American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

One of American's newest Americans celebrates patriotic journey

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Over the last decade, Roy Wallace-Reeves has enjoyed a storybook American life. He married his high school sweetheart and started a family; built an aviation career from the ground up at airports in New York and North Carolina; and in his spare time, served as a volunteer firefighter while earning a private pilot license. There's even an American flag tattooed on his leg, intertwined with that of his birthplace, the United Kingdom, and the date he moved to the United States: July 10, 2010.

But one piece of this American story has always been missing. "My wife is dual nationality, born to a British dad and an American mom," Roy said. "We were married in the U.S. and bought our first house in the U.S. Our kids were all born in the U.S. And here I am on a green card. So I always had this feeling of wanting to join them."

That process, of course, takes time. But time is something Roy has never wasted.

He met his wife, Jaci, at the age of 14 as a high schooler in London. They were engaged by 18, about the time Roy got his first job in aviation as a Ramp Agent for Swissport at London's Stansted Airport (STN). He moved to Buffalo, New York, with Jaci and her family shortly before turning 20.

Roy Wallace-Reeves, General Manager at Buffalo, New York (BUF), for American.

As they married and started a family, Roy was determined to find his way back to aviation. In October 2011, he joined Calspan Air Services at Niagara Falls International Airport (IAG), working in a variety of roles including customer service, aircraft re-fueling, ramp and dispatch. He would eventually lead a team of 10 responsible for handling Spirit Airlines flights. His work there earned him an offer to become a manager on the ramp for US Airways at Charlotte Douglas International Airport (CLT) in North Carolina. That meant a move for his young family,

but the opportunity proved fruitful. He was quickly promoted to a manager role in the Control Center at CLT in 2014, not long after the merger with American Airlines.

After nearly four years, Roy and his family — which by this time included three children — eyed a return to their adopted hometown of Buffalo. They put their house up for sale, figuring Roy could find his next role while the house was on the market. It sold in four days. “And that’s when I knew I was part of two American families,” Roy said. “A colleague and her partner — now my family — opened their home to me, no questions asked, so I wouldn’t have to commute without a place to stay. They just wanted to pay it forward.”

Not long after, Roy was made General Manager of American’s operation at Buffalo Niagara International Airport (BUF). “The whole experience really captures the two things I love so much about America: the people and the opportunities,” Roy said. “I’ll admit, I’ve struggled with some aspects, particularly with my accent. I had a hard time building relationships with people when I first arrived … I spoke very quickly, came across very serious, tended to jumble my words. Yet I’ve encountered nothing but kindness and generosity.”

But there was still that nagging feeling of being an outsider. What Roy didn’t know is that his journey would soon come full circle in a rush of all things patriotic — and a hint of irony.

Roy with his wife, Jaci, and their youngest son, Jackson.

Last week, on June 23, American was proud to fly former U.S. Army Staff Sgt. David Bellavia and his family from Buffalo to Washington, D.C. (DCA), to receive the Medal of Honor from President Donald Trump. It’s the highest award for valor in combat that can be bestowed upon a member of the U.S. military, and Staff Sgt. Bellavia is the first living recipient of the award for actions during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Though not yet an American himself, Roy felt duty-bound to ensure the best possible journey for Staff Sgt. Bellavia, partnering with American’s Military and Veterans Initiatives program to place a recognition flyer on every seat of Staff Sgt. Bellavia’s outbound flight. When weather threatened to disrupt the journey, Roy rallied teams at BUF, CLT, DCA and American’s Integrated Operations Center to minimize the disruption and ensure a travel experience and arrival befitting an American hero.

Along with dozens of other immigrants, Roy takes the Oath of Allegiance to become a naturalized citizen of the United States.

It was the kickoff to a whirlwind week. Just four days later, on a still and sunny Thursday morning, Roy and his family boarded the USS Little Rock at the Buffalo Naval and Military Park. Inside a makeshift tent lined with red, white and blue, music filled the air. For the 30th consecutive year, a judge — an immigrant himself — spoke to the assembled about the promise of America, and the importance of the ceremony in which they were participating. He raised his right hand, and Roy raised his, pledging the Oath of Allegiance to become a naturalized citizen of the

United States.

“It was very overwhelming, if I’m being honest,” Roy said. “I felt very patriotic, very honored to be a part of it all. I actually do feel different. I don’t know what it is. But it feels fantastic to now fully be a part of three American families — this country, my own and my airline.”

It’s not lost on Roy — who described himself as “chuffed” — that his naturalization ceremony took place a week before Independence Day. “That was the most awkward part of the ceremony,” he laughed. “I was the only Brit there. They’re talking about the American Revolution and I’m thinking ‘can we skip this part?’ But ultimately, that’s part of our countries’ history and my history. And now, of course, it’s different. We’re allies, hand-in-hand.”

Lest anyone wonder if Roy has fully bought into Americana, his post-citizenship plans should leave no doubt. “First thing is to update this tattoo,” he said. “I’m adding my citizenship date: June 27, 2019.”

And then?

“Celebrating the Fourth of July the right way,” he said. “I’m going to watch some fireworks. Lots and lots of fireworks.”

See the sights from Roy’s June 27 naturalization ceremony in the gallery below.