

NEWS RELEASE

WWII Veteran who guarded Tomb of the Unknown Soldier given a hero's salute

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Eighty years ago, a then 20-year-old Jack Eaton stood guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier – a monument dedicated to deceased US service members whose remains have not been identified. In October 2019, he returned to Arlington, Virginia, and received recognition for holding one of the most prestigious assignments in the armed services.

Jack traveled to see his dream come true — for his name to be displayed on the walls of the barracks at the tomb.

Eaton said he guarded the tomb from 1938 through 1940. But on a trip to Washington, D.C., he saw that his name was missing from a wall of plaques in the back barracks of the guards of the tomb. Despite the uncertainty surrounding Jack's post, he was able to recite classified information that only those who guarded the tomb would know.

Jack knew so many details about the assignment that officials concluded that he had, indeed, guarded the tomb. A plaque with his name and years of service at the tomb was ordered to correct the oversight.

He returned to Washington this past May on the Mid-Michigan Honor Flight for a second time. However, when he arrived, he learned that the plaque had been misplaced.

Robert Greene, President of Mid-Michigan Honor Flight, made it a priority to make Jack's dream a reality. Greene teamed up with American Customer Service Agent Greg Locher, who also who also coordinates Honor Flights at Washington's Reagan National Airport (DCA) since 2014.

"From the moment I got a text from Robert asking if there was anything I could do, I immediately contacted our corporate headquarters asking what we could do," Greg said. "We were able to provide five round-trip tickets to make Jack's dream come true through our Military and Veterans Initiatives program within 48 hours."

A hero's welcome usually greets Honor Flight participants at the gate when they arrive at DCA. Although this most recent flight was not considered an Honor Flight, many considered it a flight to honor Jack. The aircraft was met with ceremonies similar to those given to Honor Flights, including a water canon salute, celebrations at the arrival gate and a warm welcome to Washington from American volunteers and other members of the airport community.

"We wanted Jack to be surprised from the moment he stepped into the terminal," Greg said. "For some, it's their first time to Washington. But for all, it's the trip of a lifetime!"

Upon his return to Detroit Metropolitan Airport, Jack was greeted by dozens of cheering veterans and American volunteers. He had finally received the recognition he deserved for decades.

"[The plaque] is a thing I've been wanting," said Jack. "Now I know it's going to be there forever."

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U.S. Army Capt. Harold Earls, commander of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown, escorts Jack to view the memorial.

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Cpl. Jack Eaton, who held guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from 1938–1940, receives his name on the memorial.

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Jack served in World War II in addition to his posting at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

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Jack displays his military ID.

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Jack sings the National Anthem with organizers and supporters shortly after arrival at DCA.

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TSA leaders at DCA, including NAME, Paul Malandrino, Vice President and Airport Manager for TSA at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, take a photo with Jack prior to heading to heading to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

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Greeters, young and old, welcomed Jack at DCA to celebrate and thank him for his service.

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Jack and U.S. Army Capt. Harold Earls, commander of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier exchange a handshake shortly after revealing Jack's name affixed to the plaque.