American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Taking care of the home front

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American Airlines is honored to serve those who serve for our country. We also employ many team members who are currently serving in the reserves. And sometimes they run into each other while performing their military duties. Below Tech Ops – Tulsa Supervisor Tim Eraker tells the story of running into Phoenix-based Captain Rex Weber while on duty and the special flag he presented to the maintenance base.

Military service runs in my family. I'm a fourth-generation combat veteran with family members who have served in World War I, World War II and Vietnam. I joined the military in 1995 and have deployed four times: to Bosnia, Macedonia, Iraq and, most recently, Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan.

My Afghanistan deployment is one of the proudest moments of my military career. Our unit had a major part in eliminating new terrorist threats in the region and ensuring stability for the local population. This deployment was also one of the hardest back home, as it was the first one my wife and two children experienced.

We had a lot of time to prepare for the deployment, and I let my leadership team at Tech Ops – Tulsa know early on that I was leaving. The well wishes and good luck sentiments came from everyone I work with on a daily basis. I wasn't too surprised by this, since I work with a large number of people who have served in the military.

The unexpected part came the week before I left. American team members from all areas, including union and management, sought me out to give me their personal contact information. I received slips of paper with phone numbers and services that could be provided for my family while I was deployed —plumbing, roofing, carpentry, car maintenance and even babysitting. Everyone I talked to wanted me to know that American had my family's back.

I wanted to do something to give back to the Tulsa team. One morning, as I was doing my pre-flight checks with the

pilot who was flying my jet that day, I put a U.S. flag in his cockpit and told the pilot I was flying the flag for my employer back home. That flag was a witness to our nation's commitment to never again allow our soil to become a battleground for terrorism.

While talking with the pilot before his flight, the subject of my employer came up again. I mentioned that I work for American Airlines in Tulsa, and, as luck would have it, the pilot ended up being a colleague: Rex "TOGA" Weber, a PHX-based Airbus A321 First Officer who was deployed through the Tucson National Guard. He was excited when he found out he was the one to fly that specific flag.

When I returned back to work, I spoke with Randy Swartwood, an Aviation Maintenance Technician (AMT) in our Component Repair organization, about my vision for a case for the flag. Randy and another team member, AMT Gavin Punch, were able to craft an amazing piece of art that captures the spirit of both aviation and patriotism. It was an honor to present it to the base as a token of my appreciation for everything the team did for our family.

When a military member deploys, they are usually not worried about their well-being; just about those they are leaving behind. The response from my American Airlines family in Tulsa was one of the most moving things I've experienced in my civilian career. It was a huge part in allowing me to deploy ready to perform the mission knowing the home front was in good hands.

Tim Eraker
Supervisor, Tech Ops – Tulsa

AMTs Randy Swartwood and Gavin Punch built a special case to house the American flag presented to the base.

Tech Ops – Tulsa Supervisor Tim Eraker presents the flag to Base Maintenance Managing Director Erik Olund.

Eraker sits with his wife Rachael, daughter Blaire and son Christian an hour before his deployment to Afghanistan.