

It's not about me!

I keep telling myself that. You get wrapped up in the pomp, etc., White House, meet the President **BUT** -- it's about all those souls at Arlington National Cemetery and elsewhere - and all the living veterans of this great country.

Nonetheless, I'd like to document my experiences of Veterans Day while they're fresh in my mind.

First a brief headline (newspaper style) then a more detailed narrative then some *optional* pictures and videos.



Headline:

On Veterans Day the President hosts a breakfast for veterans, followed by a wreath laying at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (precisely at 11:00 AM) and then a speech in the Arlington Memorial Amphitheater.

Details:

Here's a link to several pictures that may be of interest:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/692otko2u7ggp2y/AACd8Ep6dsncU0hwnhSDspt2a?dl=0>

As some of you may be aware I was recently elected as National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans -- as such I had the privilege of attending this year's national veteran's observance as their representative.

Thursday night CINC Home (Commander in Chief - Home -- aka, my wife, Miriam) and I drove down to Washington. I was co-pilot manning the WAZE while Miriam drove.

Since I'm still saying kaddish for my Mother, I went to morning services 6:30 AM at Congregation Ohav Shalom / The National Synagogue -- which is located in NorthWest Washington, DC just inside the city line from Silver Spring. Ohav Shalom means (one who) Loves Peace, by the way.

Grabbed a cab to the White House -- I was told that the Metro is unreliable due to construction.

Arrived at the designated entrance on 15th street and Alexander Hamilton and then went through a series of security checks. Did my government issued ID match the previously submitted info, etc?

I saw some people turned aside (to an administrative table) because of birth date discrepancies. I told the guard that if he could shave 20 years off I'd wait in the other line as well.

Walk perhaps 20 yards to a security room -- along the way two casual "greeters" -- we exchange pleasantries -- I know they're really security as well.

Enter a room - 1 person at a time -- went through airport style security -- even the badge that had been sent to me for entrance set off the detectors. [See Picture Link - Badge & Back of Badge] as did the Veterans Day 2016 pin we had been given (see eagle pin above)

After a long walk made it to a reception area was given a small envelope with my name on the outside - similar to a wedding. [Again, see Picture Link] which had my table seating and, mysteriously (at the time), a small card inside with my name on it.

Socialized with and said hello to many fellow veterans and several government officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Like a cocktail hour without the cocktails. It should be noted that with the election many political appointees may or may not retain their positions.

I sat at a table with John Rowan who heads the Vietnam Veterans of America and his wife, A Buffalo area judge, Robert T. Russell, Jr., who's been instrumental in establish Veteran's Courts And Doctor David Shulkin - VA Undersecretary for health and his family: His wife, also a physician, his daughter - 2nd year Harvard law and his son, who I did not get a chance to speak with.

As they're Philadelphians living in Gladwynne, not far from where I once lived in Wynnewood, we got to share some common memories. Dr. Shulkin is a most accomplished physician. https://www.va.gov/opa/bios/bio_shulkin.asp

I enjoyed a granola bar that I had brought with me and a cup of tea - -with sugar cubes served on a silver platter with tongs -- Since Miriam wasn't there I splurged with three (3) cubes.

Mystery solved -- we got into a long line -- handed the name card to someone who announced us one by one -- and then individually we had our picture taken with a most patient President.

We then packed onto buses and with a police escort were whisked across the river to Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier - [See Picture Link - TOMB -- I was standing about where the little boy with the camera is in that picture] (In the videos below you may catch a glimpse of me from time to time -- look for the JWV garrison cap -- and I'm wearing sunglasses and a dark suit)

I managed to take two pictures with my iPhone of the 5 honor guard platoons assembled next to the tomb -- Coast Guard, Navy, Army, Marine & Air Force. [See Picture Link entitled Tomb-left & Tomb-right]

After the wreath ceremony we were escorted through the back entrance of the Amphitheater -- the 20 or so us who were to be seated on the dais were escorted there. When we get onto the dais I'm seated to the right, directly behind MG Bradley A. Becker - who is the Commanding General of the Military District of Washington (MDW) -- brought back some memories in that I was assigned to MDW my first two years of service when I worked at the Pentagon. [See Picture Link Amphitheater]

Much pomp & ceremony, parade of flags, etc. We were each introduced 1 by 1 to the audience and then the President spoke. [Picture Link -- 2 pictures of the President] If you have lots of time -- follow the links below for videos.

Arlington National cemetery is a humbling place -- I can't put it into words. It's both personal (my wife's uncle - her mother's brother - is there) and for all it is special.

After the ceremonies Miriam headed off to find her uncle - I went to the reception hosted splendidly by the Polish Legion of American Veterans - Kielbasa & Pirogis -- I enjoyed an ice cold Coke.

As I was heading out after the ceremonies I was alongside Dave Riley who's National Commander of the DAV - Disabled American Veterans -- Dave lost all 4 limbs but not his spirit or his smile. Try shaking hands a man who has two hooks for hands -- It will get you thinking. You'll see Dave sitting on a motorized scooter -- Maroon & White garrison cap -- at the very beginning of the first video, below. <https://www.dav.org/david-riley/>

You'll see me at the 35 second mark of the same video -- blue-gray garrison cap and dark glasses 2nd row in the Veteran's section -- you can tell by the many hats.

VIDEOS

The long video (link below) -- about an hour and one hour & sixteen minutes -- includes the entire ceremony -- during the wreath laying you'll see me from time to time,

I'm off to the right -- in a blue-gray garrison cap -- 2nd row wearing sun glasses.

Towards the end of this video after President Obama finished his speech he shook each of our hands

At 1:14:52 or so I'm shaking hand with the President (at very bottom of the frame.)

The finger you see pointing is John Rowan's head of the Vietnam Veterans of America - he palmed a business card and handed it to the President with some statement about (of all things, veterans)

My sons fell for the optical illusion that made it look like I was giving the President some advice.

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?418044-1/president-obama-lays-wreath-tomb-unknown-soldier>

This is a video of the wreath ceremony (only)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Nfo6SUN70A>

This is a video of (only) the President's speech - very moving.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0N-Z2Drj_Yw

This is a video of all the speeches (by all) that took place after the wreath laying.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uv-11XebZ_E

GOD BLESS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA