers was immediately apparent. My first "Wow!" moment was the 4 letters from local elementary school students, each of whom wrote a personal letter to me. After I finish this letter, I plan to respond to each of them.

In my memory, every military operation had at least one SNAFU, and ours occurred with the 2 hour delay leaving Rochester. The crew adjusted the schedule accordingly, to minimize the effects of the delay. The highlight for Lance and me was the changing of the guards at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. In addition to the regular change, we saw 2 special ceremonies that were very moving.

As we learned, Honor Flight Rochester is the only unit east of the Mississippi that provides overnight accommodations for all of its missions. What a treat to be able to rest for a while after a busy day! The banquet dinner (along with the drink chits) gave us a chance enjoy an excellent meal in addition to meeting and socializing with more of our fellow veterans. Lance and I especially enjoyed the presence of our bus leader, Lee Begy, at our table. In addition to his strong commitment to HFR, Lee has a long and impressive active military record.

The planning for our trip was impressive. HFR even arranged for beautiful Spring weather in DC (no comment about the snow upon our landing back home on Sunday). I knew there would be some excitement upon our return to GRIA, but the actual experience was overwhelming. The number of additional Honor Flight volunteers was incredible, and it seemed every one shook my hand and thanked me for my service. And there must have been more that 2,000 people who turned out to cheer for us. Wow! Wow! Wow! Finally, Adam Bello gave a moving speech that touched every veteran's heart—an excellent climax to our fantastic weekend.

As a result of my memorable experience, I am enclosing a donation to Honor Flight Rochester. My sincere thanks, Eric, to you and the entire team. Continued best wishes as you recognize additional men and women who served our country. God Bless America, and God Bless Honor Flight Rochester!





# WE LOVE WHAT WE DO!

## KNUCKLEHEAD BREWING FUNDRAISER





# PURPLE PAINTED LADY FESTIVAL





# BARNARD EXEMPT ELVIS NIGHT





# AVON HOLIDAY FESTIVAL



# REAL ID UPDATE

The Secretary of Homeland Security announced that DHS extended the Real ID enforcement date to May 7, 2025, due to lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.





# SPEAKERS BUREAU – HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Mary Beauchamp and Karen Zilora recently made a Speakers Bureau presentation to the Rochester Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA). The Rochester Chapter has a mission “To Open the World of Communication to People with Hearing Loss by Providing Information, Education, Support and Advocacy.” The organization publishes a Chapter Newsletter, provides presentations to groups, promotes social and print media, and has an extensive website with many useful resources ([www.HearingLossRochester.org](http://www.HearingLossRochester.org)). HLAA also offers in-person and virtual programs via Zoom and has an Assistive Listening Demonstration Center where consumers may view and try out a selection of assistive listening devices.

Local chapter membership is only \$10 per year, but they provide a free lifetime membership for veterans with hearing loss (they currently have 26 veteran members). Here is the link to their membership form:  
<https://storage.googleapis.com/wzukusers/user-28775318/documents/675af3b448fd4564a7e13680a2338de9/Membership%2022-23WF%20.pdf>

Our presentation to the HLAA has inspired thinking about how Honor Flight Rochester can better assist veterans with hearing loss who are flying with us. Special thanks to our travel coordinator Tracy Williams who has researched the availability of induction loops (which work with hearing aid t-coils) at the Greater Rochester airport. She found that the airport is equipped with hearing loops as shown in the map link below (located in the concourses, at gates, and at security checkpoints):

<https://roairport.com/accessibility/hearingmap>

The International Room where we hold the closing ceremony for each mission is not currently outfitted with a hearing loop, but it is included on their upcoming 2023 list of improvement projects!

## EVENTS

**January 21**  
**No BS Brewery**  
Livonia, NY



**March 24-26**  
**Rochester Home & Garden Show**  
Rochester, NY





# PRESIDENT'S NOTE

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## Dear Volunteers:

75 Missions have flown since 2008! Nobody in their wildest imagination could have guessed back in 2008 that Honor Flight Rochester would fly 75 missions. Yes, we got a significant boost by Honor Flight National Co-Founder Earl Morse attending our first Reunion on Veterans Day 2008 just 25 days after our inaugural mission. More importantly two organizations stepped up, WROC Channel 8 and Legacy at Clover Blossom Community. The Reunion Invitation sent to about 50 people read:

*From 2 to 4 PM on Veterans Day at Legacy Clover Blossom bring your photos and albums to share stories and memories of your Honor Flight.*

*Then join us for a LIVE Telecast at WROC Channel 8 Studios for a documentary to commemorate our Inaugural Flight 10/18/2008.*



*D-Day Veteran John D shared his scrapbook with Earl Morse at Legacy on 11/11/2008.*

At the reunion Earl Morse personally thanked each of our veterans and gave encouragement to those of us who were involved early with Honor Flight Rochester for the epic journey that had just begun. This was an exciting time, but the future was uncertain.

With that as a brief lead in, I want to thank all volunteers for making our reactivation year so successful. After the 2½ year pandemic pause our FAM Team picked up where

we left off leading over 800 volunteers in the many tasks needed to fly our missions and provide support to the sponsors who fund us. We put great effort into this highly focused purpose and once again delivered great results.

We flew 328 veterans over six missions. These numbers are terrific. We still have so much more to do as our Fly List is growing back to 1000 veterans, mostly from the Vietnam era.

Outreach at our Welcome Home Celebrations is so important. This year our well-known emcees were Maureen McGuire, Don Alhart, Glenn Johnson, Ginny Ryan, Eric Snitel and Jim Memmott. Our keynote speakers, all experts in their fields, have deep involvement with veterans: Laura Stradley-Executive Director Volunteer Outreach Center (VOC); Barry Culhane-Associate Professor & Executive Assistant to RIT President (deceased); Todd Baxter-Sheriff Monroe County; The Honorable Mark W. Pederson-U.S. Magistrate Judge; Joe Morelle-U.S. Congressman; and Adam Bello- Monroe County Executive.

Additionally, Sheriff Baxter traveled as an Emissary on Mission 73. His assignment was as an “at large” member of the mission, not assigned to a specific veteran. Instead, the Emissary should talk with most of the veterans then bring that experience back and relate that first-hand account to more people in the greater Rochester area. Outreach is accomplished in many different ways.

Once again, thank Volunteers for all that you do.

Happy New Year,

**Rich Stewart**  
*President & CEO*

