

In May 2026, my Dad (Rick Batchelder, Vietnam Veteran, Army) and I went on the Honor Flight Maine (HFM) trip to Washington D.C. We arrived at Bangor International Airport on Friday May 29th to meet up with the group and prepare for the weekend journey. We were told this would be a “trip of a lifetime!”

On Friday we went to Fort McHenry, where the Star-Spangled Banner was written and the veterans got to fold a historic flag, then on to Fort Meade where after an unbelievable welcome party of active service members greeted us, we dined in style at Freedom Inn.

On Saturday morning, we experienced the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. This was a profoundly moving experience that is difficult to describe in words alone. Next, we explored the Iwo Jima Memorial (Marines), the Air Force Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, the Military Women’s Memorial, and the Navy Memorial Plaza. At the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial, two young boys helped Dad find and do a rubbing of a name on the wall. The hugs he got afterward brought tears to my eyes, and Dad’s too!

My favorite spot visited was the WWII Memorial near the reflecting pool and Washington Monument. Dad and I found a nice shady place to sit and watch families of multitudes of nationalities enjoying the day in our nations’ capital!

We went to a local American Legion for dinner Saturday night, where the veteran’s got a “Mail Call.” The packets included cards, notes and trinkets from schools across Maine, and messages from family and friends. I will never forget the powerful emotions rippling through the air when they opened their mail packets...several “grumpy old men” vets burst into tears, as they had never gotten any mail during their years of active service. I’d managed to get a few notes from our family into Dad’s packet ahead of time, including the “Thank You” cards from Penquis’ Compliance Team, and Fiscal Team members (thanks everyone!) It meant a lot to Dad! Saturday night ended with cocktails in the hotel lounge where we made friends with other veterans and guardians from across Maine, and swapped stories that honestly made me shudder, cry or laugh. Those veterans sure know how to tell tales!

We traveled back to Bangor on Sunday, where friends and family were waiting to welcome us home. The “welcome home” is something many of the veteran’s never experienced when returning home from service, and the greetings from the community and by Senator Susan Collins was special and much appreciated.

The HFM folks weren’t kidding...this truly was a trip of a lifetime and I’m so honored to have experienced it with my Dad and his fellow veterans. I strongly suggest (I mean it!) that if you are veteran, or know a veteran, please check out Honor Flight Maine and book the trip! Want to support veterans? Find out when the trips are scheduled and be at the airport to welcome them home! It means more to the veterans and their families than you can possibly imagine.

Dad’s HFM “Guardian” and Compliance Coordinator Nancy Batchelder, MBA