

Journey honors memories of heroes

Several veterans said the visit to Washington offered the one chance they'd likely have to see the World War II Memorial.

By **ELIZABETH FISHER**
COURIER TIMES

WASHINGTON, D.C. — He's hard of hearing, his shoulders are slightly stooped and his gait is slower than it was when he was a Navy Seabee.

But 95-year-old Jake Walker's salute is as snappy as ever, and he was awash in memories on Monday as he took in the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The Langhorne resident was one of 200 World War II veterans who traveled to the nation's capital to see the memorial as guests of Bucks County Commissioners Mike Fitzpatrick, Charles Martin and Sandra Miller.

"My service finished in Okinawa," said Walker, his eyes filled with tears. "We were getting ready to invade Japan when Harry [Truman] dropped the A-bomb. If he hadn't, a lot of us soldiers

would never have come home."

Former Air Force gunner Al Cordisco's thoughts took him back to the turbulence of D-Day, when the Allies landed at Normandy in fierce weather and battle conditions to reclaim Europe from Hitler. Cordisco, of Bristol, was an Air Force gunner flying through heavy clouds to provide firepower for ground troops.

Cordisco said he remembers looking down on thousands of ships rocking in the choppy Atlantic and spewing thousands of landing crafts filled with infantrymen. He said the memorial in Washington is a fitting tribute to those soldiers.

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Veterans from Bucks Charles Morgan (left) and James Petrino joined other local vets on the trip to Washington. The veterans are invited to participate in the "Veterans History Project," a gathering of written or videotaped stories from battle.

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of showing respect for those who couldn't be here," he said.

Fitzpatrick, who accompanied the veterans, along with Dan Fraley, director of veterans affairs for the county, said it was moving to see so many veterans take advantage of the bus trip.

"It is a privilege for me to be here with so many that I consider heroes. These people have never let any of us down," Fitzpatrick said.

After an hour at the memorial, the veterans were taken to the nearby U.S. Navy Base for a luncheon hosted by

Congressman Jim Greenwood. They sat down to a meal of chicken, lasagna, vegetables and rice and were pleasantly interrupted by a political celebrity.

Former Sen. Bob Dole, a World War II veteran who still carries his own battle scars, took a few minutes to address the gathering.

Dole acknowledged that the memorial was a long time coming — of the original 16.5 million World War II veterans, only about 6 million are still living — but praised the veterans, who collected 94 percent of the cost for its construction.

"This will be a living memorial where concerts will

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recall heroism

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AL CORDISCO
FORMER AIR FORCE GUNNER

be held. I hope you have come away with the real thought that, sometime in your life, you are called to sacrifice something for the love of freedom," Dole said.

Another speaker, Peter Bartis, a liaison from the Library of Congress, invited

the veterans to participate in the "Veterans History Project," a gathering of written or videotaped stories from battle. The project committee is also collecting letters and diaries from old soldiers as part of the project.

Information can be obtained or sent to the Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, 101 Independence Ave. SE, Washington, D.C. 20540-4615.

Just before leaving the city, the veterans requested one more stop, a visit to the Iwo Jima memorial in Virginia.

The buses struggled through a gridlock of rush-hour traffic from the city into

the Virginia countryside, where the monument depicting U.S. Marines raising the American flag stands.

Bucks veteran Ray Kilroy seemed a little stunned as he stood in front of the sculpture to look at a scene he personally witnessed from a landing dock.

"Man, it was like New Year's Eve when that flag went up. Everyone hollered and all the [offshore] ships blew their horns. It was quite a scene, and the men who raised that flag were great guys," he said.

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