



There at the WALL

*William H. Powell -
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Marilyn and I left the warmth and comfort of the Hotel Harrington in downtown Washington DC and rode the Metro to Arlington National Cemetery.

In Bentonville and Bella Vista you stirred from your slumber and, if you were like me, perhaps even grumbled about another “Flag Day.”

On the way to Arlington National Cemetery we had bundled up enough for the chill, but not enough for the brisk wind that blew fallen autumn leaves up into the air.

In Hiwassee – a blanket was found, flashlights were checked, and drinking water was put into the already warmed up truck. Another Flag Day began.

Walking upon the hollowed grounds of Arlington National Cemetery we saw old men and old women, we saw young people of every race and religion, and we even saw a few women alone with their small children.

In Bentonville, in the early morning dark, Rotarians loaded flags into the beds of trucks and started off in the cool morning mist

At Arlington National Cemetery military personnel in dress uniform were alert and ready to help in any way they could. Veterans from every branch of service, veterans with visible scars and with invisible scars were everywhere.

In Bentonville and Bella Vista flag insert after flag insert was found and lovingly flags were placed into the ground and unfurled by the gentle breeze.

At Arlington National Cemetery, in the dark shadows, we sat upon cold white marble benches, and listened to the U.S. Navy Band and the Vice President of the United States.

In Arkansas, as the sun began to bring daylight, and as flashlights were put away, the job was almost over, there were but a few more flags to put out.

At Arlington National Cemetery we stood as the flags of all our military units, passed by. Then, stepping into the sun, we saw row upon row of white tombstones, each one representing a fallen warrior or a veteran finally at rest from the horrors of war.

In Northwest Arkansas the flags had been placed and it was time for the Village Inn. It was time for hot coffee, for bacon and eggs. It was time for pancakes, and for French toast.

At Arlington National Cemetery it was time for the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns. As the crowd stood in hushed silence, the departing guard gave a final salute to these, his fallen comrades.

In Arkansas, a busy work day had begun. For some it was a day for another round of golf, for others a day of well earned rest, and for some of you it was a day of errands or even doctor visits.

At the Vietnam War Memorial Marilyn and I had one more mission to fulfill. Pushing my way through the crowd, I placed a copy of my Vietnam memoirs, and a deeply personal note, below the names of these my fallen comrades.

There at the Wall – there stretching out as high as I could – there with my hands open wide – all I could do was touch the names of those who had fought with me – those who had died.

There at the Wall – a veteran held me up as I cried.

The crowd parted – A hush fell upon us - a lone bugler played Taps.

I beg you – never – never ever - forget why we Rotarians “Do Flags.”