

Passing Down Their ‘Bravery’

VFW members escort WWII veterans to Europe

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On Sept. 21, on the 81st anniversary of Operation Market Garden, members of VFW Post 6712 in Revere, Massachusetts, escorted three WWII veterans back to the Netherlands, where they attended several ceremonies in the cities they were deployed to.

One of the veterans, Gene Metcalfe, now 102 years old, served with the Infantry Regiment 82nd Airborne Division, 508th Parachute. After landing in Groesbeek, Netherlands, Metcalfe was struck by shrapnel and was assumed to be killed in action. He was later taken captive and held in prison camps until he was liberated by Allied Forces in April 1945.

Frank Stellar, 100 years old, served with the 302nd Bomb Squadron, 8th Air Force. Stellar aided the allies’ advance by supplying air support to ground troops, as well as disrupting enemy supply lines.

Lester “Les” Schrenk survived brutal conditions when he was captured after his plane was shot down. Schrenk was sent to Stalag Luft IV in Poland and survived the 500-mile death march— a forced march of captured Allied Forces across Germany towards the end of WWII. He is now 101 years old.

The veterans were escorted by VFW Post 6712 members Andrew Biggio, a Marine Corps veteran and Boston police officer; Post Quartermaster Steven Ashman, a Boston Police officer and Army Reserve Civil Affairs Captain; Brian Johnston, a Purple Heart recipient; and Marc Silvestri, a Bronze Star recipient.

Biggio organized and led the escort mission to the Netherlands and has organized more than 25 similar trips to Europe for veterans.

While in Berg en Dal, Netherlands, Metcalfe presented a plaque to the mayor. Ashman described this moment as “missie volbracht,” or “mission accomplished.”

In Groesbeek, they had a chance to share their experiences with students. Ashman, in an article he wrote for VFW Massachusetts, described it as passing down their “bravery,

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sacrifice and survival to the next generation.”

The veterans also had the chance to visit the Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten, where they could reflect and pay tribute to those soldiers who were unable to make it home.

In his article, Ashman praised VFW and the members of Post 6712 who were able to make trips like this possible.

“This journey highlighted the vital role the VFW plays in ensuring that no generation of veterans is forgotten,” he wrote. “The members of Post 6712 personally volunteered their time, resources and care to escort WWII heroes, reflecting the VFW’s enduring mission of veterans serving veterans.”

This article is featured in the 2025 October issue of Checkpoint. If you're a VFW member and don't currently receive the VFW Checkpoint, please contact VFW magazine at magazine@vfw.org.