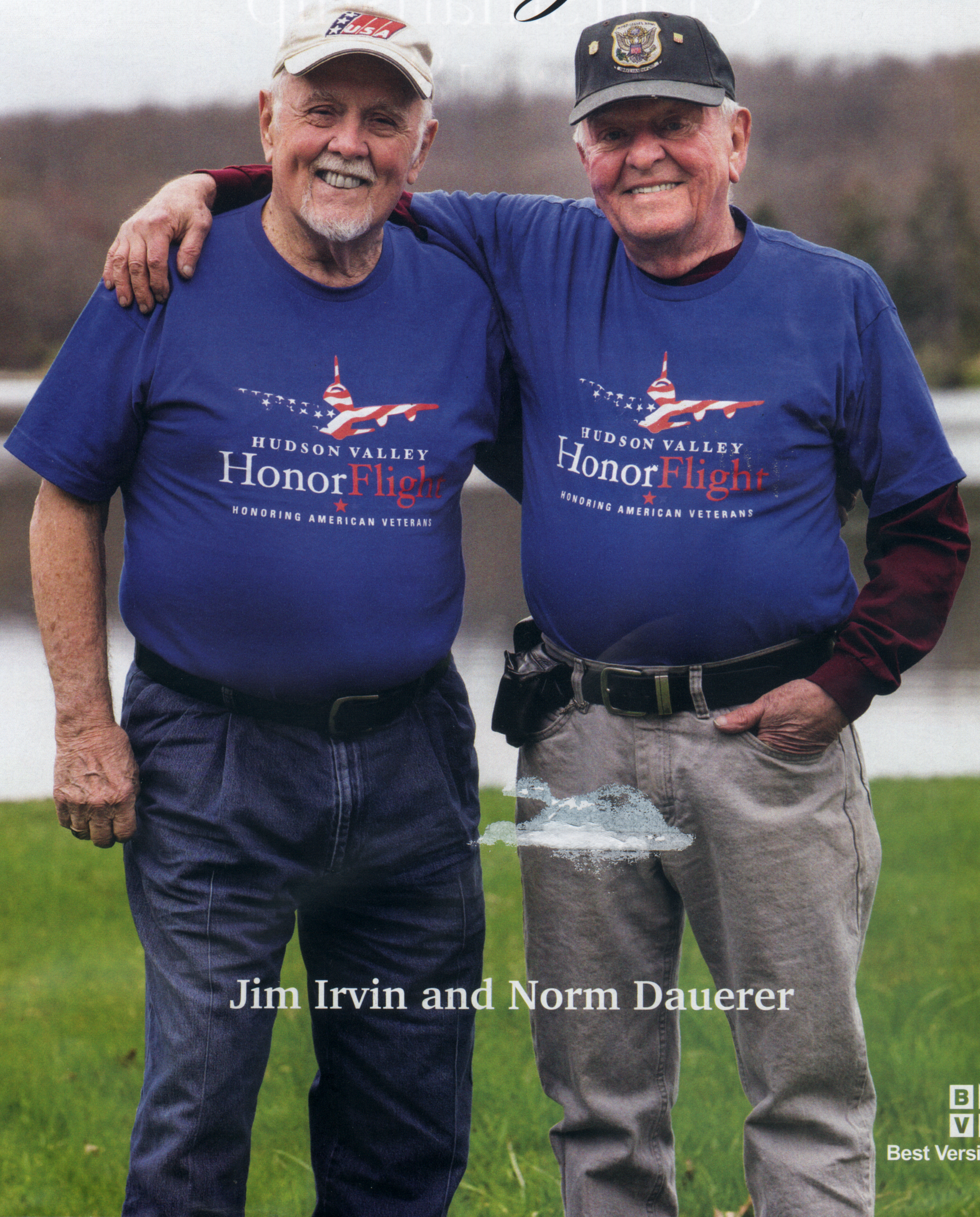


East Fishkill

Living

July 2022



Jim Irvin and Norm Dauerer



Best Version Media

HonorFlight

By Jeanne Cotroneo Darrow
and Lauren Fitzgerald

A Trip of a Lifetime for Norm Dauerer and Jim Irvin

In the early morning hours of April 9, hundreds gathered outside Stewart International Airport to welcome a very special convoy. Buses, escorted by a motorcade, arrived carrying more than 80 local military Veterans about to embark on the trip of a lifetime. After a two-year pause due to the pandemic, the Hudson Valley Honor Flight once again took to the skies to transport Veterans to Washington, D.C., for a day of togetherness—touring the war memorial sites, being treated to lunch and dinner, and experiencing a hero's welcome upon their return.

Aboard the organization's 25th mission were East Fishkill's Norman J. Dauerer and James Irvin. "I was flabbergasted by the number of people there to greet us," said Norm, who signed up for a flight three years ago at the Honor Flight's booth at East Fishkill Community Day.

"They did an absolutely wonderful job," Jim said of the experience, which included visiting the WWII Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Iwo Jima Memorial and the Vietnam War Memorial, where both he and Norm found the names of friends killed in action.

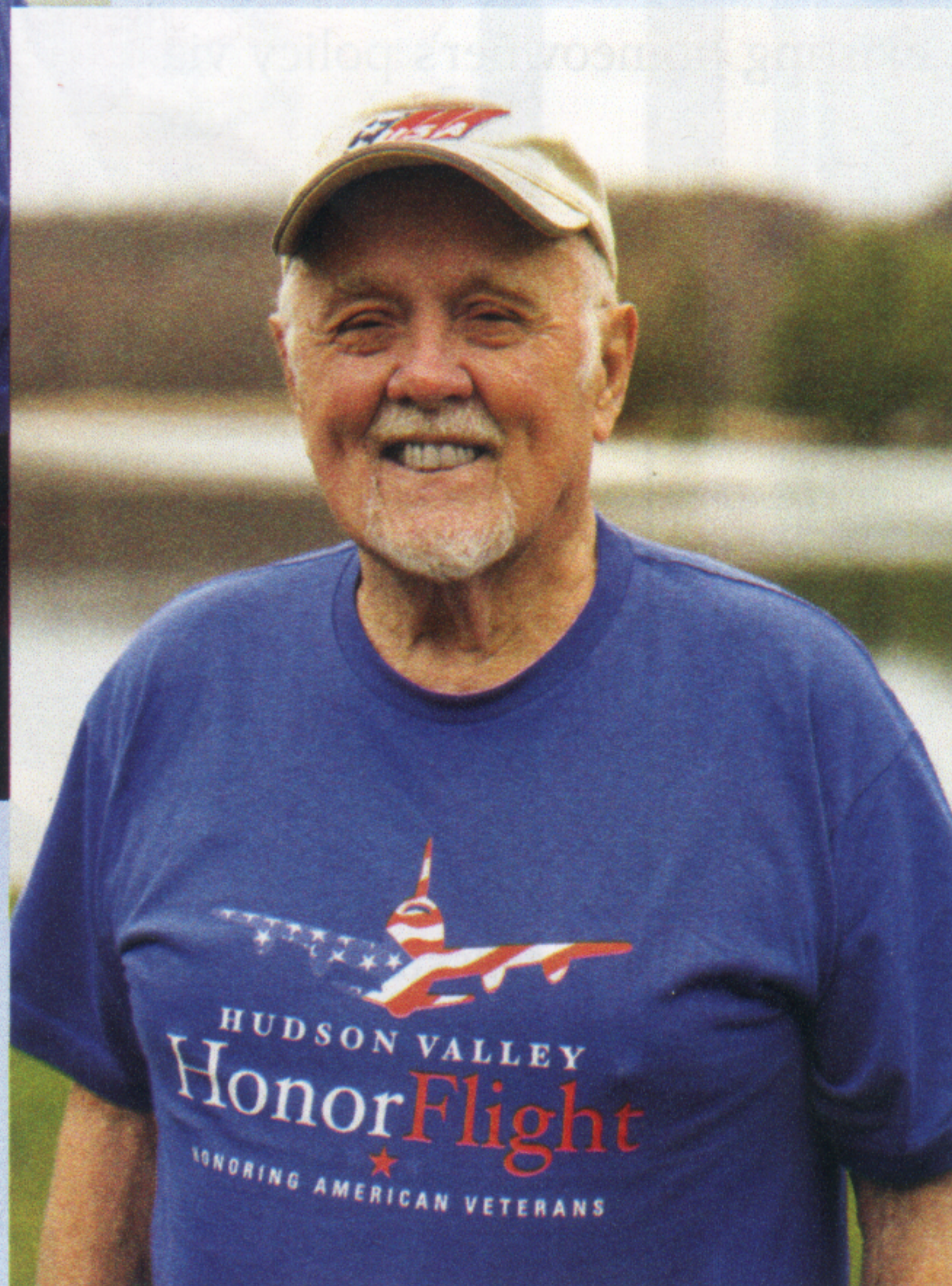
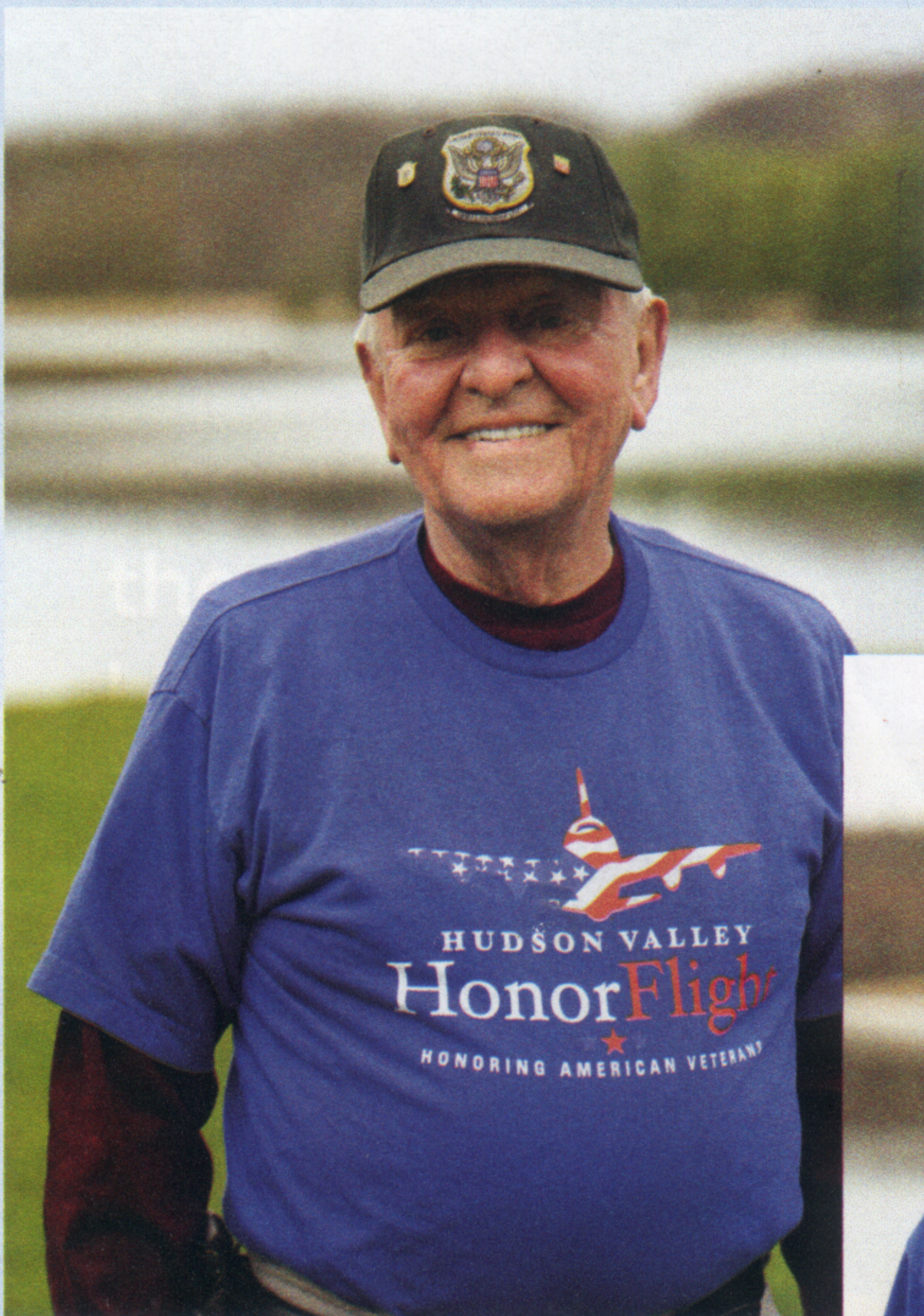
Norm was accompanied on the Honor Flight by his friend Mark and met up in D.C. with his son Joe and granddaughter Victoria, who live in Virginia. Jim was thrilled to have his son, James Andrew (Andy), also a Veteran, as his "guardian" that day.

"Being able to accompany my father was an experience I will never forget," said Andy, the assistant principal at Myers Corners Elementary who coincidentally is married to Norm's niece, Maureen, a teacher at Gayhead Elementary. "The reception given to the Veterans everywhere we went was so touching," he added. "While they are humble, the service each gave to this country makes them all very deserving."

LIBERATION BY THE 106TH CALVARY

Born in Germany at the start of WWII, Norm's life changed on April 28, 1945. He will never forget the U.S. Calvary entering his uncle's farm 40 kilometers north of Munich. The six-year-old Norm was asleep in the farmhouse when U.S. forces put a 75-millimeter tank round through the kitchen window, just missing the German SS Major who was sitting at the table. "It blew a 2-foot-by-3-foot hole above the stove, right where my mother had been standing two minutes before," Norm described. The Major took off, and Norm remembers three jeeps pulling in and the American soldiers who had arrived giving him his first piece of chewing gum. Surprised by the Americans' advance, the remaining Volkssturm soldiers surrendered.

Norm's father, an American citizen, returned to the U.S. in 1947. The rest of the family followed the next year and settled in the Bronx, where Norm and his older brother enrolled in school and learned English. At Xavier Catholic High School, Norm was on the rifle team and received a full scholarship to St. John's University, where he earned a degree in English.



Veterans Norm Dauerer (above) and Jim Irvin shared a special experience aboard Hudson Valley Honor Flight's Mission 25.

After graduation in 1962, Norm enlisted in the Army. "I was thankful to have immigrated to this country and felt I wanted to give back," he explained. He also had hopes of being chosen for the Army's rifle team.

Basic training was followed by electronics school at Fort Monmouth, N.J., before Norm was sent to join the International Rifle Team at Fort Benning, Ga. In 1963, he married Giovina, who joined him at Fort Benning, where their son Joseph was born nine months later.

While an eye condition prevented him from continuing on the international team, Norm joined the U.S. Service Rifle Team and competed in national matches. He was awarded the Distinguished Rifleman Badge, the most prestigious marksmanship honor a soldier can earn.

In 1965, he completed his service and relocated to Dutchess County, where Norm landed a job as a technical writer at IBM. After welcoming sons Louis and Michael, the family settled in Hopewell Junction in 1967, in the home where Norm and Giovina still live today. By the time he retired from IBM in 2001, the advisory engineer had registered 33 patents.

For the past 20 years, Norm has been an instructor for Venturing Crew 3758, part of the Hudson Valley Boy Scout Council, a co-ed program for youth ages 14 to 21. Affectionately known as "Coach," Norm is happy to "give back in support of youth education and pass on my experience."

LEARNING FINANCE, ARMY STYLE

A Lewistown, Pa., native, Jim joined the Army in 1959, also feeling "it was my duty to enlist." After basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., and finance school at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Ind., he spent 14 months in the Army's finance office at Camp Kaiser, Korea. Upon returning to the U.S., Jim was stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., where he remained until 1962.

The next year, he married Sara, also from Lewistown. They welcomed daughter Bethany in 1964 and son Andrew in 1967. From 1967 to 1973, the family lived in a tiny mobile home on Palen Road while Jim traveled extensively throughout the Northeast for his job with AT&T. When Jim settled into a role in AT&T's White Plains office, he moved his family into their current home in East Fishkill. Jim retired from AT&T in 1989 after 26 years of service, then again in 1999 after 10 years as a contract employee with the company.

For Jim, it was four years ago that the Honor Flight reached out to offer him a seat on the plane, but he passed it to a WWII Veteran. This year, he got his turn.

MAIL CALL

Exhausted by 7 p.m., the group boarded the flight home, during which they got a nostalgic surprise. During "mail call," written expressions of gratitude from family, friends, schoolchildren and supporters from across the country brought most of the Veterans to tears. Jim counted more than 50 pieces of mail, including from his wife, children, daughter-in-law and five grandchildren (who call him "Grampy." He also has two great grandchildren.) Norm ("Opa") also got cards and letters from his six grandchildren, three sons and his daughter-in-law too.

Jim laughed about how mail calls were always the second most popular call behind "pay day," for which he was in charge. Jim admitted he "did not feel as worthy" of the Honor Flight as his comrades "who were shot at," but, as Norm reminded him, "everyone is needed."

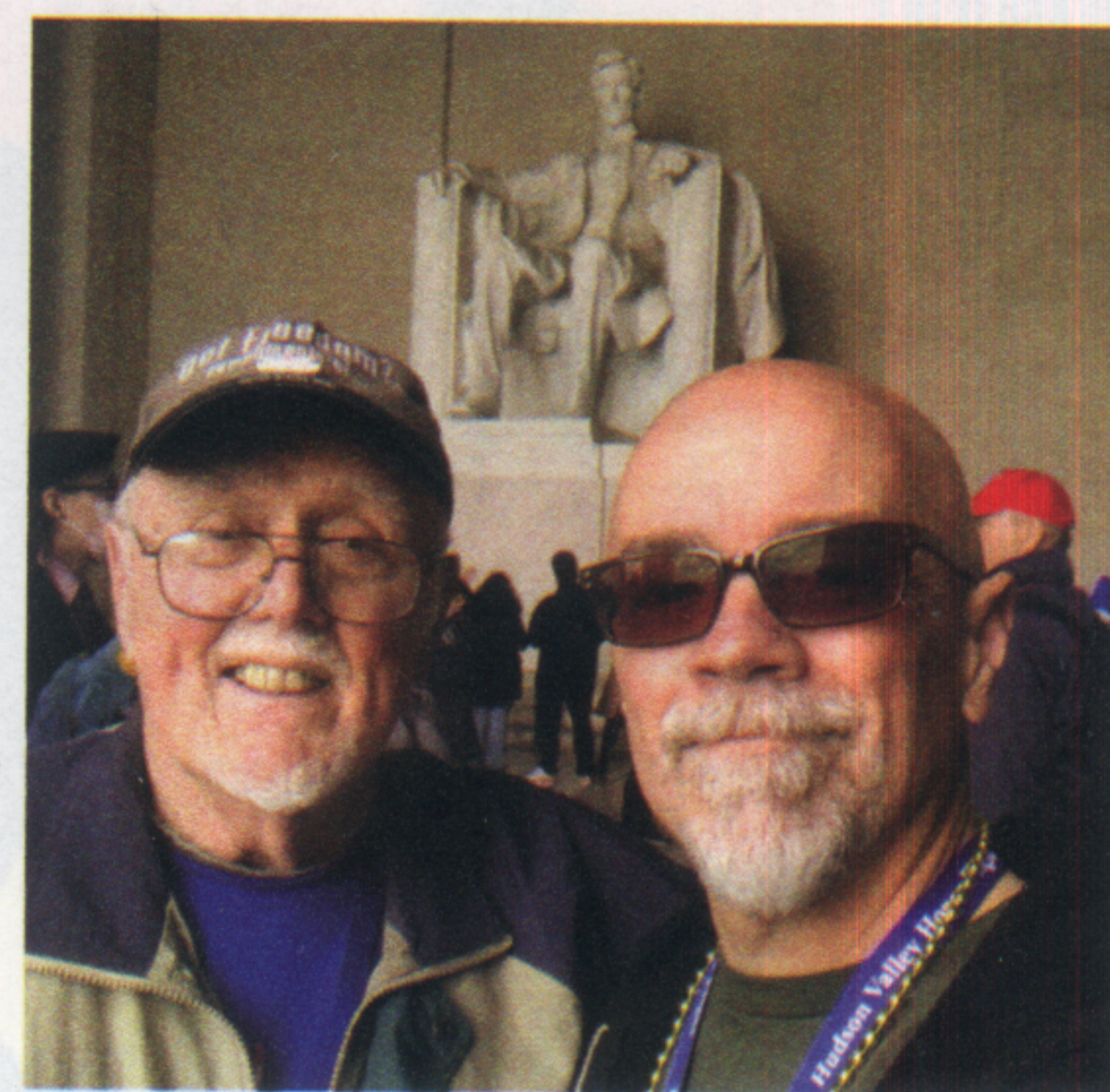
The heroes were greeted back at Stewart Airport by "welcome home" signs, warm handshakes and cheers from a large crowd, something that Jim reminded "not all soldiers received in the past."



Norm was thrilled to meet up with his son Joe and granddaughter Victoria, who live in Virginia.
Courtesy of Norm Dauerer.



Jim, pictured here in 1961 at Camp Kaiser, Korea.
Courtesy of Jim Irvin.



Father and son, Jim and Andy Irvin, share a special moment at the Lincoln Memorial.
Courtesy of Andy Irvin.

He and Norm added that "freedom isn't free" and thanked the community for their support, including all of the Honor Flight volunteers "who made it such a memorable experience." Appreciation for our Veterans is "a way of showing thanks for all we have in this country and for the Veterans who protected it."

Hudson Valley Honor Flight is a 501c3 nonprofit organization and a local hub of the National Honor Flight Network. Veterans are transported to Washington, D.C. at no cost to them. Additional flights are scheduled for this fall. While priority is given to WWII, Korean War and terminally ill Veterans, Honor Flight is accepting applications from all military servicemen and -women, and volunteer opportunities are many.

To learn more, visit
HVHonorFlight.com. ♦

We would like to thank **THE DARLIND COMPANIES**
for bringing you this cover story.