

So, here's the thing...**Cloverdalian among heroes feted at the White House**

By Paula Wrenn



It is always a pleasure to tell a about a hero living in our midst - there are too many walking among us who are truly unsung heroes. This is a story of deserved praises sung and the exciting experiences one of our locals encountered decades after his war-time efforts.

Perhaps you recall the story in a spring edition of the *Reveille* when Neena Hanchett reported on Dan Bunting's trip to Berlin for the 60th anniversary of the airlift that sent in supplies and established freedom for many caught up in the Russian blockade. Bunting was just 17 and living in Germany when his father enlisted him to help the U.S. military load planes with people and unload supply planes for those behind the blockade. Young Dan went to work each day after school from 3:30 to midnight, alongside a German crew.

**Dan
Bunting's
trip to
Berlin**

The experience was eye-opening and transforming for a young man. The conditions were difficult, but rather than eat in the officer's quarters, Bunting would stay and eat the simpler food served once a day to his German crew. In would come basic survival supplies; out would go people. Some were survivors of prison camps, and most had only a pillow case or tiny cardboard suitcase containing the sum of their worldly possessions. Bunting recalls crying some days when he got home after work because he was so much better off than the people he was helping.

He also recalls humor in doing a back-breaking job. One day he unloaded two airplanes; the first loaded with coal and the second with flour. He and his mother laughed, but it was especially challenging to wash off the flour and coal dust given the Russians had compromised the city's power source. The thought of that cold, pasty-gray bath should give anyone chills.

Sixty years had passed when Bunting and his co-heroes were invited in May of this year to Berlin for the celebration that nation holds every 10 years to commemorate the airlift. Hanchett's story describes the warmth of the reception the Americans received. But the story recently got even better.

At the close of an overseas telephone call to the celebrants in Berlin, Vice President Joe Biden suggested that Berlin's American heroes should visit The White House for Veteran's Day. Sure enough, it happened. Bunting, his wife Ann, and his fellow airlift heroes found themselves in Washington, D.C., earlier this month. They were hosted at banquets and the Kennedy Center. They were ushered to VIP seating at Arlington Cemetery's Amphitheater, where they heard a speech from President Obama that Bunting describes as "very inspiring." They sat near the First Lady and the Biden's. Who else was there? "The Secretary of the Air Force and umpteen four-star generals; more brass than I've ever seen in one place," Bunting says.

And then there was a reception - in the West Wing of The White House. That's where Biden spent an hour with the group, chatting like a regular guy, clearly impressed by their stories. When Bunting mentioned the book he wrote about the airlift, a Biden aide appeared as if by magic to provide the information so the history-loving VP could receive his copy. Ann Bunting, proud of her husband and thrilled to be a part of the excitement, scored a friendly peck on the forehead from Biden. "He's really a down-to-earth guy," says Bunting, whose feet still haven't touched the ground.

It's nice to see someone get their due for such selflessness. I can't help but think that many of the people helped during that time found their way to this country and that they thank people like Dan Bunting for making their Thanksgivings possible. And just imagine how proud his father would be to know his son continued to live a life of service and that his memoir is on the Vice President's bedside table. If you run into Dan Bunting, let him regale you with just one of his great stories from this trip. I haven't given it all away.