NEWS RELEASE

Captain is honored to help veterans visit Honolulu on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor

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On Saturday, Dec. 3, 2016, DFW-based Captain Tim Knutson flew 72 Pearl Harbor survivors and World War II veterans to Honolulu to mark the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The captain regularly volunteers his time and talent to serve veterans by flying Honor Flights and raising funds to support our military and veterans. He shares his experience for this trip:

CAPTAIN TIM KNUTSON: The opportunity to serve is one of the most gratifying things that a person can experience. As my life has evolved, the opportunity to serve involves serving those who have served. Over the past couple of years, getting involved with the Veterans Initiatives arm of American Airlines has been the most rewarding service that I could ever imagine.

Meeting and serving veterans through events such as Snowball Express, Skyball, Honor Flights — and now the Pearl Harbor 75th Anniversary flight are truly heartwarming and rewarding in every regard.

Starting at a reception Friday night at LAX, the stories of the people I met just can't be made up. Every walk of service member is present. And now, as always, they have each other's back. There are no inhibitions about what they did and why they served. They all are grateful for their very existence and are really telling their stories to memorialize and honor those who aren't able to anymore and who gave the ultimate sacrifice in their service.

The funny thing is they are the strong ones, now at 91 years and older. You'll be visiting with them and reflecting on what they have given and sacrificed and what their friends sacrificed. You can't help but get emotional as you realize the extent of their service and commitment. You see immediately how deeply they feel about our nation and the preservation of freedom. Even when I'll start to tear up listening to their stories, I had this 95-year-old guy who

parachuted into Europe and fought at D-Day grab my arm and say, “Hang in there. You’ll be OK!” Then you get renewed strength and pull it together.

The exhilaration of each and every veteran on Saturday morning at LAX was absolutely without a doubt infectious. We had guys playing the harmonica, dancing, telling jokes — you name it. There were also those who were somberly reflecting on the events over the past 75 years, as well. You could see it in their eyes, feel it in their presence.

They all have a story, and they all have a take-away. The resounding message is that “Freedom is not free.” These veterans know what the true price of Freedom really is. Not one hesitates to mention that the true heroes are the ones who gave the ultimate gift of freedom with their lives.

The occasion was marked with several events, celebrating and honoring the veterans. An opening gala, Pearl Harbor Documentary premiers and block parties at museums — throughout the trip, you realize these folks are beloved by everyone that they come in contact with. These gentleman telling their story and sharing literally their lives with everyone around them is like a vitamin shot for freedom and the preservation of it that is so dear.

Their stories are like a living history lesson: One gentleman who flew Navy Patrol after Pearl Harbor spotted the Japanese fleet. His discovery resulted in the United States’ decisive victory at The Battle of Midway. This gentleman had a very real and direct role in the writing of history and freedom. Another gentleman was manning the gun that sunk the very first Japanese mini-sub about 45 minutes before the “attack” started on Pearl Harbor. A 91-year-old veteran who was at D-Day and tasked with burying the dead for the next year as part of a “graves registration unit,” now devotes his life to making documentaries about the price of freedom.

The stories are as endless as their conviction for freedom. There are more than a million reasons that they are called the Greatest Generation.

I would be remiss if I didn’t also mention that this whole crew of incredible flight attendants and my truly devoted, professional and outstanding DFW-based First Officer Donna Miller are some of the most incredible people to work with and also watch represent each and every employee of this airline.

As a Captain for American Airlines and a representative of not only our 15,000 pilots, but every employee of the airline, I can tell you that every time I hear a story, shake a hand, tell someone thank you for your service, or accept a thank you for what we are doing — every time I safely operate an aircraft delivering these folks for these priceless historical visits, it is on behalf of every single American Airlines employee. Every Honor Flight, I have the weight of every pilot and employee on my shoulders as I know that I am one of the privileged ones to represent them in this very reverent and most honorable job.