

CIA Field Trip Essay: Austin/Houston

On Friday, November 15, I woke up at roughly 04:00 to go to school. Obviously, it wasn't a normal day of school, my AFJROTC unit and I were heading to the Capitol of the great State of Texas. Although it was considered a field trip by many, in reality it was just another day of school, just way better in every aspect.

Museums are arguably some of the most interesting places to come across, you can find a variety of things inside of them ranging from: journals and paintings, to knives and tanks.

Personally, I'm more of a history person than an artsy one, so as soon as I walked through the doors of our first destination of the trip, and I got to see a M4A3 Sherman Tank pointing right at me, it was certainly to my pleasure. The museum we went to contained a lot of neat things from different time periods, I'd have to say my favorite piece I got to see was a section of the Berlin Wall. The broken down, piece of concrete was only about 2-3 feet wide, but the reason I liked it so much was because it's the closest thing I can relate to. In many ways the merging of East and West Germany give me hope that one day in my lifetime I'll be able to see the countries of North and South Korea reunite. I also enjoyed looking at some tanks that belonged to Nazi Germany, mainly because you hear a lot of stories about how intimidating those tanks were to see during combat, and trying to imagine 15 of those tanks I saw, coming straight at me with waves of infantry behind them, really brought to light what it must have felt like, although I'll never actually get to know.

Later that afternoon we visited the Capitol building of Texas, which was beautiful. There we learned about Texas History and saw the famous "Dawn at the Alamo" painting, we also saw paintings of previous Presidents like: George W. Bush, and Lyndon B. Johnson. Some other Portraits I saw that stood out to me were that of Captain Audie Murphy (a decorated World War

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II Veteran, and Medal of Honor recipient) and Governor John Connally (Governor of Texas during the assassination of President Kennedy, who was also shot himself seconds after Kennedy). My interest spiked once we entered the Senate floor, it seemed so surreal to me, especially since I have a huge interest in politics. After touring the Floor of the Senate and House of Representatives we took a trip down to a hall of Medal of Honor recipients, which showed pictures of them and even a brief history about them. One of the people that caught my attention was MSG Roy Benavidez, I heard his name before and had even heard a speech he once gave. His Rank threw me off a bit since in the Air Force, the rank of Master Sergeant is abbreviated MSgt, but after learning more about him I grew much respect for him and his accomplishments. MSG Benavidez served in the Vietnam War and was presented the Medal of Honor by President Ronald Reagan. Benavidez was born in DeWitt County Texas on the 5th of August 1935, he started his career in the Army by joining the Texas National Guard during The Korean War, later he would join the 82nd Airborne Division and would act as an advisor in South Vietnam. During his first trip to Vietnam, Benavidez unfortunately would step on a land mine and was declared never to walk again once he woke up at Clark AFB, seven months later he walked out of the Clark AFB Hospital. Then he would parachute out of a plane three times in a day to prove he was mentally and physically ready to return to Vietnam. On return to Vietnam, one of Benavidez's close friends would get seriously wounded, Benavidez made sure to save his friend's life at all costs. When he heard that the same helicopter crew that had saved him had been trapped, he volunteered to go save them, knowing the crew he was attempting to save was either all dead or wounded, Benavidez leapt from his helicopter to help. Benavidez armed with only a knife and medical aid, ran to save his comrades and helped aid fallen soldiers under severe enemy fire, which led to him getting shot multiple times. He brought many to safety, making

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sure to either retrieve or destroy classified information on the way, then once the pilot of the helicopter died and the aircraft crashed, he ran back to take care of the wounded, and he set up a defensive line to hold the enemies back while simultaneously calling for air support, to allow another rescue landing. It'd take 6 hours for help to arrive, MSG Benavidez was shot five times, and he was bayoneted on both arms, once all the bodies from the helicopters had been unloaded it was found out that he had even brought back three dead enemy soldiers, the reason for that being that he didn't want to leave anybody behind and he didn't notice. One of MSG Benavidez's quotes that has directly impacted me is when he said "It makes me feel great when I put my uniform on-that's the best piece of clothing I've ever worn...I don't care what other people think. They don't think I have any civilian clothes... I don't care... It's great to be in uniform" he said "At least I get to show the taxpayer where his money goes". Frankly this just goes to show how much meaning there is behind every uniform worn in the Military, it's something uniquely attractive you wouldn't be able to replicate anyway else.

Once we got to Houston we spent the night, and then visited The Space Center Houston, which was a very good learning experience. I was privileged to see the Saturn V Launch Vehicle which was used for the Apollo missions, and was the Launch Vehicle that sent Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to the moon. The Saturn V was also the Launch Vehicle that launched the first American Space station into orbit. Influence of the Apollo missions were seen everywhere we went, even as you walked into the gift shops you'd see Apollo emblems and keyrings for sale, with NASA apparel frequently having Apollo Mission Patches on them as well. The Apollo program lasted from 1968-1972 and its main goal was to get a man on the moon and assert American dominance in space. The Apollo program's best highlight would be on July 20th of 1969 when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin would step on the moon for the first time in human

history. Unfortunately, there would be some unfortunate mishaps to come as well. Apollo 13 is most infamously known for almost taking the lives of three astronauts after an oxygen tank exploded which led to the men not being able to land and instead orbit, until it would be safe for them to go back home four days later. It is undeniable how much of an impact the Apollo missions had on the world, and the influence it would have on American culture and Science for years to come. The Apollo program has also inspired the start of a modern program called Artemis, which NASA plans to be the program that one day takes a human to the surface of Mars. A fitting name for sure, seeing as in Greek mythology Apollo is the Twin of Artemis.

After leaving the Space Center we went to the San Jacinto Monument which is where the Battle of San Jacinto was fought, the battle which would give Texans, President Santa Ana of Mexico, who would then sign the Treaty of Velasco which would grant Texas it's independence from Mexico. The Monument had a great view at the top where we got to see one of the busiest ports in the world, from that View we also got to see the battleship USS Texas which was used by the U.S Navy from 1914-1948. The USS Texas was also the very first U.S battleship to be mounted with anti-air guns. The USS Texas now serves as a monument for troops who served in both World Wars. Another significant thing the monument had was its own museum like section that had a collection of things from: American, Mexican, and Tejano descent. I then stumbled across a portrait of Vicente Guerrero (The Second President of Mexico and a General during the Mexican war for independence over Spain), this was particularly important to me since my Grandfather was born in a Mexican State named after Guerrero, which is also Spanish for the word "Warrior".

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Overall, I can say for certain I came back from this trip with more than a handful of knowledge that I didn't expect to learn and that I didn't even get to fit into this essay. I learned about Military History, Aerospace History, and about Government and Politics.