

NEWS RELEASE

Honoring our fallen on Memorial Day

5/28/2018

Since 9/11, nearly 7,000 service members have made the ultimate sacrifice overseas in the global war on terrorism. On Memorial Day, we pause to remember them and all other members of the military who have died in service to our nation.

The American Fallen Soldiers Project (AFSP), an organization that provides hand-painted original portraits of fallen soldiers by artist Phil Taylor, was founded on the principle of never forgetting those who have sacrificed their life for our freedom. Since the inception of AFSP in 2007, hundreds of portraits have been painted and presented to family members across the United States, including three American Airlines team members.

"I will never be able to put into words what the portrait of my son, U.S. Army Sgt. Joshua 'Jay' Strickland, means to me."

— Beth Funk, Release Manager, Lead PSS, IT

Jay enlisted in the Army after graduating high school and joined a Special Forces Support Group as a heavy diesel equipment mechanic shortly after completing basic training. From an early age, he showed a patriotic sense of duty and loved having the opportunity to serve his country. He took easily to his job in the Army and planned to make a career in the military. On Sept. 21, 2013, Sgt. Strickland's unit came under fire in an insider attack, while supporting a training exercise for a group of Afghan National Army soldiers in Paktia Province, Afghanistan. One of the Afghan National trainees turned his gun on Strickland's unit before being shot and killed by the Afghan commander. Jay died of multiple gunshot wounds.

"As a mother, my biggest fear is that Jay will be forgotten," said Beth. "The portrait was bittersweet to receive, but having his biography and portrait displayed brings Jay's story to life and allows his legacy to live on."

"Over time I've become acutely aware of the deep sorrow of losing a loved one in the ongoing fight against evil," said Phil. "I felt that a portrait of their hero that captured their spirit and personality could possibly help in mending a family's broken hearts. Over the past decade, and with great humility, the evidence of that hope has become more real than I ever imagined."

American has helped transport more than 250 of these original works of art. With the arrival of new requests daily, Phil has countless portraits to paint for families for years to come.

"American is tremendously proud to support The American Fallen Soldiers Project and has done so for more than nine years through our Military and Veterans Initiatives program," said David Seymour, senior vice president, Integrated Operations and a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point. "Their mission to honor, respect and memorialize the military service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation, comfort their mourning families and inspire all Americans to know and recognize the price paid for their freedom is one worth emulating."

Beth has seen the support of American firsthand. "As a Gold Star mother, I am proud to work for a company like American that supports our military and fallen military families," she said. "I know Phil's dedication to bringing our fallen home through his portraits is made possible by sponsors like American. These portraits bring healing to the families they come home to."

Portraits from the American Fallen Soldiers Project are on display at American headquarters.

Team member Beth Funk stands next to a portrait of her son Joshua "Jay" Strickland.