



Honoring our Veterans

The Honor Flight Network

~ Geoffrey Seffens

“Mission Statement: To transport America’s Veterans to Washington, DC to visit those memorials dedicated to honor the service and sacrifices of themselves and their friends.”

“Honor Flight Network is a non-profit organization created solely to honor America’s veterans for all their sacrifices. We transport our heroes to Washington, D.C. to visit and reflect at their memorials. Top priority is given to the senior veterans – World War II survivors, along with those other veterans who may be terminally ill.

In recent years, the Honor Flight Network has also paid tribute to America’s other heroes who served during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, followed by veterans of more current wars. They, too, have given so much and it’s time we show them that their efforts are not forgotten.” (Taken from the Home Page of the Honor Flight Network; www.honorflight.org)

Since the first Honor Flight Tour in May of 2005, when six small planes flew out of Springfield, Ohio carrying twelve World War II veterans to the Nation’s Capital, the Honor Flight Network has expanded to 131 hubs in 45 states and has brought more than 180,000 veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit ‘their’ memorials.

If you would like to learn more about the Honor Flight Program and how to participate, please visit the Honor Flight Network website at honorflight.org. The website is outstanding and includes an excellent history of the Honor Flight program, locations of Honor Flight hubs, an up to date listing of scheduled Honor Flights, and contact information. I would also suggest visiting YouTube, and typing ‘Honor Flights’ into the browser. You will find hundreds of videos posted of Honor Flight activities, both at hubs and at D.C.



Background



My name is Jeff Seffens. I retired as a middle school band director from the Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia, in 2007, after a rewarding career that lasted for 32 years. In 2009, I had the good fortune to become involved with the City of Fairfax Band Association. (www.fairfaxband.org)

The City of Fairfax Band (CFB) is the parent ensemble of the association. It has entertained audiences with a broad repertoire of classical transcriptions, marches, Broadway tunes, and popular band compositions since 1969. Since its formation, the band has grown from a small, summer-season ensemble to one of Northern Virginia’s best-known volunteer community performing groups. Under the leadership and direction of Robert Pouliot, the band provides its audience with a musical experience that rivals the nation’s top bands. The CFB was awarded the John Philip Sousa Foundation’s Sudler Silver Scroll Award in 2004.

Over the years, it became increasingly apparent that there was sufficient interest within the Fairfax community to justify creating a second adult community band and in 2008 the City of Fairfax Band Association took steps to make that a reality! It was my honor to be asked to lead this new ensemble, and the Main Street Community Band was born.

One evening during a rehearsal break, one of our members approached me and told me about the Honor Flight program. During WWII, my father was a 1st Lt. in the Field Artillery, my stepfather flew B-17s over Europe, and three of my uncles were also in the Army. The Honor Flight program seemed like a wonderful way to honor their service and the service of their comrades. After contacting the coordinator at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, we were added to the list of interested performing groups. Initially, since Main Street was still finding its identity within the larger organization, I invited only our own group’s members to participate. It wasn’t long, though, that I realized that the interest level in BOTH bands so strong that now members from both the City of Fairfax Band and Main Street participate together.



Since 2010, our volunteer ensemble has been a frequent presence at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport performing for the Honor Flight program. Over the years, its music has welcomed veterans of

... Playing for Honor Flights



World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War from across the country to the Nation's Capital to visit 'their' memorial.

In September of 2016, the CFBA Honor Flight ensemble had the honor of performing for the 500th Honor Flight to arrive at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. This Honor Flight, coincidentally, occurred on the 10th anniversary of the first Honor Flight to arrive in the Nation's Capital!

Performing for the Honor Flights is an incredible experience, and one you and your ensemble members will always cherish. You come away knowing that the music you provided was an important part of the Honor Flight experience to these veterans and their loved ones. What you did was meaningful and so very much appreciated!

I am not affiliated with the Honor Flight Network, nor do I speak for them in an official capacity, but it's an incredible program and I would encourage ACB

members to participate if so moved. Below are some helpful suggestions based on my own experience that may assist you getting started!

How can we contribute musically to the Honor Flight program?

Each Honor Flight is a one-day experience. Performance opportunities for music groups (both instrumental and choral) would be available where the veterans assemble at the start of their trip and when they return 'home' at the end of the day. Groups would be encouraged to play patriotic selections, including arrangements of the five major service songs, and popular music of the period (for example, "The White Cliffs of Dover" and "I'll Be Seeing You" for the World War II veterans).

How do we get started?

Step 1 would be to contact your closest hub to find out how things are done in your area and what opportunities there are for musical groups to participate. Chances are that each hub coordinator has a list of organizations that have expressed an interest in participating, and when a schedule of Honor Flight dates has been arranged for a given period these groups would be notified and selected on a 'first come first served' basis.

Once we have a date, what next?

Our requirements may be different than yours will be depending on – among other things - where you will be performing. For example, will you be performing at the airport, or will the veterans be meeting at a school or other location before being taken as a group to the airport? In our situation, we greet the veterans at their arrival gate as they deplane at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and enter the terminal. As a result, we need to go through airport security.

At least 24 hours prior to our Honor Flight date, I provide the HF coordinator a list of all performers. The list must include each performer's name, exactly as it appears on the photo ID they will present when going through security, plus their complete birth date – month, day and year. This information is required by TSA and will be used to create a 'gate pass' for each participant to get through security and into the terminal where planes arrive and depart. I usually arrive prior to the ensemble members, pick up the gate passes and pass them out as members arrive.

Prior to the event, the HF coordinator lets us know what gate the HF will be arriving at (or departing from) and makes sure we have chairs available to us. Since we are playing for flights coming into D.C. that MAY arrive early, we have to be through security and at the gate one hour before the scheduled arrival time.

What do we need to bring with us?

The only things provided by the airport are space and chairs. Performers bring their own collapsible stands and music. We typically use one percussionist on drum set – basically the bass drum, snare drum and crash cymbal.

Music: What is in our folder?

Because of limited rehearsal time, varying instrumentation, and the nature of the performance situation, you want music that you work up quickly, that sounds good, and that is meaningful to your target audience – the veterans! Here is what we have in our folder:

Soundpower's Greatest Hits, by Bill Moffit and published by Hal Leonard

Conductor's Score - \$14.95; Individual books - \$2.50

- American The Beautiful
- March America

... Honoring Our Veterans

- Stars and Stripes Trio

The Army Goes Rolling Along

by Gruber, Bryden and Danford / Arranged by Jerry Brubaker / Published by Belwin/Alfred

Guadalcanal March

Taken from “Victory at Sea” by Richard Rodgers and arranged by Robert Russell Bennett (played from “Alla Marcia” to the downbeat of the 7th measures after 166.

Heave Ho! My Lads, Heave Ho! (March of the Merchant Marine

by Jack Lawrence and arranged by Philip Lang and published by Kaycee Music Company, Inc.

The Homefront: Musical Memories From World War II

arranged by James Christensen and published by Hal Leonard

- Measure 9 to 38 (as written) – “It’s Been A Long, Long Time” and “Thanks for the Memories”
- Measure 81 (with the pick-up) to measure 111 (sustaining the first note of measure 111 as the end) – “The White Cliffs of Dover” and “I’ll Be Seeing You”
- Measure 121 (with pick-ups in the trombones) through 160 – “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree”

Semper Paratus (United States Coast Guard)

by Francis Saltus Van Boskerck and arranged by Jerry Brubaker and published by Belwin/Alfred – played from measure 40 to the end)

The Star Spangled Banner, from the “Americana Collection” / Published by Rubank, inc.

On Wisconsin, from “College Songs for School Band”

Arranged by Paul Yoder and distributed by Hal Leonard
(We have quite a few HFs from Wisconsin)

New versions of the service melodies available from Jerry Brubaker

Anchors Away – by Zimmerman / Brubaker

The Army Goes Rolling Along – by Gruber, Bryden and Danford / Brubaker

The Marines’ Hymn – Traditional / Brubaker

Semper Paratus (Always Ready) – Francis Saltus Van Boskerck / Brubaker

The U.S. Air Force – Robert Crawford / Brubaker

Jerry Brubaker, ACB President, has arranged the five major service songs in easy stand-alone versions. To encourage ACB member bands to play Honor Flight departures or arrivals in nearby cities Jerry will supply these arrangements free of charge to any band that will take on this mission. To request the arrangements simply send an email request to Jerry at president@acbands.org

The Ensemble

In my experience, the groups interested in performing for Honor Flight arrivals and departures are diverse indeed. They include community bands, pep bands, swing bands, brass quintets and other small ensembles, choral ensembles and even some solo performers!

Both the City of Fairfax Band and the Main Street Community Band rehearse on the same night in the same building. Whenever we are scheduled to perform for an Honor Flight (or flights), I ask for volunteers from both bands. As a result, each time we play, the group is different! We typically have between 20 and 30 participants for each HF date.

Prior to each Honor Flight performance, I rehearse Main Street without a break, and then let everyone go who is not playing this particular Honor Flight date. I also invite the participants in City Band to join us (with the director’s permission, of course!) Once everyone is present, we adjust the seating to accommodate the instrumentation, review the morning’s timeline, talk through the music and rehearse where needed.

In terms of uniform, we use our summer uniform. The City of Fairfax Band members have white short sleeve polo shirts, and Main Street members wear blue. Our folders are red!

In conclusion:

On one morning last fall, we performed for two Honor Flights. On board one flight was a veteran who landed on the first wave on D-Day; another was a veteran of Pearl Harbor. At one point, a Marine Corps veteran sang as we played the Marines Hymn, in such a strong, beautiful and rousing voice that it was all we could do not to stop playing and just listen. Each time we perform, we realize how important this program is to our veterans. The experience is one you and your ensembles will always cherish. You come away knowing that the music you provided was an important part of the Honor Flight experience to these veterans and their loved ones, and that you did was meaningful and so very much appreciated!