



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
AIR UNIVERSITY (AETC)**



06 November 2017

Ms. Sharon Roberts and Staff,

I would like to express the gratitude of each of the Virginia Tech cadets for allowing us the opportunity to attend the American Veterans Center Conference in Washington DC. The conference was an unforgettable learning and humbling experience for all of us. Cadet Michael Shipley states:

"The American Veterans Conference was an amazing opportunity to interact with living history. The number of true American heroes that we got to personally interact with was astonishing. As a future LT, I gained an immense appreciation for those servicemembers who went before me and sacrificed so much for our nation. You can read stories about these amazing acts of heroism, but nothing will ever beat interacting face-to-face with those who experienced it."

While at the conference, we had the privilege of listening to and meeting many American heroes, distinguished guests, and cadets from other universities. The first night of the conference was the wounded warrior panel where we heard of incredible stories of sacrifice and what it truly means to be selfless. During the panel, SFC Michael Schiltz spoke of acts of selflessness and bravery when his vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb. In the attack, one of his fellow soldiers used their own body to shield him from the rounds cooking off in their burning vehicle. Hearing this makes one realize the bond between these soldiers, and how they will give their life for one another at any moment.



(from left to right) Army Cadets Shipley, Payne, and Gendron with Shilo Harris



Virginia Tech cadets with Lt. Jim Downing and Lt Col Richard E. Cole

During the second and third day of the conference there were panels of WWII legends and Pearl Harbor survivors. Hearing these WWII vets talk about their experiences gives any one listening an insight that no history book or documentary will every give you. Their stories were full of lessons that can be applied in today's world.

Not only did we learn from the inspiring stories that all the guests shared with us during the various panels throughout the conference, but some of the most memorable moments were personal conversations with the guests at reception events during the conference such as when we visited the Norwegian Embassy. Cadets got to speak firsthand to the heroes and distinguished guests they heard from just a few hours prior. The ability to freely ask questions to these men and women afforded each of us an entirely new insight that can only be achieved through conversation. Cadet Sinnott states:

"I am so incredibly fortunate to have been able to participate in the conference and I was able to learn so much from the panelists as well as speaking to them individually. One of my favorite portions of the conference included leading women in the military, this panel inspired me to work my best so one day I could possibly be as successful as the women up on stage."



Air Force Cadets in front of the Norwegian Embassy

During the last evening of the conference at *American Valor: A Salute to Our Heroes*



SFC Ronald Rosser speaking with Virginia Tech cadets

reception, many of the Virginia Tech cadets had the opportunity to speak with numerous Medal of Honor recipients. At one point during the night, SFC Ronald Rosser approached the Virginia Tech cadets to pass off knowledge he had gained over the years—this was a once in a life time experience to speak with a MOH recipient

The best way to sum up the experience is through the words of the cadets themselves who attended.

"Weekend full of Ambassadors, Celebrities, Medal of Honor Recipients, and great advice. Thank you for allowing us to experience

this great event. Many of the notes I took from these walking legends will guide me throughout my life in the military." - Cadet Brandon Tull

"We met some amazing people, heard some amazing stories, and more prepared for Active Duty because of it. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to go, it truly was an excellent experience." - Cadet Jack Tully

"My experience at the American Veterans Conference was what I consider to be a once in a lifetime opportunity." - Cadet Noah Gendron

"I thought that the conference was one of the best learning experiences I have had in the Corps. The range of speakers on the panels were of the highest accolades, and they gave us all a big picture to when they fought and sacrificed much." - Midshipman Ethan Claybrook

"I had an incredible experience at the American Veteran's Conference that I will not soon forget! I spoke to so many incredible and inspirational people and learned countless valuable lessons that I will be able to take with me into my future career in the Air Force." - Cadet Micaela Albright



Cadet McKay learning WWII fighter tactics from Cmdr. Dean 'Diz' Laird

The American Veterans Conference was awe-inspiring for the fifteen cadets who attended and was even described as the best thing ever experienced. Without your support, the abundant lessons learned from America's bravest heroes mentioned above would not have been possible. Spending time among men and women of valor encouraged every single one of us to use their stories as motivation towards bettering ourselves. On behalf of the Army, Navy, and Air Force ROTC programs, we want to offer our biggest gratitude and thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C.W. Torrens', with a stylized flourish at the end.

CAMERON W. TORRENS, Colonel, USAF
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