



POLICE TAPE BLOCKED access to the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam and Korean War monuments last Wednesday. Visitors had to cool their heels in the chilly weather waiting for the landmarks to reopen.

Whole Washington trip was close

We had a near-miss trip to Washington. We nearly missed going at all when a major blizzard hit Denver last Tuesday. We ended up three hours late taking off, but we finally winged our way into the air — almost the last plane to leave Denver, as the second worst snow storm in memory hit the Mile High City.

Once in Denver, we nearly missed seeing the Lincoln Memorial, nearly visited the Pentagon, came close to the Capitol and almost had a press conference with Ari Fleischer, the White House press secretary.

Youngest daughter joined us in Washington. It was spring break at her school, and she had no papers to grade, no detentions to hand out. She had never been to D.C. before and had big plans to see as many monuments, museums and famous sites as possible.

On Wednesday, Steve had a board meeting, so daughter and I set out to see the sites. Her big objective — the Lincoln Memorial. But first we went up to the Washington Monument, saw the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial and the Jefferson Memorial. It was cool and breezy, and we froze as we walked around the Tidal Basin, where the famous cherry blossoms were almost ready to bloom.

We arrived at the Lincoln Memorial to find that it was roped off. Some guy in a John Deere tractor had parked in a large pond in Constitution Gardens, just east of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, holding police at bay. By the time we got



Open Season

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there, the frenzied farmer had given up, but the memorial was still roped off, as were the Vietnam and Korean war memorials.

They opened the area an hour after we left, but by then we had shivered our way back to the hotel.

On Thursday, we visited the Hill, going between Senate and House office buildings through the tunnels and basement corridors under the Capitol. It was like being in the intestines of the government.

Rep. Jim Ryan was too fast for us, running off to a vote. We did talk to Rep. Jerry Moran and almost got together with Sen. Pat Roberts, who was called away to an interview with Peter Jennings. We watched the interview on Pat's television and went back into the underground to try to catch more representatives, all of whom we missed.

We almost got to meet Sen. Sam Brownback, but we were late. Then Kansas' distinguished attorney general, Phill Kline, strolled in and marched right into the senator's office while we cooled our heels with an aide — who listened to not a word we had to say.

Friday morning, we were to have

a tour of the Pentagon, ending at the National Military Command Center, the "War Room." We got to the monster building and in the door, but we didn't get a tour. We were ushered into a theater, shown a video and told that the military was only doing about half its scheduled tours. Ours was one of the canceled ones.

I guess they were using the War Room.

An Army colonel came and briefed us. He was a tired-looking man who said everyone was working overtime because of the war. He was a China expert, and while he was interesting, his remarks were "off the record." We got more information about the situation in Iraq from CNN when we got back to the hotel.

The afternoon session was a White House press briefing. It wasn't at the White House and it wasn't much of a briefing.

Although a "high White House official" said that he had just come from a briefing with the Washington press corps, his remarks to the publishers and editors from American's small newspapers had to be "off the record."

Since he talked mostly about what he did each day — up at 5 a.m., meet with his staff, stay with the president for about half the day — his remarks were not exactly classified stuff. He did say that the president truly believed in the war. We could have figured that out ourselves.

I just sat there and wondered why he would go from a televised press conference with one set of reporters and say our meeting was "off the record." At least he could have said something.

I think it's because he can't control it. The capital press corps has to follow the "rules" or they will find themselves on the outside. They seem to ask tough questions, but they know how far they can go and never cross the line.

Us little guys, on the other hand, are from small towns in California, Texas, Oregon, Louisiana and a dozen other states.

When we left the Old Executive Office Building, we would scatter to all parts of the country. We could not be controlled. We could not be punished. We were a wild and free press, and not safe.

I hope to return to Washington next year to visit the Capitol, and maybe we'll get to see the Pentagon and have more press conferences. Of course, after this, Steve will probably have to go by himself. I probably won't be invited back.

After all, youngest daughter did finally get to see the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam and Korean war memorials with her father, so anything is possible.

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