

## THANKSGIVING MESSAGE FROM THE GRAND COMMANDER

Sir Knights and Ladies of Ohio,

Lady Diana and I wish you all a Happy Thanksgiving. We hope that each of you has a joyous and safe Thanksgiving celebration with your family and friends. We wish you safe travels and pray for your safe return if you are on the road this holiday weekend.

I have been thinking about this message for several days now and wondered what I was going to say. One would not think that it should be difficult to say, "Happy Thanksgiving," but I always overthink things and make it harder than it needs to be. I have seen many Thanksgiving messages where we are given a list of things that we should all be thankful for in our lives. I would never be so presumptuous as to believe that I know enough about your lives to tell you why to be thankful. I also think that is a bit trite.

Each of us has our own joys and sorrows. Our own hopes and fears, and our own goals and disappointments. Each of us has to decide what we are thankful for this year. I genuinely believe that Thanksgiving is the most individual of all holidays and that it is something different for every person. Of course, there are enduring Thanksgiving traditions such as the dinner feast, watching "The Wizard of Oz," and NFL football but in the truest sense, Thanksgiving is something different for each of us. Thanksgiving is in the heart, not at the dinner table or on TV.

Like most of us, I am very thankful for my family and their good health. I am thankful for Lady Diana standing by me 36 years. I am thankful for my mother living with us. I am thankful for our wonderful son Alan and my three great brothers and their families. I am thankful that I am still able to fly missions for the Civil Air Patrol.

This year of course, I am very thankful for the opportunity that you have all afforded me to serve you as your Grand Commander. I know that there will be great challenges, but I also know that there will be wonderful opportunities. So far during my tenure as Grand Commander, I have had the opportunity to present a 65-year award, a 70-year award and in December, I will be presenting a 75-year

award to a Sir Knight. To say that I am thankful for the opportunity to make these presentations to these incredible Sir Knights would be a huge understatement. I am overjoyed to have these opportunities and I look forward to the chance to honor more Sir Knights with service awards.

If you will indulge me for just a few minutes, I would like to share with you one of my favorite Thanksgiving memories which just happened to have occurred forty years ago today. On Thanksgiving Eve in 1982 I was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. flying my initial qualification in the C-130 at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas. On this Wednesday afternoon, I was flying a qualification sortie as a new Co-Pilot in the C-130 with the 16<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Training Squadron.

My flying partner was Major Neil Dobbin, an Aircraft Commander Upgrade. Neil was a member of the Georgia Air National Guard assigned to Dobbins AFB located in Marietta. Neil was a Vietnam veteran, a great pilot, and an all-around great guy. Even though he was a Major and I was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt., he always treated me as just another one of the guys. We were flying a five-hour sortie and we were due to finish at about 5pm. After we landed, we were riding back to the squadron on the crew bus and Neil asked me what I was doing for Thanksgiving. I told him that I was staying on base and would be having Thanksgiving dinner at the Officers Club. Neil asked me where my home was and I told him that my family was all still back in Benwood, WV. He asked me if that was near Charleston and I told him no, it is about an hour from Pittsburgh and a little less than two hours from Columbus. When we got back to the squadron, Neil picked up the phone and after about 5 minutes, he hung up and said, "Grab your stuff and come with me. You are going home for Thanksgiving." The GA ANG was sending a C-130 to pick up Neil and take him home for Thanksgiving. He convinced his unit to allow the crew to bring me along and drop me off at Rickenbacker AFB in Columbus.

I quickly went to the orderly room, filled out a leave request for the weekend and ran back to base ops to meet Neil and we walked out on the ramp and jumped on a brand-new C-130 called "City of Marietta". The Aircraft Commander was an Instructor Pilot and told me to hop in the right seat and let me fly the plane to Columbus. When they dropped me off in front of base operations at Rickenbacker, I walked in to try to figure the next step of my journey to Benwood.

The Master Sergeant working at the ops desk asked me if I had a rental car. I told him not yet. He was obviously impressed with my planning skills having arrived in the Capitol city of Ohio, late on Thanksgiving eve without a rental car, a plan, OR a clue! He asked me when I was planning to go back to Little Rock, and I told him that the GA ANG was picking me up on Sunday afternoon. The Master Sergeant obviously felt sorry for me and told me that there were several “crew cars” that were available for transient aircrews who were passing through the base. He told me that I could sign one out and bring it back on Sunday.

I picked up the crew car and drove about two hours to Benwood WV. When I opened the front door (nobody locked their doors in Benwood in 1982) and walked in the living room, my mom and dad were watching the 11 o’clock news. I walked in still wearing my flight suit and carrying my helmet bag and said, “Hi, got room for one more for dinner tomorrow.” I hugged my mom and gave her a kiss. By the time I walked over to hug my dad and shake his hand, he was crying. My dad was a pretty emotional guy, quick to laugh with an easy smile. He was also not ashamed to cry when the situation dictated. I hugged him tight and told him how glad I was glad to be home.

I spent the Thanksgiving weekend with my family, drove back to Rickenbacker on Sunday and even got to fly the “City of Marietta” back to Little Rock. Despite my lack of planning, it turned out to be a wonderful Thanksgiving and a memory that I cherish to this day. Sadly, my dad passed away in 1998. I continued to see the “City of Marietta” at military bases and civilian airports all over the world for many years. Every time I saw her the happy memories of my Thanksgiving adventure and especially of my dad came flooding back. A wonderful Thanksgiving memory for me.

Sir Knights, I thank you for allowing me to share my Thanksgiving memories of my dad with you and I appreciate your time. I also thank you all for allowing me the honor and privilege of serving you as Grand Commander. This will truly be a special Thanksgiving for me. Happy Thanksgiving and God Bless each of you and your families.

With my deepest appreciation.

Dale Olson