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5/30/04

A Nation Remember's by Ben Palmer

Being a survivor of six campaigns in the great 36<sup>Th</sup>.Inf. Div. This trip was a must for this old Veteran. So plans started very early in Feb.04. Bill Adair who had been a P.O.W. from the Batan Death March, and Ray Wells and I both from the 36<sup>Th</sup> Div. Each had family with us. I had the great honor of having my son Greg and his wife Mary, who were a neverending support for DAD. We were all in the same hotel, each having our family group, and each group attended different functions, as Washington was a mass of people.

After arriving at our Hotel we would visit the Arlington Cemetary. My goal was to visit the grave, of my Mothers brother who was killed in France in WW1. We had a diagram of sorts, and after walking what seemed like five miles we did locate the grave. As we were looking for the gravesite, the Soldiers stationed next to Arlington where placing a flag at each Soldiers grave, it looked like they were out in battalion strength, setting the flags in their proper place at each Gravesite. Then our long walk back to the Unknown Soldiers Monument. Here we observed the placing of the wreath, and Taps was sounded. A very emotional ceremony, that takes place every half hour, and every day of the year.

Arriving back at our Hotel, a very tired bunch. Going out to a great meal and back to plan for the next day.

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This was the day that Bob Dole's secretary had set up a personal meeting at his Washington Office. For Greg I and six veterans. We entered the room, along with a few more veterans that had been invited. We are asked to help ourselves to coffee, soft drinks, and doughnuts. Bob Dole enters and looks around and sees my Legion Hat with the 36<sup>th</sup>. Div. T patch. He asks where are those 36 Div. Vets. I spoke up, and introduced my old friend Ray Wells. Stating we were from the 36 Div. By then he was meeting some more of the group. What a great guy to talk with. Bob Dole asked his secretary to get these guys tickets for the afternoon show, at the M.C.I. Arena. These were tickets for his personal Suite and what a memorable time we had. Greg, Mary, talked about this wonderful reenactment, of scenes from both theaters of WW1. The color Guards, and Bands from each of the services. We were all in awe, and our emotions were not easily controlled. We left with tears in our eyes. It brought back so many memories for these old veterans.

The big day was Saturday, the monument dedication. Our group was bussed from our Hotel to the Washington Redskins parking lot. Here we boarded shuttle bus that dropped us within ten minute walking distance of our seats. We were a sea of people, all trying to find our Section of seats, Plus going thru a radar check, we do get our seats with the Wells family.

We are at least an hour before show time. A clear blue

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sky, a gentle breeze, and a great afternoon for a Sunburn. Water was given out everywhere. The mammoth stage was about fifty rows from us. Bands were playing, music from all the different Era's. The show was nonstop. Two very large movie screens showed old film of many battles through the war. A screen on each side so folks could see more of what was going on. Also as each speaker came on we watched the screen. Bob Dole, the Senator who never gave up on this monument for the WW11 generation spoke and was well received. President Bush had a great speech, and a whole lot of other speakers welcoming the old soldiers, sailors and all other branches of the armed services and to honor the survivors.

Now as we waited, a friend of mine said Ben, did you know that Ollie North was only a few yards away, in the Fox News Tent. This was a picture Opt.and the introduction of Lt. Col. Oliver North was in progress at the FOX News tent. I had carried a couple of my books with me to the dedication, as one never knows. The time was now. I hailed Greg to give me a book I am heading to the Fox News Tent. With my book in hand, the front cover showing my picture of Ben Palmer on patrol in the Mts. Of Italy.His first word, is that you on the cover, "Oh Yes" it was I back in the Mts. of Italy 1943. I was so excited that I had forgot about Greg, but to my surprise I looked up and he has been taking pictures all

along. I asked Col. Oliver North if he would like me to sign the book, and he said of course. So stepping aside to a small desk I signed my book to Oliver North. Book signed I step up again to Ollie and we hold my book so Greg can get our picture. I introduce Greg to Col. Oliver North and he said to Greg, you must be so proud of your Dad. This made our day a wonderful experience. Just think how Proud old Dad was.

I told Col. North my big bitch of today, is the lack of recognition of our war from Sicily, to Salerno, the Rapido River feasco, Cassino, Anzio, the road to Rome. We in the Mediterranean had been in combat for most of a year before the Normandy Invasion ever happened.

History forgets our year long battles of all the above combat in the worst Terrain that our Infantry Divisions fought through in the Mountains of Italy.

Then several of these old Divisions went on to the Southern France Invasion, and the endless combat In France pushing the Germans North up through France With many major combat battles, on to the wars end on 5/7/45. For the few of us that survived, I asked Col. North as I handed him my book ( The Hunter and The Hunted) I asked Col. North to give the G.I.S in Italy, and France another look and a new study.

That I would hear from him. This was great time for the living Veterans to remember those who aren't here today. This trip meant so much to this old Soldier.

The respect shown here was a handshake, a thank you and even a hug. Washington was alive with thousands of Marine Corp Bikers. Most were Nam Vets. These guys went out of their way to come up to us and shake our hand and give us the old Marine bulldog bark, as they thanked us old Soldiers. I must practice their thoughtful Bark.

This was a total time of remembrance. For combat Soldiers our memories of past battles and comrades lost, names forgotten, faces still in our brain, and the survivors BIG QUESTION: WHY ME. We were all at this great reunion for the same reason, to again say to the World, we were the G.I.Kids of WW11 and went to War from every corner of this great nation to help free the world of oppression, by a couple dictators. THE GREATEST GENERATION is slowly fading away, so sad that millions of our generation will never see their great monument in their name. Thanks to Robert Dole for keeping his word, and getting this monument finished, words can't describe our feelings on this great day.

I never heard one word of complaint. We that were well enough to attend were in AUE. We shall never forget this tribute to all who helped win the war. Mostly we Salute those who paid the supreme sacrifice, who lie in graves all over the world. To my lost buddies, I will never forget you in my lifetime.

My book! {THE HUNTER and THE HUNTED} Was

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my way of telling the story of the millions of G.I.Kid's  
that were caught up in the attrition of the War in Europe  
As a survivor of six campaigns, in a rifle company in  
WW11. ONLY GOD HAS THE ANSWER

Bennett J.Palmer

~~July 15 1944~~