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Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

Air Force One: Zero Failure

Col. (Ret.) Mark W. Tillman, the nation's 12th presidential pilot, gives a first-hand account of remarkable moments in history with his experience as pilot and commander of Air Force One from 2001-2009.

Col. (Ret.) Mark W. Tillman: I'm truly honored to be here tonight. It's such a great opportunity and, General, I appreciate you inviting me. This is one of the dreams. I started out here 33 years ago. I worked at the Foreign Technology Division as a Second Lieutenant and then went to pilot training shortly after that.

Tonight, I'm going to tell you a bunch of stories and it's a real nice, laid back social atmosphere. In the end, you can ask as many questions as you want. I've retired now, so if I give away the secrets, what the heck? No big deal. General, same thing, he's not going to hurt me either, so I love him to death.

Thirty-three years ago, I show up on the base here at Wright-Patterson. I'm a Second Lieutenant. I went through the ROTC program. I got to admitted, the Air Force paid for my college and I was so excited about it. I didn't learn a lot in the ROTC, I'll be totally honest to say.

I go to the opening ceremony where the Wing Commander says all the Second Lieutenants have to show up. Kind of mandatory, it's what he said. I showed up ten minutes late. As I walk in the back of the room, everybody's already sitting down. The Wing Commander addresses me as "Well, thank you so much. glad you were able to make it." I said, "Its fine, sir. I appreciate it. Thank you too." I sit down. The briefing is done. I think he's a great man because he was so nice to introduce me and I went in.

Go out in the parking lot as he's leaving. He drives away in his car and all I went was, I waved at him. He comes back around. I'm standing there with two other Air Force Academy graduates. They all were laughing their heads off. The Wing Commander comes out. He grabs me, he asks who I am. He explains to me that I will salute from now on at the blue cars with the white roofs. I'd never heard that. It was the craziest thing in the world to salute a car.

That night, I go home. My dad, not a big military supporter, I said "Dad, I'm not sure this Air Force thing's for me. The guy just stopped me today, said he's the Wing Commander, says from now on, I got to salute the cars." And my Dad was "Well, what kind of car was it?" It's a K-car!" My Dad says, "Yeah, this is goofy. I don't know if you want to be with these guys."

Then over 30 years later, I am President Bush's pilot, I am extremely thankful to have been in the United States Air Force. I loved it to death. If they called me again tomorrow, I'd be right back here serving in a blue uniform. I haven't figured out this civilian thing yet, so I'm trying to work it.

747-200, it was bought under the Reagan Administration, delivered it under President Bush's administration, Bush 41. When I say 41, 41st President of the United States; his son, 43rd President of the United States; so I call them 41 and 43, that's what we always use to call them. 747-200 has capability to do about 14 and a half hours of flying; basically, go halfway around the world; can hit a tanker if it needs to; or can load up a bunch of gas, 60,000 gallons of gas.

It basically is a flying fortress, but it is mainly a flying White House. Inside, it has a bedroom for the President of the United States. He has his own office; he's got his own medical annex, capability to have any kind of meals he'd ever want, two galleys. We've got press on board, secret service on board. The plane also serves as the carrier for any of the Presidents after they've fallen. So the plane will actually, President Reagan, the most recent, President Ford went ahead, and we flew to their hometowns, picked up the fallen Presidents, and brought them back to Washington so they could lie in state in the capital. Then we brought them to their final resting place. Air Force One is responsible for that as well.

The 747 is an amazing aircraft. It's a normal civilian aircraft with a tremendous amount of modifications. I'm going to get right into it right now. I'm a fast talker, so if I'm talking too fast, for you, somebody just stand up and give me the level off signal, and I'll slow it on down. But until that point, just go ahead and hang on.

This airstrip right here is in an African country. In 2003, the President of the United States, President Bush, decided to go ahead and tour the African continent. We based out at South Africa and we went to different areas within that continent. The problem was, after September 11th, the threats became enormous for the President of the United States. No matter where we went, somebody was trying to kill this man and we had to counter each one of those threats.

Africa, we're all set. We're going to visit a bunch of countries. Uganda was one of the countries of concern, but we countered all the threats that were told to us by not only our own secret service or intelligence agencies, but the host countries as well. Two weeks prior to going on in this trip, you can see this runway sits at the base of a lake. We get word from the host country intelligence that the plan is to assassinate the President as Air Force One comes in to land. Plan is we're going to go ahead and have fishermen in the lake go ahead and shoot Air Force One down with some kind of rocket.

I'm in charge of Air Force One. My goal for the eight years while I was in charge of Air Force One, and pretty much, I was at Air Force One for 18 years, the whole time, I didn't want to be the guy in the history books that said something wrong or did something

wrong. So I didn't want my kids reading about it. So the plan was to make sure everything was perfect. So we got together, we figured out how can we secure this lake? How many Air Force vets are in here? Ah, I love you. I love you, man.

Okay, Air Force. What we would have done is we would have bombed that lake for four to five days. Absolutely, all of us pilots would have bombed it, and we would have gone back to the five-star hotel, and we would have just waited to see what happens.

Any Army vets? Marines? Army? Marines? Absolutely, you guys are the best. You just surrounded that lake. You would have gone ahead and made sure no one could get access to that lake, and you would have done what you did, constantly, and it would have been perfect.

Navy vets? Navy, absolutely. You all would have found a way to go ahead and bring ships into that lake, steam up and down it, and find a great port to party in. That's what we're about.

My problem is everything I do with the President of the United States has to be "the men in black." We cannot do anything that will take away from the President's message. So what do you do to secure a lake and no one knows about it? Bring in a SEAL team. I love these guys to death! These guys came in to that lake with two boats and 50 caliber machine guns, about five guys, and took control of that whole lake. Now, it wasn't rocket science. All they did was drive around that lake and let all the fishermen know there's a new game warden on in that lake. These guys then report to us, "Hey, to protect you, we're going to need you 500 feet above the water." The pilot in me now was saying, "Yes, 747, five hundred feet above the water. President of the United States, I'm your guy."

So that's what we did. These guys went in and patrolled the lake. They gave us the idea, "Okay, here's your entry point. Here's your exit point. Here's all the codes you need in case something goes wrong." Okay now, I'm in the Wright-Patt. So everybody here is a technical genius. Now, if a rocket attack is going to happen, the shooter has to go ahead and acquire the aircraft. He's got to see the aircraft, if he's using the main path or something like that. He's got to see the aircraft and he's got to lock on to the aircraft. So all my training says, "Okay, 747, put the sun behind you. The guy can't lock on to your engines or wherever the sun's behind you." Not a big deal. I've got all the intelligence, I've trained. I've got all the tactics. I'm ready to go.

Game day, we had started to head in there. We had talked with the SEAL team; they're ready to take us. It's completely overcast that day. It's a standard luck of Tillman. But I got, basically got a SEAL team on the water, so they tell me where to enter. We come dropping through the clouds, drop down to 500 feet. SEAL team goes ahead and says, "Yeah, we're all clear." Fishing boat comes off the shore. As they're coming off the shore, they're telling us the usual cosmic stuff "broad 275, 162" or whatever. But all we need to see out the window was these guys going TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT.

Let the fishermen know today is not the day to go fishing. And because they were nailing the water, obviously the fish are scared. You're not going to do any fishing that day.

These guys are amazing. Five hundred feet, trucking on in, I come in to land at the airport, single runway awaits there so I'm coming across the water. Secret service comes in the cockpit, "Tillman, Tillman. Hey, the rest of the story is their country has a rogue agent whose plan is when the President comes down the stairs he's going to go ahead and assassinate him. We're trying to get the rogue agent right now."

But all of us in the military, we know that we are highly trained, so all it really takes is you call the guy and you say, "Hey, execute. Do your mission." For me, that's all it was. Guy on the ground that receives me, I call him up immediately. I tell him, "Look. I'm going to give you the signal and if I have to come through this spot, get everything out of the way because I'm taxiing through in the event there's some kind of firepower coming at us." We taxi in, the agents are telling me, "Hey, it looks like we've got the guy." That's great.

As I taxi in to the spot, normally, sharpshooters of secret service are looking out into the distance. Today, they were all turned, looking down at the foot of the stairs. I mean, these are guys, just big gorillas that can shoot the eyes out of something within 1,000 yards. And they're just pointing down. So as we come taxiing in, we see a guy at the foot of the stairs next to their President. All of a sudden, their agents, as well as ours; oomph, we see the guy get handcuffed and he just backs off; the coolest thing ever. President then comes down the stairs. That was what my life was like for eight years with President Bush. We did everything but infiltrate a drug cartel.

The men in black -- this is the picture we give out at Air Force One. It's a 747 over Mount Rushmore. We hand these pictures out to everybody that takes a visit of the plane. The plan was to go ahead and have another picture of Air Force One over the Statue of Liberty. Thought it was time to change it. Aw, come on.

We contact every agency up in New York: the 411, the 911. If we added a 1-1 after it, they all knew about the 747 with an F-16 on the wing going to be going up and down the Hudson taking pictures. The FAA knew, everybody knew, and the mayor knew as well, just to let you know. F-16 on the wing, the plane does its first pass. When it does its first pass, everybody in Manhattan and basically in the buildings all of a sudden sees a 747 large aircraft with an F-16 following right there. They all immediately come out of the buildings. Now, all of you people in here kill me because what you do at this point, and I know you said you wouldn't do it, but you do it; you pull out your cell phone, you go to the video function. Before I can get back to where I can get to so I can say that "I didn't do that," you film it. You film it and send it to CNN and Fox, et cetera.

So during this period, we were not the men in black because CNN and FOX, for three days, advertised how much does it cost to fly a 747 on a picture expedition going up and down the Hudson. Okay, we were not the men in black during that period, unfortunately. The key to this whole thing for me though is I have retired at that point. That was my

deputy who then became President Obama's pilot, Presidential pilot number 13. So that was not me, THANK GOD!

That's me looking out of the window there. I have tremendous vantage point on Air Force One. Twenty feet up in the air, I can see everything out there that is within front of me or off to the side. My goal is when the President comes down the steps; I want him to get past halfway on those steps because in my mind, when he's halfway, he's secret service issue. He's not mine anymore. So I prayed every day, very religious, "Okay, go, go, go, go." And then when he'd gotten in that motorcade, I was so happy because he was no longer my issue anymore.

But I've seen some amazing things from that vantage point. I've seen kings and queens at the foot of the stairs. I've seen people come to see the United States of America roll on to their soil. They're so impressed with the United States of America. That's what the 747 is. We're delivering you, the United States of America, onto foreign soil.

The most memorable thing that I've ever seen in my life is the city in the mid-West, turning 2004 during the election. As I land, as I'm coming in, I'm hearing over my loudspeaker the secret service, as well as the staff. I can hear both radios; they're all talking to each other the whole time. As I'm taxiing in, they're briefing the President on who's going to meet him at the foot of the stairs. It's always the same group of folks: senator, congressmen, local business leaders, et cetera. But as I'm taxiing in on that day, I hear the staff talking about, "Hey the service member at the foot of the stairs," so and so, "the President will greet him," et cetera, et cetera.

As we're taxiing in, I see this off in a distance. I see a young Marine that's lost both legs, but he's at full attention for the last 300 yards that Air Force One comes in. He has limited use of his right hand but he has full use of his left hand, and he's at attention in his wheel chair, saluting with his left hand. Senators, congressmen all joking around, hitting each other. "Hey, Rocky, what the heck?" you know. This guy no. He is at full attention; he's ready to meet the Commander-in-Chief.

As President Bush gets off the plane, you hear the staff talking over their radio saying, "Let the President know the man has limited use of his right hand. He's going to need to know that." Young staffer comes walking up to the President of the United States and you can see him whispering to the President's ear. President goes ahead and just pushes him away, moves him away. The staffer comes back over the radio to tell the rest of the staff. "President says he knows how to greet a man." Wow! Coolest thing ever!

President goes ahead, and he drops to his knees, and he gives the young Marine a big hug. Then he comes back up, salutes, drops the salute, and then he grabs his hand and shakes his hand. In the crowd is his young wife with a one-year-old baby. The President goes ahead, "Come on, come on over here." They bring him over to the young Marine and at that point, he points to the cockpit.

And the signal is the same for every time a serviceman's at the foot of the stairs. Tillman, it's my job now to go ahead and take care of that man and have him in his office when the President returns. President of the United States, a lot of you don't know it, that with all the families of the fallen, he took care of business like this constantly. This is what the military's about. This is what the United States of America is about, this. That young man, I'll never forget that young man, standing, or basically sitting, at attention the whole time. That's what we're about. Everybody in here, that's what we're about.

September 10th, 2001, President of the United States makes a decision he's going to go to Florida and do an education campaign. First stop: Jacksonville, Florida. After he meets with the educators in Jacksonville, plan is to head over to Sarasota that afternoon. And on September 11th, then take him back to Washington, D.C. President meets with the folks in Jacksonville, the President then goes on to Sarasota. Sarasota, Air Force One sits on the tarmac, tarmac in Sarasota. It's the standard security around that aircraft, cones. So I mean, you know. Give me a break. You can't put up a fence, so you got to have cones.

So we put cones all the way around the aircraft. And then inside those cones, if you could see in the picture there, there's a young African-American man, 6' 4", about 240 lbs. He was my chief of security, a guy named Will Chandler. He's on the National Geographic Special; just an amazing man. His problem now is he has to guard this plane constantly and there were numerous threats against that aircraft, bomb threats, et cetera. He had to make things happen. The plane is guarded constantly and there's not a time where it comes down; everything is bomb-swept, listening device-swept before he comes walking on that plane.

Inside those cones, you have to have business with Air Force One. Outside of those cones is the United States of America. Big Will's job was to go ahead and see all those people outside of those cones and figure out whether they were coming to take pictures or they're coming to do harm. He has four ways he's going to defend that aircraft.

First thing, he's going to come up to the cone, "Hey, how are you doing? Everything good?" Then he's going to try to talk you out of doing something stupid. He's a great talker. Second thing he's going to do, he's going to use hand-to-hand combat. Thing I didn't tell you about Will is he has a scar from his ear all the way across his neck, where he got in a knife fight as a kid. The best part is he won the knife fight, but he's got a big scar. And that's all it takes.

The other part, he's got a clip-on tie, instead of a tied tie, because you don't want to be choked when you're doing hand-to-hand combat. So that's all he does. He pulls off the clip-on tie. If that doesn't make you stop wanting to do something bad, he then shows you his 9-mm. Just let you know the capability of the 9-mm and how close it is, and that he fires expert.

The next thing he does is he's got a little microphone. He just can talk into it. A young man would come down those stairs of the aircraft with an M4 and he will ruin your day because that's all he's trained to do. It's a simple world I lived in, it was great.

747, sitting just like it is right there. September 11th, 2001. I'm an Air Force officer. I did my PT that morning; so all of you Air Force guys in here right now, hoorah, hoorah. So I had to run a mile and a half in thirteen and a half minutes. Yeah, Army and Marine guys, yeah, we did. Next thing I had to do; I had to do 40 push-ups and 40 sit-ups in two minutes. Yeah, yeah, I did. So I did all of that.

Now, you're saying to me, why am I making fun of that? Well, that's why I joined the Air Force. Let's not be crazy. I joined to fly and whatever PT I had to do, I did it. So I was physically fit. That morning I did that, I come walking out to the plane. I stand on the outside of those cones, I look for Big Will Chandler to give me the signal to come in because I don't want any firepower hitting me, gives me the signal. I come across. He salutes me, "Sir, no one was killed or injured last night on this aircraft," while he protected it. If you're going to take away from the President's message, you kill somebody at the Air Force One the night prior, you will take away from the President's message that whole day.

Get on the 747; two crew chiefs immediately come up to me. They brief me on what the status of the aircraft is, how much fuel it has on it, or whatever. Anybody else in here Air Force pilots, I'm telling you, we basically get on, push the button. We make the houses smaller and the houses bigger, but other guys. We got guys. Everybody's got a guy. I got guys to do all the dirty work, which was great. I come up the stairs, now I'm met by the flight engineer. Same thing; flight engineer's plan is to tell me everything about the plane, the enlisted force, they are kind of the senior enlisted onboard the plane, and everything's good on September 11. The plane is ready to go.

Each one of the rooms on the aircraft, flight attendant then shows me that room to make sure that everything is set up for the room. President Bush, famous for sarcasm, his attention-getting step to me was the Texas hit in the chest and he'd call me Tillman. And then he would joke around about something. But he's just like you do with your kids. You know, you joke around about "Hey, your room is really, really dirty." Now, I know he's getting at me because something's wrong and I've got to find it. You know, finders, keepers. So I don't want that to happen. So I go through each room to make sure it's perfect.

That morning, I did the same thing. Get to the second room, radio operator comes across the loudspeaker, "Colonel Tillman, pick up a white phone." The plane had 82 phones on it, white phones and beige phones. White phone: normal communications; beige phone: secure communications. Pick it up; radio operator goes, "Come on upstairs. You got to see this. I'm not sure what's going on, but you do have to see this." I go upstairs. The radio operator has TiVoed what the morning news shows have got on. He took this from the Today's Show and he's telling me that look "I don't know what's going on, neither does the media. But it doesn't look like it's anything important; it looks like it's an aircraft accident."

And at that point, 42 phone lines on the aircraft were tied in to all the vowel agencies, as we used to call them; OSI, FBI, NSA, etcetera, CIA, none of those phones were going off. Everybody thought this was just an aircraft accident. I told the radio operator, "Monitor it because we know we're going to be going to New York," because obviously there's loss of life if a plane has hit the building. I go back downstairs. As I'm walking through the rest of the rooms, I get this frantic call, "Colonel Tillman, pick up the beige phone." "Sir, we're executing plans such and such. You need to come upstairs immediately."

As I go upstairs, the radio operator now shows me the second footage, a plane actually attacking the tower. At that point, all the phone lines are coming alive. Every agency in the world wants to know what our status is if we're ready to go. I'm getting words from my boss, the White House Military Office Commander as well the Secret Service lead Eddie Marinzel at the time, asking us, "What is our status? If they can come to us within ten minutes, can we get going?" "Yes, absolutely, we are ready to go."

At the same time, I'm getting words that there have been about nine planes hijacked and one is in the Florida area, we may be the sitting duck. We may be a target sitting on the Sarasota ramp. My plan of attack is to move that aircraft. Get it out of the way and come back and grab the President when he's ready to go. I get a word from the Secret Service, "Negative, we are coming at you as fast as we can come at you. Do not, repeat, do not move." "I have a backup plan. We have two 747's. The backup plane is overhead. Launch it." "Okay, you may have to take the passenger. We're going to do a lot of decoying." We don't know what's going on. We give him his orders.

Andy Card talks to the president on the television, "We see the same thing as you do." Mr. President knows the country is under attack. The President finishes up with the students. He comes back to the classroom next to him, and now he is talking to the Vice President on a secured line in the classroom behind him. Behind him is the NSA Rep Communications Director Karl Rove, Secret Service. His whole staff was with him on that day as well as every other day. He had all the right decision-makers with him doing that. He then leaves that room. He goes ahead and addresses the nation. He talks with the Elementary School. At that same time, I'm getting the word that President wants to go to Washington, D.C. I'm telling you right now, there is no plan to evacuate the President of the United State and says, "Bring him back to Washington, D.C." What? That was my orders and they overrode those plans that I had.

Now, obviously when they made those plans, they didn't take into account that we have a president that was from Texas that wanted to get into the battle and start kicking ass. That was what, excuse my language, but that's what he said he was going to do. As the President is coming to us, we get a word that the Pentagon was bombed. Any tacticians in here? What does it mean it was bombed versus an aircraft flew into it? There's a ground attack. That's skewed everything for all of us. We knew that there were airliners being hijacked, but we had no idea what they meant when they said the Pentagon was bombed. They said, "Bombs are going off in the mall as well." Now, there's a ground attack. It's not going to be safe to get the President back to Washington because there are people on

the ground. They are doing things, setting off bombs, etcetera. Mr. President is coming to us, that's all we knew. So, prior to take off, that was the plan. Okay, there's bombs and they are basically flying airplanes into buildings.

Air Force One, sits on the ramp, ready to go. Four engines on the aircraft, all four engines can start at the same time. We have two auxiliary power units. We can just light them up; hit all four buttons at the same time. Within about three minutes, the plane is ready to start taxiing. The challenge is you've got to get everybody in on the left side. As the President arrives, the right side engines are running. The President comes up the plane. Secret Service, as well as our security, run through the manifest. Bombs sweeping everybody, bringing everybody on at that point, the President still wants to go to Washington, D.C.

Air Force One, as I'm taxiing out, I get a word from the Secret Service. There's a man at the end of the runway, unknown man. The shooters have him in sight. They will take him down if he moves. But, there is a man that has come up to the end of the runway, so please, do not taxi by him and take off." Prevailing wind would have us go by him. I took off with a tail wind, not a big problem for the 747, a highly overrated engines etcetera. It wasn't a big deal. The problem was, they said is the man at the end of the runway had a long gun. It's tough to defend against missiles, but the plane is highly capable. It is almost impossible to defend against a long gun if he's going to shoot me on the ground.

Now, how many of the good all boys in here have ever tried to shoot an aircraft in your backyard with your shotgun. Come on, be honest, throw those hands up. Obviously, you can't do it and as much as you thought as a kid you could take something down, it just doesn't happen. Yeah, your physics stuff, it's not there. Yeah, the kinetics and everything, so you've got to haul down the runaway and then get out of the man's way. That's what I did. I start hauling down the runway, halfway down the runway, I was basically pulling back all my training, houses got to get smaller quick! Pullback, went up at about 8000 feet per minute, and just put the plane on its tail, rolled it off towards the Gulf of Mexico because I didn't want the shooter to get us.

What happened at that point was what we did the whole day. The guy at the end of the runway was not a threat. We avoided threats all day. They weren't exactly threats. The guy at the end of the runway was the gentleman that brought his kids; to see President Bush leave, watch Air Force One leave. The beauty of it was I'm assuming these kids are Secret Service agents now because they got introduced to the finest agents in the world.

I start heading across Florida, heading towards Washington, D.C., at this point now, Jacksonville Center advises us, "Air Force One, you have traffic above you descending into you. Are you aware of that?" "No, we're not aware of that at all." We didn't see anything on our TCAS which shows us the capability of planes around us. Jacksonville Center says, "Yeah, he's not talking to anybody and he has shut his transponder off." It's the MO of all the other hijacked airliners. Now at this point, I was not sure what capability of the terrorist was. All I knew was it's possible that the man was above us and

then followed us as we're climbing out and now he's going to try to hit us midair because he definitely had us in sight.

My plan was, we turn out towards the Gulf of Mexico. If he follows me, obviously we've got some issues and now it's time to be Tom Cruise or whatever. I've got to outrun this guy. It didn't happen. I turned out towards the Northern Panhandle of Florida. He kept descending toward the Jacksonville area. As it turns out, it was an airliner that had lost his transponder and then had not made the subsequent radio call to the next sector of Jacksonville. He was not a threat. But what it did for us is, it diverted us away from Washington long enough for the President and staff to think about, "Okay, let's take a good look of what's going on here." There's a lot of confusion. At the same time, the FA is putting all the aircraft on the ground, best decision ever. Now, you can identify which aircraft are hijacked. Hijacked aircraft, had all met their target with the exception of one aircraft that was wondering out to the west of Ohio, basically, just maneuvering around.

We are looking out for all kinds of aircraft. The President right now is downstairs, Secret Service Agent Eddie Marinzel, Andy Card, the Military Aide to the President and another Secret Service agent. Military Aide to the President carries the "football" of all the secret centers for nuclear war. I tell you, this wasn't a nuclear war so as much as you thumb through those secrets, nothing applied. The plan was to move him around, decoy him, until we could figure out exactly what did apply at that point. The President was on the phone with the Vice President. The Vice President then tells the President that Angel is next. Angel was a classified call sign of Air Force One, the only people that knew that call sign was us, Secret Service, and the staff. So, for somebody call into the White House and say that Angel was next, that was just incredible.

At this point, I'm a strong believer in the Big Sky Theory that no one is going to find me, but I'm not going to take the chance so, I asked for a fighter escort. I asked for AWACS, radar plane overhead, to follow us around for the rest of the day. Now, a lot of you may think that all of these airline incidences occurred within six, seven or eight-hour period, they did not. Within 10:30 to 11:00, everything had been accomplished at that point. The airliners had either hit their target or not.

As we're flying along, the radio operators call me back from the cockpit, "Sir, you need to know, the Vice President and the President have just talked about shoot down authority. The President has given the "Okay" for the American fighters to go ahead and shoot down the American airliner." Wow, this is crazy. We then get the word that the aircraft that is out over the Ohio area has turned to make its run end. It's on a direct line with where we had hoped to take the President. We planned to take the President with a smaller plane into Camp David until Washington was safe. We immediately abort that plan. It's now heading towards Washington.

This is all that's left to Flight 93 than went into Shanksville. It is the saddest thing ever. But when we got told that they lost radar contact with that plane, all of us assumed, to include the President, it had been shut down by an American fighter pilot. That was the sickest feeling I've ever had in my life. About twenty minutes later, after accountability,

we found that that fighters did not shoot the aircraft down. In my mind, the true heroes of September 11th are the firefighters up in New York, the Air Traffic Controllers, the Port Authority, but high on my list is the guys that went ahead and took that plane back over again and crash it in the fields of Shanksville. If that plane had ever hit Washington, D.C. with the amount of fuel it had on it, there would have been thousands of people that had been killed.

We asked for fighter support. I get the call from Houston Center, "Air Force One, you have traffic at your seven o'clock, fast movers are coming up on you," seven o'clock, being behind me to the left." "It sounds good. Who are they, such and such?" Houston comes back and goes, "We don't know. They just popped up on radar."

Yeah, once again, luck at Tillman. I go the Military Aide, I'd say, "Hey, it looks like we've got the fighters that you had asked for. Everything is looking good," because I haven't asked for them yet and not only that, Air Force has passed to us that there's foreign nationals training out in the Gulf of Mexico and armed, F-16's. "Oh, you're killing me, man." The fighters join up on us. The best radio call I ever hear in my life is, "Air Force One, this is Calvary 45, Flight of 2, we are your cover, ETA three minutes." Literally, they're our supersonic truck to get on our wing right now. Their wing commander out of Houston went ahead and launched them because they knew we needed help airborne, [Inaudible], and all of these places, all of these fighter lingo places went ahead and took care of it.

Fighter jumps on our wing. As we're heading now to take the President to some other location where he can address the American public, the fighter guys call out, "Calvary 452, target broad 275..." he goes. So basically he's off the nose and then the lead tells him to go ahead and check it out and splash them. Even me, being a heavy guy who really enjoys the fact I have a bathroom and a place to get meal, knows "splash them." So, I go to the fighter lead and say, "Hey, hey, who has got shoot down authority here. What's going on? What's that, "You have shoot down authority." Yeah, that's pretty neat. So, I picked up the phone; picked up the phone, I call downstairs to the flight attendant. I let him know, hey let the President know that fighters on the wings say I have shoot down authority. All I can hear over the phone is a bunch of laughing by the President. "Yeah, Tillman thinks he has shoot down authority," kind of a little levity in the moment.

Fighters joined up on us. We then go to Barksdale Air Force Base. I land in Barksdale. The President addresses the nation. I fueled the plane up as much gas as I can. Any retired Chief Master Sergeants or Chiefs in the audience? Yeah, yeah; I love you guys to death. I am trying to get fuel at Barksdale Air Force Base. Trans alert guys are coming up. They are telling us the usual, "It's going to be a couple of more minutes before we get the trucks to you", and all this kind stuff. Chief Master Sergeant walks up because we parked over the top of the refueling pit, walks up with his dikes and clips, clips, clips it; demands to get such and such. And the guy is going, "Hey, what are you talking about. We don't use those unless we are in time of war." The guy says, "Dammit, we're at time of war. Get going." I love him to death. The President does his message. He comes back.

As I'm standing there, I get the word that Barksdale is undergoing a nuclear exercise. All the V-52's around me are filled with nukes - luck of Tillman. I'm telling you.

The Wing Commander advises me, the smartest thing I could ever done is bring him to the most secured base. The dumbest thing I could have ever done, if anybody who is following me is to bring him to the nation's nuclear stockpile. Hey, I'm an optimist. I'm an Air Force guy. Hey, let's keep that little secret tight and maybe ten years from now, we'll put that out. But for right now, it was a great decision.

We leave Barksdale. We started heading out to Offutt Air Force Base. The goal is to get the President underground until everything is secured in Washington, D.C., the President in underground, talking to the nation's leaders as well as talking to the military command and authority. I go into base office at Offutt Air Force Base. I have fighter support. We're talking with those guys, "How are we going to get into Washington?" I have asked Washington to push everything out, the base perimeters, so I could come in overhead. I'll spiral down to come in, we'll be well-protected. I knew as soon as I start talking with the fighter guys, a young airman from Offutt Air Force Base runs up to me, "Sir, sir, sir, it looks like the President is heading back to the plane." "No, not a chance, the President said he'd be here twelve to fifteen hours, not a big deal. It's probably wasn't the guy." "No, no, no, that's in the wing commander's car, this guy was waving at everybody as he went by." I was like, "Damn, that's my guy. That's his motion."

I jumped in the base ops truck; we go hauling out to the plane. As I get on the plane, the President is already on the plane, standing at the top of the stairs, up by the cockpit, and he just looks at me and he goes, "Tillman, it's time to get home. Let's get home." "Absolutely," boom, I jumped in the cockpit. I started heading across the country. 747 does about 9-0 Mach and that's what we were doing that day. We were the only game in town. But as we're flying by Chicago and we started heading to the north and then started working our way, we're still trying to decoy a little bit. They are pulling fighters off to major city, so I'm getting fighter support coming up on me. Now, was there any reason for it? No, but it was the coolest thing ever to have fighters on your wing. Nowhere threat or whatsoever, but that's what we are, we are Air Force. We got fighters out there. We're going to use those fighters.

The F-16's, they followed me the whole day. But, I didn't tell you was, they were from the President's Guard Unit. I could not have written history any better. They're President Bush's Guard Unit from Ellington. I wanted them to lead me into Washington D.C. So as I come up on the Shenandoah Valley. I do a 360 to allow these guys to catch up. They are hauling after us. United States Air Force has two F-15's from Langley joined up on us and F-16's came off to nose from Washington from the Air National Guard there at Andrews Air Force Base.

The F-16's joins up on us. A guy named Mark Saserville, a great guy; I got to meet him afterwards. Now, if my hand is the fuselage, my thumb is the wing. All of us Air Force guys in here are joining up on the wing. They're joining up on the wing. He joined up on the fuselage. He came up in front of the.

Once again, the coolest thing ever, so as I look out at the window and say, “Yeah! There he is.” I’ve spent a whole day keeping this man safe and then less than 80 miles from landing, I’m going to go ahead and get killed by my own people. He gave the Commander-in-Chief a big thumbs-up, the Commander-in-Chief is right there watching it, the President, his staff, Ari Fleischer, everybody, Karl Rove, looking out the window of the F-16’s sitting on the side there.

We descended on Washington D.C.; we finally now see what exactly has happened. We can see the Pentagon smoldering. Prior to that, we had seen footage on television, but we hadn’t seen anything real at this point. The Pentagon is smoldering. We come into Andrews Air Force Base, F-16’s from the Ellington unit underneath me screaming in, F-16’s from Washington on the wing, we go ahead and land at the Andrews Air Force Base. We now get the President up to Marine One. Marine One then takes him on a 100-foot low level circuitous route all around, because we do not know what the threat is. We have been told there are numerous threats waiting for us back in Washington.

Ground Zero, two days later, we take the President up to McGuire Air Force Base. On the way up there, we have to decoy because once again, there are still threats. There are still Intel saying, “The President is still a target.” So we go up there on the 747. I land at McGuire Air Force Base, the President helicopters stood at the Wall Street landing zone. He goes to Ground Zero. You remember him on Ground Zero, standing on the destroyed fire truck, talking to the firefighters, “George, go get them, George.” And then, somebody yells out, “I can’t hear you.” The President, “I can hear you. The United States of America can hear you.” That’s the way we ran for the next eight years, kind of kicking, doing business, taking care of business.

This is the coolest picture ever, raising the American Flag on the rubble. I’ve got that on my desk, all through Air Force One, and now I’m a pilot for Discount Tire. I run their flight department. Come on, the best tires ever you just have to throw a little plug in here.

I got this picture and it’s signed by President Bush and I look at it every morning when I come in. This is America and this is what it was about. After September 11th, that’s what America was. We were tight. I used to see, when we take the President to places we land, people, tens of thousands of people. The coolest I ever saw was a little kid. We go landing in the Midwest. Kids got a sign when we land. All it says on it is, “Put me in, coach,” the kid is about ten years old and it’s just the coolest thing ever. But that was the mentality at the time.

Baghdad, I’m going to tell you about how we got the President in and out of Baghdad. This is the Baghdad Airport. The runway on the left is the runway that we’re planning to land on. That’s the goal right now. Baghdad Airport was pretty well shelled up and any of you did time over there know that we not only hit the Baghdad Airport, but a lot of others did as well. September of 2003, the President, prior to that had already asked the question about trying to get in Afghanistan to see the troops. We just couldn’t make it happen. Afghanistan was the Wild West. How do you defend against guys with rocket propelled

grenades or MANPADS on camels and horses that shoot, and then run up in the hills? You just can't do it. So, it's the Wild West. We did not do it. The President was not happy. He wanted to get to Afghanistan.

2003 though, the President wasn't accepting "no" for an answer. He talked to Dr. Rice. He talked to Andy Card and his Deputy Chief of Staff Joe Hagin. Joe Hagin then called me and says, "Hey, you need to come up with a plan of attack to get the President from United States into Iraq to have Thanksgiving dinner with the troops and then bring him back to the United States without anybody knowing it." The President then emphasized that. The President then explained to me that, "Look, it's a simple operation. You fly me every day. All you have to do in this case is take me over there and no one will ever know about it, and that's all you got to do, Tillman."

So, I took those words of advice. The President then added in that I could not tell anybody. I could not tell my crew. I could not tell the United States Military. His concern was that once the Military knew about it, the chain of command would kill him and that would be Johnny telling him, Billy telling him, whatever, "Hey, this is what I learned. We all got to be ready for it," and some servicemen or women would be killed over in the arena mainly because somebody let the word out. He said, "It had to be kept quiet."

So this is what I did. I put this picture up on my bulletin board in my office. For three weeks, I analyzed this picture. I took Intel from United States Air Force, CIA, NSA, etcetera and I plotted every mortar attack, every RPG attack on this airport and I had to figure out a place to park a 747. Now, everybody says, "Why don't you use a C-17 or whatever?" The problem is the moment you use a C-17, you just about 150 people know because you've got a primary, backup, tertiary, quadrucary, and a fifth plane because that's how it all works, everybody's got to get involved. You got to have tankers. So, we had to use the 747 and bring him over there. The plan was to put him on one area on this airport. There was one area that had never gotten attacked. Tacticians in here, do you know why that was? Yell it out, come on.

Male Speaker 1: Out of range.

Tillman: Out of range, absolutely. Here I'm an Air Force guy ROTC to boot, and I've got to go ahead and figure out how to get the President into this area. All of my PME, Professional Military Education, still sits in the plastic wrapper back in my home now, so I am making this up as we go along. But I had to figure that out. It was cool because I had all the tacticians at my disposal and they explained to me exactly what was happening. There is a river there. The fellows would go ahead and jumped in their Toyota pickup trucks, probably a truck of choice, have a mortar in the back, drive across the river; they would go ahead and fire. The guy on the airport would then say to him, "Hey, you hit over here by billeting," or whatever. The guy would go, "Yeah, I was on the corner of Hussein and Main," and he had logged it in. There you go. And he would know that if you drove that truck with this elevation, he would go ahead and fire and he would hit that. Well this area, they couldn't hit because, like you said, it was out of range of the mortar. We had that all set up.

Now, all I had to do is figure out how I was going to go ahead and fill the plane up with gas. When I landed there I had enough gas to divert to Kuwait and then flame out because we basically would have flown fourteen hours at that point. We had that gas on the ground there. We sent guys in there with one of the vowel agencies that they have over there. I'm not going to tell you which one, but it's a great bunch of folks. They took my guys in there and they eventually got fuel. They got everything setup for us.

Now, plan of attack is up to the Secret Service now. Their problem was one agent got briefed in, "How do you get the President out of either the White House or any location that he's at?" We all sat down and discussed it. The plan was to take him out of Crawford, his location down there to the south, in Texas. Now, this is what I'm defending against, the Hussein brothers with the MANPAD. These guys could shoot in their backyard in Baghdad. Basically, I assume they probably had the outdoor barbecue and then, "Hey..." or whatever. That wasn't going to happen.

Two 747's are exactly identical, some called at the backup, I called it the decoy. This plane was; everybody had to think the President was somewhere else. That plane got involved. It went to an unnamed country. As soon as they landed, they basically all were arrested because they diverted into that country and they had to sit on the ground and wait for the go ahead for me to say, "Look, I'm going to call the State Department now they are going to clear you and you will be free in that country." They had to wait two and half hours on the ground in that country and accept all the ridiculousness from that country until the State Department could call-in and say, "Okay, here you go." I'll explain two-and-a-half in a second.

The President of the United States, he gets on the plane in Waco, Texas. Now, to get him off the ranch, what they had done in the Secret Service, basically three to four days prior to Thanksgiving, they had a Chrysler minivan, a big black minivan, and they would have it go off the ranch all the time. The guards or the Secret Service on the ranch would see this, basically, a truck leaving all the time. It wasn't a big deal. It always leave at the same time every day because they knew that's when they're going to take the President and Dr. Rice out of the ranch.

The Secret Service on the ranch knew nothing of his movements. They all thought the President was there and to make sure of that, they left a guy that was right in on the ranch to go ahead and talk in his wrist all night long. "The President is moving into the pool. The President is moving to the barbecue. The President is going to bed." Everybody thought the President was still on that ranch. The coolest part of this whole thing is, Bush 41 and Barbara Bush were coming for Thanksgiving dinner, so they were coming in. They did not know anything about it. CNN and everybody else knew the President was going to be on the ranch for Thanksgiving dinner.

After we left Baghdad on the way back, the President called his wife, Laura Bush, but I called her First Lady. He called her and explained to her that he had left Baghdad. While she's on the ranch after a couple of hours she goes to the Secret Service lead and says,

“Hey is the President about here?” The Secret Service goes, “[Inaudible]” and all of a sudden, he gets back and she goes, “Oh, you must be talking about Bush 41? Yeah, he’s about an hour out right now.” Then she goes, “No, no; the President.” “Yeah, President is in the back lawn ma’am. He is out working in the back.” Then, she looks up and goes, “It’s very effective.”

The President jumps on the plane in Waco, Texas. He comes to us. The problem is that the President is late. The reason being it is because the day prior to Thanksgiving is the big day that all the Texans use the I-35, just go to their Thanksgiving dinner. The President doesn’t have a motorcade. He is stuck in traffic with the United States Secret Service. He has got his ball cap on. He keeps it low. He lets everybody know; “Hey...” he’s trying to keep quiet. The Secret Service calls me, “It looks like we’re twenty minutes late.” Twenty minutes is a big thing for me because I’ve got to make up those twenty minutes as I cross the North Atlantic. I don’t have that kind of gas to make-up twenty minutes. I had an hour extra gas, forty minutes is killing me. But that’s okay, just a little thing. You’ve got to be flexible.

The President comes to us, he gets onboard the aircraft. Our plan is to take the President to Andrews Air Force Base where the second plane is waiting, completely fueled. My crew knows nothing about this until they show up at the plane in Waco. I tell them the plane is broken. We’re heading to Washington, D.C. to swap with the backup plane. Flight attendants, the whiniest, hard and forking people in the world, I love them to death. They all said the same thing. They had tickets to Dallas Cowboy - Washington Redskin game on Thanksgiving. I had guys on their knees, begging me, “Sir, can you just leave me. This is the first time I had tickets to this.” “No, we’re absolutely going to do the following.” As soon as everybody knew it, we pull all their cellphones away from them. Everybody saluted smartly and proud to make it happen for the President of United States.

The President gets off one plane. He starts moving to the next plane. You have to bring Press with you. We had ten Press from Waco as part of the Press core. They thought they were going back to Washington for bill signing. They came on the aircraft. Once we got airborne, the President basically explained to them what we’re doing. We had Press in Washington, D.C., they were told what they were going to be doing. But they had to keep it quiet. They were told a day prior. Those people who all showed up at our hangar, which is in this picture here, they had to give up all their comm. One gentleman left a cellphone in his sock because he wanted to be the one to callout the first byline, whatever. The President comes walking around the corner. The guy with the cellphone, he stands there and pulls out the cellphone. At that point, the President looks at him and goes; like that. But at the same point, my top cop, 6’4” African American 240, hits the man hard. Bam, blinding tackle, got it.

Okay, everybody in here now. You’ve got a guy that’s willing to give up everything? What do you do? Do you take him with you or you leave him home?

Male Speaker 2: Leave them home.

Tillman: Oh, you've got take him; that was my decision. You take him with you, nothing rope and duct tape and rope will not fix. We brought the guy with us. Once he got onboard, he realized how important it was to keep his mouth shut and the President buys all the media that whoever let it out; he would make sure the American public knew that the reason why servicemen and women were compromised is because of that news organization. They were handing up everything, radios and cellphones, anything they had.

The President gets onboard. We end up taking the President across the North Atlantic, so we go across the North Atlantic. It's dark. We know that when we hit the English Coasts, daylight. Someone is going to see us.

We start planning our route as we're going to start to head to the Med., and start working through France, working across. We've got to cut through Turkey. We're all going through diplomatically cleared areas where the State Department said, "Look, hit these countries because we know we can beg for forgiveness after you do it." But as we're heading across the North Atlantic, we're changing calls signs. We're changing types of aircraft. We knew sooner hit the English Coasts, British Airways is above us, they breakaway. We are so excited because they didn't say anything. But, all of a sudden, we get the radio call, "London, is that Air Force One?" Oh, God, I've gone this far and someone else has given it up. London comes back, "No, that's Gulfstream V." Wow! The guy in the aircraft starts laughing, "Ha-ha, a Gulfstream V, okay." He just goes right in front of us. Then, what have happened was the Nav had just switched flight plans and now we were a Gulfstream V. So we changed everything, at some points we were tankers, at some point whatever, we lucked out. But, God we never thought that we want to fool a guy on the ground but we never thought a plane would see us, thinking were a Gulfstream V. They did not say anything.

As we start heading into the Iraqi area, the President comes to the cockpit. He is dressed in suit pants and a white undershirt. He comes to the cockpit, sitting behind me, he's doing just like he is in the picture. As I'm flying along, he hitting me, "Hey Tillman, what's it like bringing the Commander-in-Chief into the war zone?" I said, "It's the best, Mr. President, I can't wait to do it." Then, he's talking and all of a sudden, he says to me, "Where is this triangle they talk about?" "Well, if you look in the picture, you could see it's completely overcast below us." I have no clue where the triangle is at. I am doing everything I can, talking to the guys on the ground to get everything set up. I called my navigator over the headset, "Georgie, the President wants to know where the triangle is at. Go ahead and throw me a bone here. Give me some coordinates or point or at least let me point in the right direction." Georgie comes back, "Sir, I'm skewing the GPS satellites. We're going Mil now. We're not civilian anymore. I am busy as hell back here. It's your game." "Yeah, absolutely." Well, the co-pilot hears that as well. So, I go to the co-pilot. "Hey, do you see that one point of the triangle over?" And Scott, he goes, "Yeah, it's right there, sir. Got it. You see, I got the other here, right here." I go, "Ah, there's the last one, right there." The President goes, "You have no idea where it's at, do you?" Mr. President I sure don't.

At the same time, he's looking across the panel to our self-defense and he's looking at the self-defense. The President then says, "What happens if we got shot at?" I say, "Well, the engineer here is going to go jump into action. He's going to give me a bunch of commands. Everything is going to be fine. We're going to be great, sir. Don't worry about it." "What happens if we get hit?" Man-flights I guess, I'm thinking out of head. You know man-flights probably going to change a little. I say, "Yes, sir just a big thump and we'll still be able to cover it." The President then goes, "That was a dumb question wasn't it?" All of us in the cockpit, all of the Chief Master Sergeants, the flight engineers, the rest of those Air Force officers, we all do the same thing at the same time. "Oh, no Mr. President, that's not a dumb question." That's great. Just as he does that, a photographer comes to the cockpit. The lady comes up and she goes, "Mr. President is it okay to flash?" The President turns and looks at her and he goes, "And then pull those pants right back up again." It was the best thing ever to break the tension right there.

We go in to Baghdad. The goal is to get in there at sunset, dark enough so that nobody can see us. The beauty of it was no one could really see us because of the overcast skies. Luck at Tillman, the overcast, if you do fly-in, the overcast ended half-way in the middle of the field in the Baghdad Airport. It's just luck of Tillman. It had been there for the whole time, but now it started moving off. So, you can start seeing the city, but it was dark. We basically came in, spiraled on in, blocked that runway, and not a big deal. It sounds worse than it is and it's not.

Prior to getting in there, we make the inject with the folks there in the military and let them know, "Hey, big U.S. old plane is coming in." The tower gets advised. They are expecting a big plane, sure enough, a big plane. They can't see us because we get our little lights off. You can't tell which plane it is. We land on the ground. We parked in that hammerhead that I told you about before. Now, it's time for army to go ahead and bring up a bunch of fuel trucks, fourteen fuel trucks so we could get gas immediately. We gave the President of United States two-and-a-half hours on the ground to meet and have dinner with the troops. The reason, two-and-a-half hours? The three-hour point at airfield, we found, if you did something at the airport, the city would have a chance to mobilize and start shooting into the base. We didn't want that to happen. So we did two-and-a-half hours.

The other thing we did is we discussed it with General Abizaid, nobody else knew it at that point. General Abizaid did with the military's famous for, he just gave the order to push the perimeter out, close the bridges on the river, so that the Hussein brothers could not fire at us with the rockets. The President goes ahead, gets off the aircraft, he then goes and meets with the troops, the troops are sitting there waiting to have Thanksgiving meal. All of you who have ever been deployed before, you know the meal is a big important part of your day. On thanksgiving, you probably want to eat around lunch time. We changed it, we gave it to them at night time which they are not excited about. But, they are waiting there and they knew that there was going to be another VIP there. Previously, in the days prior, Senator Clinton had come over so they knew that the VIPs were coming in, but they had no idea it's the President of the United States.

General Sanchez and Ambassador Bremer stand in front of a partition. They go ahead they have the Thanksgiving message from the President of United States. Ambassador Bremer says to General Sanchez, "Hey, why don't you read this?" and the General Sanchez, "Hey, why don't we have the President read it." President comes around the corner, servicemen and women go wild, jumping up and down because the Commander-In-Chief is there. He reads it to them, his Thanksgiving message. He then goes ahead and serves the troops, working in the chow line.

The President of United States then leaves the chow line. He's coming back to us at the two-and-a-half hour point. The plane had gotten completely refueled will all fourteen fuel trucks. We had multiple Special Ops guys around us protecting us. No idea that we're coming but they did their job. They protected that Hammerhead. As the President comes back, he's in the personnel carrier. He asked the question because he can't see Air Force One. He asked, "Hey, is Air Force One still out there?" Our call sign has changed at this point. Secret Service, "Hey, are you guys still in position?" Radio operators [Inaudible], "Absolutely, we're in position," scaring the hell out of me though now that if he can't see it, the driver can't see it. They are not wearing night vision goggles.

My top cop, Big Will, goes ahead and cracks a little green flare, those are like that. The driver confirms that he could see us. They come around the wing. Mr. President gets on the plane. He asking a question to Big Will, "Hey, is there anybody out here, any of the servicemen out here?" Big Will says, "Yeah, we've got a guy off the nose, a .50 Cal off the nose, a guy off the nose, scrub brush of on his helmet with a big .50 Cal." Mr. President starts of point him and Big Will stops and pulls his arm. "Don't give away his position, sir. Use my night vision goggles and you can look at him." He looks at him. The President just gives a simple thumbs-up to the man. The man gives him a simple thumbs-up. That's all it took, a big thing.

Coming back, the President is so excited about that. He jumps on the plane. We climbed out of there as steep as all get out. Completely blacked out, self-defense working like champ. We take him back. We then level off as we are leaving the Iraqi border and the President goes ahead and allows the Press to go ahead and file their stories with our phone lines. At that point, no one in the United States knew or within the world knew that we had made in and out and everything was fine. The press goes ahead and does that.

At the same time, the President invites me downstairs to walk into the conference room to meet with his staff. As I walked in, they all stand up; they start clapping. The President thanked me for a mission well done. The mission was to meet with the men and women in the service there and it was accomplished. He ate Thanksgiving dinner there. I asked the President of the United States, "What was Thanksgiving dinner like?" He said, "I didn't get a chance to eat, but I got a chance to serve the finest men and women in the United States of America." I will never forget that. I keep journals. I wrote that quote down. That's something that always is going to be in my mind.

As I leave, I called my boss back at Andrews Air Force Base to let him know, "Hey, while you were asleep, I brought a 747 with the President on board and I'm bringing him

back now,” and whatever. I was expecting to get a high five mark, you’re the best, or whatever, I got a small lecture on the chain of command. It’s okay, “The guy downstairs love me, that’s all I cared about.”

I go back to Waco, Texas. We go ahead and dropped the President off. He goes back to the ranch. I go to sleep. I’ve been awake for about; I felt weeks scared to death. Well, I’m a big sports fanatic. So, I had gone asleep with the ESPN on. Buddy of mine calls me up and goes to say, “Hey Mark, hit the ESPN.” I go to ESPN, clicking and I’m looking at it, and I’m like, “Oh, my God. They got behind the guy, they are talking about who’s hot and who’s not in college football.” Number ten is Col. Mark Tillman. They go down through all the people. The announcer goes; and he talks about number nine and then the other guy with him says, “Hey, who’s this Col. Tillman guy?” And then he goes, “What are you an idiot? He’s the guy that brought him into Baghdad yesterday and he got him in safely got the President in.” The guy goes, “Holy God, he is hot.” Now, if you are number ten and hot, you are the man at all the bars in Waco, Texas from then on.

I brought the President into Baghdad four other times. We’re in Afghanistan a couple of times, the same kind of secrecy. Toward the end, it started getting a little different, but once again, the President was always in the cockpit with us. The President of United States on his last flight with us, we gave him the same window that he had looked out on September 11th. On the window, the maintenance guy etched into the window. What it says on it is “The right man, at the right time.” It has the Manhattan skyline with the Twin Towers on it. We gave it to the President to go ahead put in the Bush Library.

I am one of the luckiest officers alive. When I pinned on Colonel on my right side, I had Bush 41 on my left side, I had Bush 43 pinning me on. The President promoted me to Brigadier General. He exercised Article 2 of the Constitution. The Senate did not confirm me. That’s okay. It’s okay. I know the guy right there loved me and so do the other guy next to me. That’s all I need. I got all the paperwork since he promoted me. I just wasn’t confirmed. In my mind, all it means is I can’t park as close to the BXs as I could be if I had; very happy. The President gave me the Distinguished Flying Cross. He presented to me in the Oval Office in front of my family and all his entire staff.

This is the last picture of me after I took President Bush to Midland, Texas and then brought him to Waco, dropped him off at his ranch. It’s the last picture they took of me before I gave up the position to President Obama’s pilot Scott Turner. That’s the last picture you’ll see of me. That concludes my brief. Thank you so much.

[END]