

COMMENTARY

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AIRLIFT
Dispatch

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Wing commander sends holiday greetings

By Col. Rusty Findley
437 AW commander

What a wonderful time of year. As we approach the new year amidst the splendor and joys of this holiday season, I'm excited about what's out ahead and thankful for all the blessings of the past year.

As I was trying to figure out what to write for my column as we near the holidays, I thought back to a column I wrote a couple years ago as I was in the midst of writing, addressing and mailing out our Christmas cards. If I could, I'd like to share those reflections with you.

About 11 years ago, I took that fateful step. I became (albeit reluctantly) a convert to the dreaded "one size fits all" family Christmas letter. It's become my custom in this letter to close it with a reference to the "five Fs" and how important they are to us as a family. The five Fs we cherish are "family, friends, faith, freedom and fun."

Being a member of the finest organization on the face of the planet, the United States Air Force for the past 24-plus years, has provided me the opportunity to develop these ideas as cornerstones of how I try to live my personal and professional life.

Serving in the Air Force, more so than any other profession I can think of, has brought home to me how important each and every "F" is to living life to its fullest each and every day we are on God's great Earth. Let me expound.

Family and friends

I couple family and friends together because as a military member, they become so intertwined over the years.

Family is family is family. Nothing ever breaks the ties, the closeness and the love that comprise family relationships.

As military members we are often called on to serve in places that take us away from our immediate family and other family members. We understand this from the very first day we put on a uniform. It's especially difficult, however, if this

call comes during a special time of the year such as Christmas; but, it's been my experience that this is where the second "F," friends, exerts itself unlike anything else I know.

The Christmas of 1985 was my youngest daughter's first. It was my turn to serve - I was overseas on a TDY. But the unique coupling of family and friends still made it a Christmas to remember. My mother, father, brother and sister, and their families all shared Christmas with my wife and daughters.

Even though I was far away, as always seems to be the case, there was a friend nearby. He invited me over to share Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with him and his new wife because they knew I'd be alone. I don't know of too many instances in today's society where a young couple enjoying their first Christmas together would invite a "deployed" friend over to share the holidays with them.

I'm not trying to pass judgment on today's societal ways, but my point is that as life has become so fast-paced, both in our business and in society as a whole, one thing we have still managed to keep intact through military service is the camaraderie and bonds of friendship that last a lifetime.

Our Christmas card list has more than 200 names on it of family and friends who we want to stay in touch with. Being in this profession of arms has given me such a unique and wonderful appreciation of how important family and friends are to a full and happy life.

Faith

This "F" can probably stand alone - after all especially during this time of year - it comprises the "reason for the season."

Though I could never be as eloquent as Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Jeff Dull when discussing faith, I can tell you that I do feel that it is a very personal experience we must all take the time to think about and act upon.

Again, with the fast-paced lives that we lead in

today's society, quite often we don't take enough time to stop and reflect upon the importance of faith - in whatever form or manner we elect to display it.

Unfortunately, I'll plead "guilty as charged" here myself. In the business we are in, however, it is something I've found over the years that helps me deal immensely with the separations and complexities of our profession. Like the second "F," friends, I look at faith as my "ultimate friend" - always there and able to be the solid rock that balances the foundation of my life.

Freedom

I think this "F" is something that we in the military know and understand better than most others in our great country. With all the sacrifices we make in our daily lives to uphold this treasured commodity, and as we get the chance to travel to many foreign lands where daily freedoms we enjoy are non-existent, it's easier for us to comprehend how fortunate we are to enjoy the freedoms that we do.

What I don't think we do well enough is communicate to others outside our military circles how, without the daily sacrifices of our men and women in uniform around the world, we preserve this hard-fought treasure.

Too often Americans, in the midst of all our prosperity, take freedom for granted.

Make it a point this holiday season to talk to others about what you've done as a member of our military to preserve and secure something we in the United States know and enjoy more than any other country on the face of the earth.

Even more importantly, be proud of how and why you serve.

Fun

The other four

"Fs" make the fifth one an automatic. I'm not going to be unrealistic and tell you that every minute of every day is fun.

Especially as a supervisor or a commander, quite often we have to deal with situations that are the farthest thing there is from being termed fun. However, I have to tell you that it is because of the other four "Fs" and the unique experiences the military life affords us, fun colors my days and my months.

I love what I'm doing. I love what it stands for and I love the fact that after all these years my family and I can honestly say "it's still loads of fun!"

So as I closed my Christmas letter this year with my reference to the five "Fs," I again thought about how fortunate we are to live in a country where faith and freedom are entrenched in our daily lives, how much friends and family have enriched our life through the years and how much fun it is to serve in the best airlift wing on the face of the planet.

God bless all of you during this special time of year.



Photo by Senior Airman Jason Smith
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