NEWS RELEASE

Soaring Valor: The greatest generation shares their living history with the youngest generation

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When Calvin Markwell saw them, you could see by the expression on his face that he was transported back — to the war, to the time he spent training. Dangling from the ceiling as you walk into the U.S. Freedom Pavilion of The National World War II Museum, are restored WWII aircraft. A Boeing B-17. A TBM Avenge. The former naval aviator pointed out his aircraft, a North American Aviation T-6 Texan (Navy SNJ). He spent three years training on that plane as a cadet in the Naval V-5 Program.

DFW-based flight attendant Laurel Fitzwater, top left, nominated her father, Calvin Markwell, who served with the U.S. Navy during WWII, to participate in the trip. Her daughter, PHL-based flight attendant Alexandra Stafford, top right, and GCISD student Brenna Currie accompanied Markwell throughout the trip.

Marcus White, left, and his brother, Malcolm White, right, pose with the National World War II Museum Victory Belles performance troupe. The ladies helped welcome the 42 veterans and guests at every stop, plus put on a special performance for the group.

The flight crew, plus other American team members, volunteered their time and service to make Soaring Valor possible. The flight crew included, from left: First Officer Kip Blackman, Flight Service Manager Kim Peysha, Captain John Dubarry, Flight Attendant Debbie Kandoll, Flight Attendant Laurel Fitzwater, Flight Attendant Sonia Hacic, Flight Attendant DeeAnna Green, Captain Tom Wideman and First Officer Curt De Keyrel.

As the memories come rushing back, Calvin recounts being stationed at locations along the East Coast — smiling as he remembers the last stop, New York City. It was on the streets of Manhattan, on leave before deployment the next day, that he learned of victory, along with the rest of America. May 8, 1945 — Victory in Europe.

“Everyone was out in the streets. Celebration everywhere … you could barely walk down the road,” he says. “And, if you were in uniform, you couldn’t buy a drink either. Civilians were dragging you into the closest place to buy you a

beer. It was something."

Holding on to the memory, the 91-year-old sits back in his chair. He puts a hand to his mouth, covering up an uncharacteristically toothy grin. Like most WWII veterans, Calvin doesn't really talk much about the war. But this trip is different.

Calvin is at the museum as part of the Gary Sinise Foundation's (GSF) Soaring Valor program — an outreach program that transports living heroes to New Orleans so they can experience the museum dedicated to telling their story. It's the sixth such trip that American Airlines has partnered with GSF to facilitate, transporting 42 WWII veterans to the museum, which is working to record the veterans' living history.

"We don't have much time left to tell these stories … we're losing these great Americans," says Jim Palmersheim, Senior Manager – Veteran & Military Programs at American. "That is why this trip is so important."

[Volunteering my time] is my way of giving back, to say thank you and serve them because they served us.
— DeeAnna Green

Calvin is joined by his daughter Laurel Fitzwater, and granddaughter Alexandra Stafford, both American flight attendants.

Lily Vu, a foreign exchange student from Vietnam, stops for a photo with Marcus White and Gary Sinise before boarding the shuttle to the museum. She says that she hasn't learned much about U.S. history before she moved here and hopes to take back the information to her fellow students in Vietnam.

Dr. Nick Mueller and Gary Sinise escort 101-year-old Richard Cole, the lone survivor of the Doolittle Raid. Cole was present to give his oral history for a special being aired during Memorial Day weekend.

He's also joined by Brenna Currie, an 11th-grader at Grapevine High School, in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. It's the first time that Soaring Valor has extended the program to partner each veteran with a student. The idea is for the veterans to share their personal story with a new generation — a hands-on learning experience about a war that defined a generation and saved a world from tyranny.

About 600 students competed for the chance to participate. Brenna, who recently visited Auschwitz, says she's always been troubled by the grand scale of one man's influence over a dominion. The essay and personal letter she wrote to secure her spot on the trip conveyed how much she valued all that the veterans sacrificed to fight for freedom.

Lily Vu, an exchange student from Vietnam, accompanied Marcus White on the trip. This is her first year to study U.S. history, and she couldn't be more excited to have this interactive learning experience. "Going through the

museum and listening to their stories has given such perspective," she says. "Vietnamese students don't know much about WWII, we only know the surface. Here, I've seen and heard about the details — the things leading up to the war. The meaning behind and what came before." Once back in Vietnam, she plans to share the veterans' stories.

Marcus and his brother, Malcolm White, were both on the trip. They had been nominated by their niece, DeeAnna Green, who has been a flight attendant at American for 28 years. DeeAnna and Laurel, along with the rest of the flight crew, donated their time and service to make the trip possible. DeeAnna says that crew members are eager to serve on these types of charters — serving others is ingrained in the culture at American. "Being involved in these types of opportunities, I've learned about American's commitment to our military families," she says. "It's my way of giving back, to say thank you and serve them because they served us."

Along with the veterans' firsthand accounts, the students were able to witness the veterans' reception throughout the trip — an experience that was intended to thank and honor them for their service. The veterans were greeted at each stop with a hero's welcome and received a personal museum tour, including a private showing of the Tom Hanks-produced Beyond All Boundaries 4-D short film.

Museum curators gave GCISD students a special hands-on presentation about the artifacts that soldiers used in combat, including weaponry.

The Soaring Valor trip included 10 American Airline team members and their nominated WWII veteran, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Gary Littrell; 101-year-old Richard Cole, the last survivor of the Doolittle Raid; Mary Eisenhower, granddaughter of President Dwight D. Eisenhower; and Gary Sinise, who welcomed each veteran personally, pausing to shake their hands and listen to their stories.

Gary said that he was excited to extend this living-history experience to a new generation, that it was an important step for Soaring Valor. He had a message for the high school students. "Soak in every bit of history these great Americans are willing to share," Gary says to the students. "Remember always who you see here. Who you met. What you learned. Carry it with you all your lives. But most importantly, share it with others. Because it's in knowing and understanding our most challenging parts in history that we will prevent it from happening again."

