

2023 DC Trip Day 1 – Warrensburg to Murray, KY

I woke up early so I left on the trip early – at 0545! The full moon, orange as it neared setting, set the mood for the day. I also saw sunrise, something I seldom see even if up on time, as my east barn hides the view. The road that I travel so often seemed completely unfamiliar until false dawn was well-along.

The blooming redbuds showed up south of Collins. I passed Springfield at 0800 and picked up US-60.

Topped off the tank at Bill's Quik Mart in Rogersville (and checked out his stock of loading supplies). Saw a curious sign on a barn; "Homeschool Football." Near Seymour, an Amish area, a rather unique wear pattern showed on shoulder pavement – two ruts for wheels, and a third halfway between them; the Amish shoe their horses. Dogwood blooms now join those of the redbuds.

US-60 is a beautiful 4-lane divided hiway, with relatively light traffic, well-maintained for most of its passage across southern Missouri.

Just west of Birch Tree, a hillside is festooned with yellow – a graveyard for construction equipment. This is very hilly country, all the way from Mansfield to Poplar Bluff. East of that city is delta country, dead flat. The row crop irrigation systems remind me of those in south Louisiana, not surprising since the Bootheel is also rice country.

Dexter is on higher ground, a long ridge running from Cape Girardeau to near Helena, AR, known as Crowley's Ridge. Dexter has a real lighthouse with a rotating light – it's associated with a church.

The US-60 bridge over the Mississippi at Cairo is closed, so I had to detour north on I-57 and back south on US-51 to reach the Ohio River bridge to Kentucky. Cairo has a flood gate under a railroad overpass, just a hint of how low and swampy this area is. The road exited the lowlands to climb into loess hills and bluffs.

It's 1230 now, and I'm hungry. Bardwell has a good little cafe. I neglected to get the name, and I can't check a credit card receipt for a cash-only establishment. Another 10 miles and I'm at Columbus, home of Columbus-Belmont state park. It commemorates a strong Confederate fortification with a chain across the Mississippi river, a railroad connection, a Trail of Tears river crossing, and USCT enlistments. The Belmont part was a battle on the Missouri side, known to those who reenacted it in 1992&3 as "Belmud."

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I arrived at my Best Western in Murray, KY, at 1525 hrs. Routes taken were Y, MO-13, Greene Cty WW & H, US-60, I-57, US-51, KY-123 and KY-80. 456 miles in 9 hours, 40 minutes (including 45 minute lunch break & 1 hour sightseeing).

Tomorrow, with serious weather expected, I'll visit Fort Donelson and follow Hood's Tennessee campaign though Columbia, Spring Hill and on to Franklin.

2023 DC Trip Day, Day 2 – Wednesday, April 5th - Murray KY to Franklin TN

Slight change of route in order to beat the storms on the way. I skipped Land Between the Lakes and headed to Fort Donelson by the most direct route. I got there at 0745 – it doesn't open until 0800 – so I walked around and looked at some interpretive signs and gun emplacements.

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The trenchlines were once protected by abatis – it appears that strong winds provided a natural one – facing the wrong direction.

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The river battery of 32-pounders worked over the Federal gunboats.

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Defenders surrendered at this hotel.

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I headed south before 0900, following TN-49, a road that runs right along the Tennessee River (aka Kentucky Lake) for quite a ways. Eventually, it connected to TN-46, where I passed Who Dat meat processing. The town of Erin sports Irish flags (modern, not the traditional harp). I picked up TN-7, coming out at the Duck River in downtown Columbia.

I picked up US-31, aka the Columbia Pike, and followed Schofield's retreat route toward Spring Hill. The wagon traffic must have been heavy then, and it was heavy today. The only thing worse than the traffic was the price of gas - \$3.79 in some places! I stopped at Rippavilla, a preserved plantation – Hood's army camped on its grounds.

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On to my real goal – Franklin. The Battle of Franklin took place on November 30th, 1864. Over 20,000 Confederates (including Cockrell's 1st Missouri Brigade) attacked close to that many Federals in their hastily prepared fortifications, with massive losses. That's more Rebs than in Picket's Charge at Gettysburg, made across well over a mile of open ground, without artillery preparation.

I booked a 90 minute personal tour of the core part of the battlefield, in the vicinity of the Carter farm along the Columbia Pike.

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Fire was intense here – this is inside the farm office.

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I saw approximately where Cockrell's Missourians overran the main Federal line, only to be forced out by reserves – no pictures.

I finally started off to my motel north of Franklin in Brentwood area, about 6 or so miles away. With some wrong turns, heavy rain as the front came through, and horrendous traffic, I ended up spending an hour to drive 13 miles

Tomorrow I afternoon I'll take the battlefield tour at Carnton, looking for the location of my great grandfather's Missouri battery. I'll also visit the McGavock Cemetery, where so many Missourians lie.

177 miles for the day, 633.1 for the trip.

2023 DC Trip Day 3 – Thursday, April 6th -Around Franklin

I continued to find the traffic congested and confusing, but I eventually made it to my destination – Carnton mansion and the Battle of Franklin East Front area. This is the area where three brigades in Loring's Division made their assault against the Federal left, supported by Guibor's Missouri Battery. The attack, over open ground, was enfiladed by Federal guns in Fort Granger and faced several batteries. The troops involved, mainly Mississippi boys, advanced from the Carnton area into a front protected by a thick hedge (Osage orange) abatis.

My first stop was a tour of Carnton, itself. It's very nicely restored, with many original family furnishings.

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It also had a formal garden.

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It was also used as a hospital during and after the battle. Upstairs rooms still hold blood stains from the many amputations carried out by candlelight. Five of the six Confederate generals killed in the battle were laid out on this porch.

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The dead were buried near where they fell, and many the shallow graves were marked. In 1866, Carnton's owner donated 2 acres adjacent to the family cemetery for reinterment of the Confederate dead, Over 1200 are buried here, by state and unit (when possible).

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The Missouri section holds the remains of 130 men, many unidentified by name.

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One of those identified was Capt, Barnett K. Atkinson (or Atkison) of the 3rd & 5th Missouri Infantry, Company G (5th Missouri, Company A before post Vicksburg consolidation). The new granite marker for him, grave 18 in the Missouri section, has the wrong initials!

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I took a walking tour of the battlefield guided by a younger gentleman who is directly descended from a Mississippian wounded in that portion of the field. My own great grandfather was Number 4 on a gun supporting that charge.

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Tomorrow, it's on to North Carolina. I had to make some changes in my plans, so I won't take the Blue Ridge Parkway. However, the revised plan will take me to Wilkes County, where Sandra's Adams ancestors lived, on Saturday.

For the day: 26.4 miles, for the trip: 659.5

2023 DC Trip Day 4 – Friday, April 7th – Franklin, TN, to Conover, NC

No photos today – it was pretty much a washout. Literally. I was up too early for motel breakfast, so grabbed a cinnamon roll and some milk, loaded up the car, and took off for Murfreesboro on TN-96. Talk about built up! New horse properties all over the place, so much so that 2 new lanes are being added. There's even a Darrel Waltrip Subaru in Franklin.

Got to Stones River Battlefield Park (Yankee name for Battle of Murfreesboro) well before the visitor center opened, and found that the tour roads were all changed since my last visit ('08 I think), and sites could only be reached by walking. Need I mention that it was raining? Hard? I drove the loop twice, just to see what the tour stops were, then looked for a way to find I-840.

As I neared the key junction with I-80, the sky started clearing – a cruel joke to be sure. The rain came back as my 101K mile Subaru went up and down the hills (in Missouri, we'd consider them mountains), crossing the Caney Fork River 6 times. Somewhere in there, I saw a drag strip next to the road – couldn't take a hand off the wheel or my eyes off the road to write down any of the other tidbits I may have passed in bumper to bumper 75mph+++ traffic on wet roads.

Passed Knoxville without incident, if one doesn't count white knuckles. I-40 veers southeastward to cross the Smokies. Crossed into North Carolina 273 miles in, stopped at really nice mountainside welcome center – probably has a nice view when it's not raining. Soon thereafter, the fun really started.

Road construction! Cars and semis are backed up for several miles until until we reached the construction area and everyone merged into a single lane peaceably. Did I mention that the rain continued? Then, about 15 miles further in, it happened again! Took over 2 hours to go 75 miles on an Interstate.

Got to Asheville, turned on to the Blue Ridge Parkway to visit the Welcome Center, and found that the original route I'd planned to take was closed – good thing I'd replanned it yesterday! Now, back on I-40, I'm heading for Conover, NC, for the night. But first, another weather test. This time it wasn't just the rain, the problem was the cloud, itself. Visibility is zip. Traffic actually slowed down to about 50 for this.

Anyway, I'm safe at a HIE in Conover, planning to head for Wilkesboro and Roaring River, then back to the Parkway up to Lexington, VA.

412.5 miles for the day in 9:45, 1072.0 for the trip.

2023 DC Trip Day 5 – Saturday, April 8th – Conover, NC, to Lexington, VA

Left my motel at 0740 EDT on NC-16 to Wilkesboro. Passed downstream of a dam on the Catawba River. Thomasville has a pro rodeo coming in May; it also has a store selling deer apples (I presume that's nothing like a road apple). I turn onto NC-268 to Roaring River, in Wilkes County, the home of Sandra's Adams ancestors - Roaring River was the place. It's a small town named for the stream beside it. It has a large, active grain elevator, but no DG store.
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Further down NC-268, I pass through Ronda – I didn't get a shot of the big metal yard rooster atop a matching gold van on the corner. At Elkin, I turn onto US-21 headed for Roaring Gap and a jaunt on the Blue Ridge Parkway. It's cold, 37, but dry. The haze is too thick to get a decent landscape picture.

I pass two bicyclists north of the Blue Ridge Music Center. Fancy Gap Cabins along side but just off the parkway are tiny – I've seen bigger privies. Some of the land is farmed; the earth has a dark red color. Most facilities are closed, since the “season” hasn't started. A mill, likely restored, presents a nice picture; the nearby store is closed.

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One section of the Parkway features nice stands of pine, with a thick understory of shrubs with dark green foliage. My thought was that these broad-leaf plants are members of the magnolia family – your thoughts?

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The sky is far from clear, but it's bright enough for a few decent view photos – here's one.

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Part of the parkway is closed, so I have to get off and take US-221 to Roanoke. Instead of following the detour and getting back on, I decide to look for something to eat. Nothing along that road, so I tried I-77 to Natural Bridge. The state park is more of a tourist trap, so rather than waiting in line to buy a ticket, I ask the information desk for a Virginia road map and dining advice. The map is forthcoming, along with a local guide and dining advice.

The Pink Cadillac Cafe parking lot looks like it'll be too crowded, so I move on. Lexington has a Southern Cafe; its menu intimidates my wallet, so I move on. I find my Best Western, check in and get more recommendations. I drive through Lexington again, this time past VMI. I don't like crowded narrow streets, so I move on.

Finally, a BBQ place! Pulled pork is not pulled as fine as we're used to, but it's good and plentiful. It has three home-made sauces, and I blended two for a great taste.

Back to the motel to unload and write this.

Tomorrow I'll take the Parkway if it's sunny, or a valley battlefield route if it's not. In either case, I end up at Winchester.

248.6 miles today, 1320.7 for the trip.

2023 DC Trip Day 6 – Sunday, April 9th – Lexington to Winchester, VA

This was to be my day to visit the battlefields of the Shenandoah Valley. Did a few, but poor directional marking and just feeling icky limited what I saw. Left Lexington at 0745 on the clock and 30 on the thermometer, headed up US-11 toward Staunton. Got off the main roads to find Port Republic & Cross Keys (both June 1862). En route, I found the site of the Battle of Piedmont (June 1864).

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Port Republic has very little interpretation, or at least not on the roads I took. However, I did find information on the Battle of Cross Keys and a good view of the terrain.

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I spent some time at New Market, famed for participation by VMI cadets. As a matter of fact, VMI owns a substantial part of the well-preserved field and the museum. Another notable unit was a company of Missouri cavalymen, dismounted) – Capt, Woodson's unit was made up of POWs from a Mississippi action, exchanged in the east.

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Here's a view of the field.

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The farmstead includes a large bank barn. Since Cedarcroft has two of them, I wanted to see how the interior was configured – a flash photo through a hole in the door told me.

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About this time, I discovered I had a fever, so I skipped Cedar Creek and the various Battles of Winchester and checked into my hotel. I found a nearby Walgreen, bought a covid test that turned out negative. So I will persevere – tomorrow it's Wilderness, Chancellorsville, Spotsylvania, and Fredericksburg and another test.

P.S. - My trusty '17 Subaru isn't being so trusty!

159.4 miles for the day, 1480.1 for the trip.

2023 Trip, Day 7 – Monday, April 9th – Winchester to Fredericksburg

Pulled out of my motel at 0645, heading southeastward on US-522, changing to VA-3 at Culpepper. I kept looking for a cafe, but finally settled for McD's for breakfast. Wouldn't you know, it was right at the corner I needed to use to reach my first battlefield of the day: The Wilderness (1864).

This is the view at the info kiosk:

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Confederate trenches at one of the open areas:

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The wilderness was much more overgrown than this photo along a trail shows

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Next stop was Chancellorsville (1863). This one actually has a small visitor center. A driving tour brings you out at the Chancellor House site. You can see how well preserved the site is and how little the modern world intrudes:

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A little humor there – This is the remnant of the Catharine Furnace – an ironworks site along Jackson's flanking march.

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Confederate guns at Hazel Grove outdueled Federal ones at the far end of this open area.

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On to Spotsylvania (1864)! This was the site of action for an extended period, but is best known for the attack on the Mule Shoe salient. A dawn Federal assault by 20,000 men captured an exposed portion, but desperate counter attacks by Lee's army held them at bay until a new line could be completed. So many men were killed here that it's known as the Bloody Angle. Here's a view of the trench line.

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This field looks so peaceful now.

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Gordon's division recovered this part of the line.

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Stepping back to December of 1862, Burnside's doomed assault on well-prepared positions at Fredericksburg made this a one-sided Confederate victory. The stone wall along the sunken road in front of Marye's Heights is symbolic of the battle:

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Rebels had time to place commanding batteries before the attack. This is a 30-pounder at Prospect Hill.

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Here at the Confederate far right, I watched a modern train go by on the nearby railroad.

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After some misadventures in finding my hotel, I settled in around 1600. Tomorrow I'll take some back roads to Manassas, then end up at my reunion hotel near Arlington.

138 miles for the day, 1618.2 for the trip.

2023 DC Trip Day 8 – Tuesday, April 10th – Fredericksburg to Arlington, VA

It was a tad noisy at the hotel last night – some hot-rodders on the road nearby – so I didn't sleep well and woke up early. So, what to do? Take a shower, pack up, and skedaddle at 0603. Fortunately, I'd already noted a Waffle House just up the road, so had 2 eggs over easy, some scrumptious bacon, and my first grits of the trip – A fine breakfast, indeed.

After the traffic I'd contended with on main roads the last couple of days, I took a series of back roads to reach Manassas. Found the battlefield without too much trouble, with these guns silhouetted against an 0830 sky.

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The two battles fought here covered much of the same ground. The area around the visitor center interprets the first of them, in 1861, with a focus on the Henry House hill.

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This is where an eccentric Virginian, Jackson, earned the name “Stonewall”

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Implements of war sometimes gain more peaceful uses.

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Do you remember that Army song about the caissons rolling along? This one carries a spare.

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I didn't get any good shots of the fields of 2nd Manassas (1862), but this stone bridge (rebuilt) served as an escape route for the Federals after both battles.

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I left after 2-1/2 hours, heading for my Holiday Inn in Crystal City (adjacent to Arlington). I skipped the crowded interstates for US-29 and good old US-50. Despite an inordinate number of stop lights and a bit of confusion near Reagan airport, I got to my hotel without any disasters, checked in, parked in the garage near the elevator, found my room, and unpacked Subie.

After unpacking, I found the nearby block of restaurants, had meatloaf at a diner, then searched for the subway station. It's a good 20-minute walk from here. Tomorrow, I'll take that subway to the Mall and check out at least one of the Smithsonian museums.

Drove 91.6 miles for the day, 1709.9 for the trip.

2023 DC Trip, Day 9, Wednesday, April 12th – D.C. Local

Up early, breakfast at the next door McDs, and off to catch the subway to the Mall. Got there about 0930, stepped out into bright sunlight, and ambled over to the Museum of Natural History. Took these photos en route to prove I was actually there.

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Got through screening with no problem, but I think I'll leave my car keys behind on next visit. Tons of people - 7 buses parked along the mall from schools and tour companies. The museum is immense, covering about every aspect of nature with attractive displays. I finally took a few photos of a few things.

Four hours later, a tired puppy headed back to the subway for the trek back to the hotel and a cool shower before meeting USAFA classmates at the Holiday Inn's bar.

To bed about 10, up at 6 to write this and get prepped for another trip to the Mall to see other museums, this time with others. The car didn't move.

2023 DC Trip, Day 10, Thursday, April 13th – D.C. Local

Up at 0600, and off to Bob & Edith's Diner for a good breakfast. Met the other reuners in the lobby for a shuttle ride to the subway station. I went with four who also had passes and rode to the edge of the Mall. We wandered down past the original Smithsonian castle, which is closed.

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On to the Air & Space Museum. We didn't have passes, and the line was about an hour long in hot sunlight, so we proceeded to the Hirschorn Museum. This museum has very modern art, some of it actually comprehensible.

Then we split up. They headed for the sculpture garden, while I went to the Native American History Museum.

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This museum emphasizes the difference between world views of natives and those of settlers, and how this difference affected various treaties. I spent a lot of time here, used up some tissue, and then had flat bread covered with chile (aka Indian taco).

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Temperature reached the upper 80s today, and the long mile walk almost the length of the Mall wore me out. Caught the train back to the station .7 mile from the hotel, showered, then went to dinner with the group at a very nice Italian place .4 miles away.

Friday's museums include American History and the National Gallery of Art

No miles driven. Total walking for the day about 4.5 miles.

Slept quite soundly, had breakfast at McDs a very short walk from the Holiday Inn. Today will be more, but better planned walking.

2023 DC Trip, Day 11, Friday, April 14th – D.C. Local

We caught the shuttle to the subway stop again, so that saved .7 miles. But, used the wrong escalator to leave the station near the Smithsonian, so had to walk just a tad more.

My first museum of the day was the National Gallery, west unit, way down at the far end of the Mall. I told the info desk that I wanted to visit the galleries with American art, but she told me that the area had been condensed and scattered because of construction. I saw some Copleys, lots of Gilbert Stuart portraits, and a Peale. A couple of landscapes looked like Hudson River school, but turned out to show Italian scenes. They did have one O'Keeffe.

I did see the da Vinci (very well protected), and works by numerous other well-known artists (at least ones I'd heard of – plus some whom I'd not). As I thought, I could have spent the whole day there, but I wanted plenty of time to visit the American History museum.

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It was a long walk. I stopped to take a few architectural photos along the way, then went in, took the elevator to the 3rd floor, and went through the America at War exhibit. Down a floor was the Democracy exhibit, and the ships & railroads took over much of the ground floor.

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I ran into most of the rest of our party at the food trucks behind the history museum. After a snack, they were headed for the Natural History museum that I saw on Wednesday.

Really tired, I headed back to the subway, now a veteran rider. Back at the hotel, cleaned up and replenished electrolytes, and ready to go to dinner at the Army-Navy Country Club. I get to drive.

2023 DC Trip, Day 12, Saturday, April 15th – D.C. Monuments & Memorials

Today, we (those of my Academy squadron classmates) saw an aeronautical museum and several memorials. The first stop was the Pentagon 911 Memorial. The 184 benches each have a small pool of water underneath, and each bench has the name of one of the victims. The benches are aligned with the direction of impact and are arranged in columns by age of the victims. Here is a view:

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From there, we went to the Air Force Monument. It has three curved stainless steel towers, reaching for the sky. A panel nearby lists campaigns that the U.S. Air Force and its predecessors (Army Air Forces, Army Air Corps, Signal Corps, etc.).

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From there, we visited the Marine Corp's Iwo Jima monument.

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We took a long ride to the Udvar-Hazy Center, a huge hangar-like facility with dozens of aircraft from all areas. Some are parked and some hang from the ceiling. Aircraft there include the Enola Gay, an SST, a RS-71 Blackbird, WWI, WWII, Korean and Vietnam era craft, a space shuttle and more. One of my favorites is this Connie (Lockheed Constellation).

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Back to Washington and the Vietnam Memorial – The Wall. As we walked between the Lincoln Memorial and the reflecting pool en route, the sun shone on the Capitol Building.

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Here is the iconic statue before the Wall.

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I looked for two names on the wall. One was an Academy classmate from my squadron – I lived just down the hall from him for 4 years. Capt. Harley B. Hackett's F4 aircraft was shot down on July 24th, 1968.

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The other was my high school classmate, 1LT Douglas B. Fournet, US Army. KIA, A Shau Valley, May 4, 1968. His actions that day resulted in the posthumous award of the Medal of Honor.

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Back at the hotel, I said goodbye to my classmates for this this year, came up to my room to write this and finish packing for an early departure. Tomorrow night I'll be in Kentucky, half-way home.

2023 DC Trip, Day 13, Sunday, April 16th – to Shelbyville, KY

Today was the penultimate day of the trip. I was up at 0500 EDT and on the road by 0540. That was a good idea, as I was all the way to Manassas before seeing much traffic. I got off the interstate at Strasburg & picked up US-48. It started as a typical mountain 2-lane. Then, much to my surprise, became a 4-lane divided hiway, thanks to Sen. Richard Byrd, for whom this Appalachian Hiway is named. That persisted, despite a few gaps, for over half the distance to I-79.

While on it, I passed several CW battlefields, including Rich Mountain. My question – how in the world did they conduct campaigns and fight battles in that terrain?

I-79 was another mountain road with the occasional towns in small valleys and the roadsides were full of redbuds in bloom.. The closer I got to Charleston, the State Capital, the heavier the traffic. There, I-79 ends and I picked up I-64. It's now 1135, and I've driven 338 miles.

A bit under an hour later, I-64 crossed the Big Sandy into Kentucky. I found a welcome center with actual maps, so updated my supply. Hit a blinding rain storm just east of Morehead – it was short, but rain persisted off-and-on to Lexington.

After passing Lexington without problem, I-64 became busier. I arrived at Shelbyville, found my hotel, and went to a Cracker Barrel for Lunper (only meal of the day, unless you count a McD sausage biscuit about 0715).

As you might guess, I had no time for pictures. However, I did find tid-bits that Sandra would have pounced on:

- Dismal Hollow Road.
- Hopeless Lane.
- Hinterland Road.
- Mountain Lion Avenue.
- Vegan Road.
- Fink Run Road.
- And Soapy Joe's Car Wash in Parsons, WV.

Home tomorrow (I hope), via I-64 & US-50. Will try for an early start to beat the traffic in Louisville.

For the day – 567.3 miles, time 9:32, for the trip 2284.2.

2023 DC Trip, Day 14, Monday, April 17th –Shelbyville, KY to Warrensburg

Pulled out at 0507 EDT, onto a dark highway already bearing traffic. The closer I got to Louisville, the more the traffic (as you'd expect). Once I crossed the Ohio into Indiana, the traffic eased and so did the gas prices.

I stopped at a Waffle House in Corydon for my last taste of grits for a while, then pressed on. I-64 was the best kind of highway – nice settings and low traffic. It merges with I-57 for a short while in central IL, then heads for St. Louis. My timing continued to be excellent, as I reached the urban expanse a tad after rush hour.

I-270, then I-44 to the US-50 exit at Union, where gas was down to \$3.19 (as compared to \$3.69 and up east of the river). Not much traffic anywhere on US-50. I stopped in Sedalia for milk & butter, getting home at 1319 CDT.

For the day, 503.4 miles. time 9:12, for the trip 2787.6.