



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You

Siyo -

Cherokee Nation has always revered and honored our Cherokee warriors, the brave men and women willing to fight for our nation and our freedom. It's part of our value system and way of life. I am so honored to have participated this year in the fifth annual Cherokee Warrior Flight.

We hosted eight war veterans from three American wars – WWII, Korean and Vietnam – on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Washington, D.C., to see the war memorials, the U.S. Capitol and Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. In addition to those significant stops, we also toured the White House and presented a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

The Cherokee Warrior Flight is our small way of saying thank you to these veterans, who served our country during wartime. Like all those who have served America, we hold them in the highest regard. We always have and we always will.

When we started this program in 2013, similar honor flight efforts nationally and by the state were shrinking. We took it upon ourselves to create a Cherokee specific program. With every passing year, the Cherokee Warrior Flight gets bigger and better. We take about 10 Cherokee veterans annually on this excursion, and since we started, we have shepherded almost 50 Cherokee veterans to Washington and home again.

I can honestly say that this is one of my favorite programs Cherokee Nation offers.

This year we had moving experiences, including a Korean War veteran, whose brother never came home from that war, share his story as we walked through the 19 statues at the Korean War Memorial. We had a World War II veteran, who later became a high school principal that would go on to lose seven of his own students during the Vietnam War, and he found one of those names on the

Vietnam Wall. Several veterans, who had never been to Washington, were so humbled and thankful they were given the opportunity.

I saw firsthand how our Cherokee veterans are praised in airports, hotel lobbies, restaurants, on the sidewalks and in the corridors of Capitol Hill. They get the respect and honor that they rightly and richly deserve, and for some of them it is a long time overdue.

As my friend Deputy Chief S. Joe Crittenden has said, the healing process that all veterans go through is a personal journey. As a Navy man during the Vietnam War, he knows closure and reconciliation for some veterans starts immediacy after discharge, while others need years to heal fully. Either way, Cherokee Nation remains blessed because we are able to take these types of heroes to D.C. and show them how much we appreciate them.

We will never forget their service and sacrifices.

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