



## Bill Knudsen's Puget Sound Honor Flight \* Speakers Bureau Presentation

(Time: 20 minutes)

Good morning / afternoon: ( ☺ )

It is my honor to be here today to tell you about an exciting new organization, located here right in the Pacific NW, on whose Board of Directors it is my honor to serve. It is called the ***Puget Sound Honor Flight***, and our local organization began its very important work on **April 1st. of 2013**. (While the national organization was born in the Midwest in 2004.)

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The history books tell us that World War 2 began **September 1st, 1939** when **Nazi Germany** invaded **Poland**. And gratefully ended **2,191 days (6 years and 1 day)** later on **September 2nd, 1945** with the official surrender of the last **Axis nation, the Empire of Japan**. World War 2 was the largest armed conflict in world history, spanning the entire world, and involving more country's than any other war. It cost more money, damaged more property, killed more people, and

caused more far reaching changes than any war in world history.

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As we all know the United States entered the war on December 7th, 1941, with the infamous bombing of Pearl Harbor. And within **3-4 years the America people had pulled together and had produced a staggering amount of firepower**. Adolph Hitler truly misjudged the commitment and tenacity of the American public.

Listen to what highly motivated American's produced in the first 48 months of the war. American workers (together) built...

- 22 aircraft carriers
- 8 battleships
- 48 cruisers
- 346 destroyers
- 420 destroyer escorts
- 203 submarines
- 34 million tons of merchant ships
- 100,000 fighter aircraft
- 98,000 bombers
- 24,000 transfer aircraft
- 58,000 training aircraft

- 93,000 tanks
- 257,000 artillery pieces
- 105,000 mortars
- 3 million machine guns
- 7 million rifles
- and 2.5 million military trucks.

Think of it...all of this was produced in a little over 48 months. Heck, it took Bill Gates over 5 years just to build his house.

The **US defense budget**, from 1940-1945 increased from **\$1.9 billion to \$59.8 billion**.

And more importantly...within that first year of the War, **over 2 million Americans were in uniform**. Sadly, our country **lost 413,000** brave Americans by the war's end. (That works out to be 220 Americans, every day of the war) And another **500,000 were wounded** during those six horrible years.

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The sacrifices made by these men and women were enormous. And in many cases the odds were stacked against them. For instance...

You might be interested to know that as a member of the US Army Air Corp, trying to complete your required 35 bombing missions over Germany, France and Italy, **your chances of being killed were 71%**. (From 1939-1945 the Allies dropped 3.4 million tons of bombs on France and Germany, 28,000 tons per month. But the price we paid for that success was enormous.)

And while the thousands of B-24 Liberator bombing missions certainly helped to win the war, the B-24's were, in fact, a flying death trap, as over **80% of them either crashed on take-off and landing, or were shot down**. Let me give you a small example, that hits home with me personally...

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I had the honor of taking a flight in a B-24 a couple of years ago in Spokane. And right away I noticed that in order to load the maximum number of bombs on each plane, there was hardly any armored protection for the guys on the flight crew. (Other than the pilot and co-pilot.) The fuselage was nothing for than sheet metal.

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My own birth father, 2nd Lt. Bill Cuthbert was one of those casualties, as his bomber, a B-24 named *The Fascinating Lady*, was shot down by German ack-ack over a small town in France called **Abbeville, at 8:22 PM on April 20th, 1944**.

He is now buried in **Plot D-Row 14-Grave 42** at The American Cemetery at Normandy. (Along with **9,386 other brave Americans who did not come back.**) This piece of American holy ground is located just above Omaha Beach, on the very northern tip of France. The gravesite just adjacent to my dad's belongs to Teddy Roosevelt Jr., a Medal of Honor winner.

I was 6 months old at the time of my father's death, and **never had the honor of meeting him.**

So my service to the *Puget Sound Honor Flight* organization is my small tribute to him. **A WW2 hero I never met!**

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Today, it is estimated that there are a little over **1 million WW2 veterans still alive** across this great nation. But sadly, we are losing close to a **<1,000 each and every day>**. And, in Western Washington, we estimate that approx. **15,000 WW2 veterans are still alive.**

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So what happened when these brave men and women came back from the war?

- Well, those that were able **went right to work.**
- Many of them went to **school on the GI Bill.**
- Many **got married.** They **had children** (us baby boomers).

They bought homes and automobiles, television sets, washing machines and settled in to live American dream.

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**Very few of them wanted to talk about what they had seen** during the war. They put the war behind them. And shoved those memories as far back as possible. They lived their lives, raised their families and helped make American the great (FREE) nation that it is today.

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Was there a parade, and did America shake their hand and collectively thank them for their service? Well, yes, for a small percentage of them.

But the vast majority of veterans just shoved those uniforms and difficult memories into a box, and put the box in the attic.

And most of the families of these hero's tell us that they rarely, if ever, talked about the war.

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Now, as of last spring, the ***Puget Sound Honor Flight*** is stepping up to recall, recognize, and reward our local WW2 heroes. We are the newest of **127 Honor Flight Network hubs** across America, located in **41 states**.

We are a 100% volunteer group, fueled by the pride of making veterans feel appreciated and loved by those of us who received a lifetime of freedom, thanks to their enormous sacrifices.

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### **A little history about the Honor Flight Network...**

It was the brainchild of a man named **Earl Morse**, a Physician's Assistant and retired Air Force Captain, who was working at a **VA Clinic in Ohio** in May, 2004. Just as the WW2 Memorial was being completed in Washington DC. He asked many of his veteran patients if they would ever travel to see the new Memorial?

Unfortunately, for most of these heroes, then in their 70's and 80's, it simply wasn't financially or physically possible for them to make the journey on their own.

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That is when **Earl**, who as it happened was a **private pilot**, asked a couple of his oldest patients if he could personally take them to see the WW2 Monument, as his guests, in his private plane? Both men teared up, and graciously accepted his kind

offer. Once that trip was completed, and the story got around, **11 more private pilots stepped up** and volunteered.

As a result of those early missions, and as word spread across America about the ideals of the program, the Honor Flight Network, as we know it today, was born.

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**Our Mission Statement is quite simple:** To thank as many of these World War 2 hero's as humanly possible by flying them, at no cost to their families, to Washington DC. To see the beautiful national memorial that was built as a tribute to them, the stunning *WW 2 Memorial*.

We also take them to the *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier* in *Arlington National Cemetery* to watch the changing of the guard. And several other war memorials located throughout our nation's capitol, including *Korea Memorial* and *Vietnam Wall*.

We call these trips **"*The Last Mission.*"** And since that first flight in 2004 over **120,000 veterans have taken** this magical flight.

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The 1st Honor flight hub in Washington State began in Spokane in 2008. And our Pacific NW hub became a reality in 2013.

Our first trip left SeaTac on my 70th birthday, October 13th, 2013, with 30 excited local veterans, joined by a member of their family, or a PSHF volunteer guardian. As they enjoyed the trip of their lifetime on our airline partner, Alaska Airlines.

(By the way, you should know that **ALL of our PSHF guardians pay their own way** on this trip. Every dime we collect goes to the veterans! Those of us who are privileged to go, each write a check for \$1,000.)

They stayed in first class accommodations, tour the facilities in air conditioned tour busses, enjoy a lovely thank you banquet at the hotel, and shed many a tear, as they soaked in the beauty of the monuments and memorials in our nation's capitol. Each and every one of them dedicated to our guests unselfish service. One can only imagine the memories that come flooding back to these veterans...both good and bad?

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And, on the return flight from DC, they also enjoyed their ***"Last Mail Call"*** as they read many letters and cards delivered to them by our organization. From family, friends, and Pacific NW school children, thanking them for their service.

In many cases it was the first time that anyone had actually said *"Thank You"* for what they did. Suffice to say there is rarely a dry eye in the group as those adorable and happy cards and letters are opened and read.

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There is also significant public and military pageantry which takes place as the veterans leave SeaTac...when they arrive in Washington DC...and of course, upon their return to SeaTac.

To assure their comfort and safety, we provide qualified medical personnel for the entire trip. As well as wheelchairs for those who need them.

Believe me when I tell you that the level of detail involved in taking a plane load of 80+ senior citizens 3,000 miles across the country is substantial. So we are prepared for any medical emergencies on the trip. Safety and care of these veterans is priority #1.

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Ladies and gentleman, **there is a tremendous sense of urgency** to our task, as these veterans are obviously elderly, and many could not accomplish this mission without our help and support. And I am here today, respectfully asking for your help?

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The **average cost** to send a veteran on an Honor Flight is about **\$1,000**. 96% of all funds donated to our organization goes directly to the expenses of these flights. The waiting list of Pacific NW-WW2 veterans, who are now dreaming of having this profound experience, is growing on a daily basis. And we need to get these guys to DC as soon as humanly possible.

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You can also read more about Puget Sound Honor Flight, and make a very important tax deductible donation at:

- **[pugetsoundhonorflight.org/](http://pugetsoundhonorflight.org/)**
- You can call us at **#253.303.1130**
- You can find us on **Facebook**
- Or you can write a check right now, payable to the ***Puget Sound Honor Flight***, and I will hand walk it right into the hands of our PSHF treasurer.

And, of course, we are always looking for volunteers who can help us make these trips spectacular and meaningful events.

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Think about these brave American's, and the sacrifices that they made for the freedoms that you, and those you love, enjoy today. And look into your heart, and reach into your wallet, so that we can send them to Washington DC, and say "*Thank You.*"

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You should also know that in the not too distant future, when we have lost all of our WW2 veterans, a **strategic plan is already in place** to transition to Korean War, then Vietnam veterans, and all other wars chronologically.

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On behalf of the remaining 15,000 Western Washington WW 2 veterans, I thank you for both your time, and for any financial support you can give us.

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On a final note, if you would like to share some great pictures of our very first ***Puget Sound Honor Flight***, you may do so by just going to Google or Bing and typing in...***Puget Sound Honor Flight Inaugural Flight***. And you may want to have a handkerchief available before you watch it.

**God Bless America!** And God Bless these brave American's, who fought for the blanket of freedom that we all sleep under every night.

(Show 15 minute DVD Video)