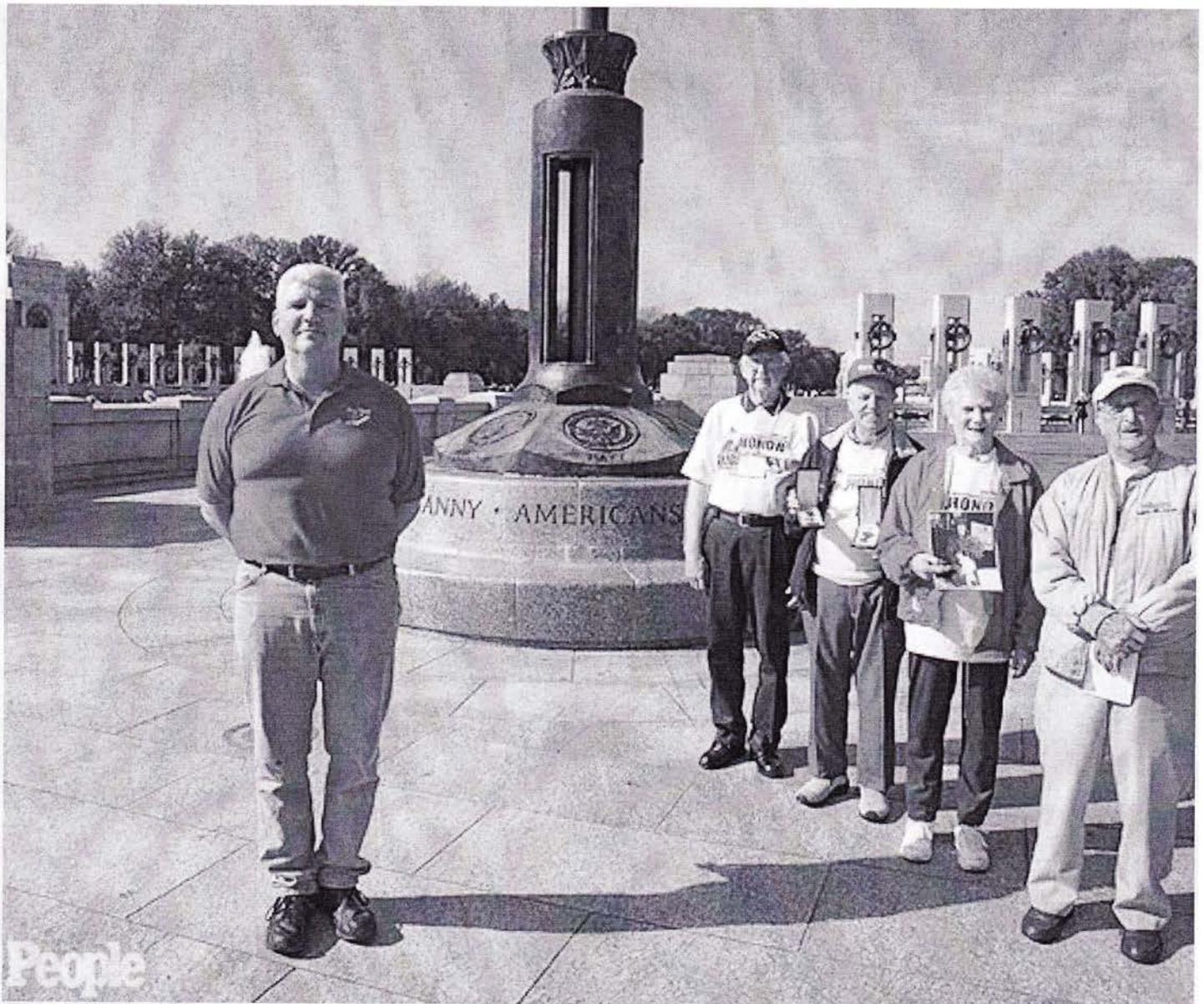


Earl Morse Helps Fly World War II Veterans to See Their Memorial

By ANNE LANG AND NICOLE WEISENSEE EGAN
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From left: Earl Morse (in red), George Gribben, Charlie Sens, Ellie Miller (in red) and Kenny Fegley
ETHAN HILL



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Earl Morse had no idea that a casual question would end up launching him on a life-changing crusade.

It was December 2004, and the physician assistant was chatting with some World War II veteran patients when the subject turned to the memorial in their honor that had just opened the previous spring in Washington, D.C.

"I said to them, 'Have you been to see your new memorial?' " says Morse, 54, who was working at an outpatient clinic for veterans in Chillicothe, Ohio.

"Sadly, none of them had been," says Morse, who still works as a full-time PA for the VA and lives in Enon, Ohio, "and reality had set in that they were never going to see their memorial because they didn't have the financial means. That broke my heart."

So Morse decided to follow his heart and do something to help the aging heroes. The end result is the [Honor Flight Network](#), a nonprofit that has flown more than 100,000 veterans to see their long-awaited memorial since its May 2005 inaugural flight.

The visits stir up a lot of emotions – and memories.

"I thought a lot about the war and all the battles I was in," says George Gribben, Jr., 88, of Howard, Ohio, of his visit last fall.

"I was remembering some of the guys I was with," says Gribben, who fought in the Battle of the Bulge, "and some of the difficulties we had."

'We Owe It to These Guys'

Morse credits Henderson, N.C., businessman Jeff Miller with making it possible to expand the project and help even more World War II veterans, who are dying at a rate of about 642 per day.

"There is no way I can describe the Honor Flight Network program and the successes that we've enjoyed without bringing Jeff into the picture," Morse says.

"He did an incredible, incredible job," he says. "He's a very wonderful, selfless individual."

Miller says helping was a no-brainer for him.

"I feel we owe it to these guys," says Miller, 58. "I mean, their memorial wasn't even built until nearly 60 years after the war. It's so rewarding to see the look on their faces."

Charlie Sens says seeing it last fall hit him harder than he thought it would.

"I told myself I'd bite my tongue to keep from crying," says Sens, 88, of Marion, Ohio, who twice earned a Purple Heart and a bronze star during his 3½ years in the Army, "but the next thing I knew, the tears were flowing."

Honor Flight is available on demand and is currently screening in select locations around the country. The documentary focuses on four WWII veterans from the Midwest as each prepares to take an Honor Flight Network trip to their long-awaited memorial in Washington, D.C. – and includes footage of the emotionally-charged hours they spend on the site.