

U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard Tours Gettysburg Battlefield

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WASHINGTON – Members of the U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard recently spent a liberty day learning the history and impact of the largest battle in the American Civil War during a trip to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 19.

Retired Master Chief Hospital Corpsman Mark Hacala, a training officer and historian for the Ceremonial Guard, volunteered to lead the tour in cooperation with the Liberty Program at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling (JBAB), who provided a bus and funding for the event.

"There are several reasons for the trip: to see first-hand one of the most important sites in American history, to deepen our Sailors' understanding and appreciation for the symbolism of our military customs and traditions, and to offer a fun, free liberty trip for their day off," Hacala said.

Before embarking on the tour, Hacala and the Sailors watched the 1993 movie "Gettysburg" for an overview on the key points and events of the three-day battle in July 1863, which resulted in a turning point in the Civil War after Union forces inflicted devastating losses to the Confederates during Pickett's Charge on the final day of the battle.

Both sides suffered more than 20,000 casualties each, including nearly 8,000 killed, in the bloodiest battle of the entire war, and the end of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's aspirations to invade the north.

"I volunteered to do this because, over the years, I have taken many groups of family, friends, students, military personnel, and veterans around the battlefield and explained key areas of the fight," Hacala said.

The group toured key areas of the battlefield while Hacala explained tactics and procedures of the opposing forces, as well as some of the historic impact of the battle that continues to influence today's military.

"Many of the practices and procedures executed in battle by soldiers of that time are the direct antecedents of the ceremonial practices the Guard executes today," Hacala said. "With its close proximity, a day trip to Gettysburg offered a wonderful opportunity for liberty for our Sailors, as well as a chance to appreciate their role as today's inheritors of our rich military heritage."

Hacala said another trip to the battlefield is scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 23, and future visits to Gettysburg and other historical sites made through the JBAB Liberty Program are possible depending on scheduling and interest.

The JBAB Liberty program, one of six Liberty programs in Naval District Washington (NDW), is a Morale, Welfare and Recreation quality of life program designated for E1-E6 single or unaccompanied enlisted military personnel, with the focus on 18-26 year-olds.

For more information about trips or to learn more about the program, call (202) 433-2636. To stay connected with news from around NDW, visit www.facebook.com/NavDistWash.



Master Chief Hospital Corpsman (Ret.) Mark Hacala, a training officer and historian for the U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard, explains field artillery procedures on a U.S. three-inch ordnance rifle during a liberty trip to the Gettysburg battlefield with Ceremonial Guard Sailors, July 19. Hacala volunteered to lead the tour as a chance for the young Sailors to learn about the largest battle fought in the United States. Courtesy Photo