

A Final Salute to Marines; a Final Goodbye to a Coheart's Son

Southwest Airlines has a long history of supporting our military, with national partnerships with military-focused organizations; our Warrior Hire program, a military pathway to help bridge the gap from the military to a career at Southwest; and as the official airline of the Honor Flight Network. Recently, we had an opportunity to show our Heart as two Southwest Families said goodbye to loved ones who lost their lives in a tragic Marine Corps helicopter crash in early February.



Southwest Airlines Ramp Agents deliver a final salute to USMC Sgt. Alec Langen as he returns home to Phoenix for the final time on Feb. 23, 2024. Phoenix Inflight Employees Steve and Caryn Langen lost their son, 23-year-old Sgt. Alec Langen, and Phoenix Flight Attendant Bill Dougherty and Dallas Tech Ops Supervisor Carl Klonowski lost their nephew, 27-year-old USMC Capt. Benjamin Moulton. Sgt. Langen and Capt. Moulton, along with three other Marines, were proud members of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361, known as the "Flying Tigers." They were returning to their base near San Diego when the helicopter accident occurred.

As the families of the fallen put plans in place to say goodbye to their loved ones, the People of Southwest extended their Hearts to bring a sense of comfort and support during their time of grief. I recently had a chance to visit with the Families, and with their blessing, I want to share a bit more about these two brave young men, their service and sacrifice to our country, and their love for Southwest.

Alec's parents, Steve and Caryn, told me that all he wanted to do was follow in his dad's footsteps and be a Crew Chief on the CH-53E Super Stallion transport helicopter. There was nothing that was going to stop him from achieving that dream. They even said that on his 17th birthday, Alec arranged for a Marine recruiter to visit his family's home to help win his parents over. It worked—and within days, Alec was signed up to join the Marine Corps as part of a delayed entry program.



Alec Langen (middle) at Southwest Summer Camp in 2016



Alec and his wife, Casey





Alec and his father, Steve, in front of a Marine helicopter



Alec waving to the camera while inflightThe Langen's said Alec loved what he did and was so proud of his service. And while he didn't know how long he would serve; he was already looking at the future and dreaming of becoming a Mechanic for Southwest.

Steve and Caryn told me how proud Alec was to grow up within the Southwest Family. They would bring him to volunteer events, letting him participate in our "bring your child to work" days, and he attended Southwest Summer Camp in 2016. He was on the runway to join Southwest, and we were looking forward to having him as a member of our Team.

Steve and Caryn have been part of the Southwest family for nearly 29 years and have seen their fair share of emotional flights, happy and sad reunions, and even the return of fallen heroes. They never expected that they would be the ones on the ramp as their own son returned home for the final time.

Shortly after Alec returned home, the family hosted a funeral service inside the Phoenix hangar, where Alec had hoped to work eventually. Guests wore their favorite western wear, because Alec's dad shared that his son once said, "no one will wear a suit to my funeral."

With the pomp and circumstance of a military funeral, there was no dry eye in the hangar. Shortly after a lone bagpiper played TAPS, the Marines performed a fly-by with the same type of helicopter Alec was in when he lost his life. It was a fitting tribute to a young man who gave his life for our country.





Alec

Langen in uniform



a Marine Honor Guard performs flag folding ceremony at Alec's funeral



a Marine CH-53E Super Stallion performs a fly by at the conclusion of Alec’s funeral. The Langen’s shared that what kept them going was the unbelievable turnout and support from Cohearts across the Company— many they had never met—who were involved in honoring Alec. I’m so proud of what so many of you did to honor the family, support them, and make this happen. The Langen’s wanted to share their story to say “thank you” to everyone who has supported them during this time.

This past Sunday, the families of Capt. Moulton came together in Boise, near his hometown of Emmett, Idaho, to say their final goodbyes. As the nephew of two Southwest Employees, Ben, as he was known to family and friends, had the opportunity to be part of various recruiting events and other Southwest functions. I'm told his uncle, Carl, shared that they were together just a few days before the crash as part of a mechanic recruiting event. He says he will cherish his time with Ben for the rest of his life.

More than 60 Marines from their base were able to attend Capt. Moulton's funeral thanks to the quick work of the Southwest Charters Team working in tandem with Raider Air, a part of the nonprofit organization Brothers in Arms Foundation. Brothers In Arms Foundation. Raider Air provides logistical support to the families of service members facing challenging circumstances.



USMC Capt. Benjamin

Moulton





the patch for Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361 remembering the Crew lost in the crash



More than 60 Marines attended Capt. Moulton's funeral thanks to a special charter flight onboard Freedom One



Marines deliver a flag to the family of Capt. Moulton at the end of funeral service on March 3, 2024. Photos courtesy of the Moulton Family and Raider Air.

If you'd like to learn more or donate, please visit the [Wingman Foundation](#) and the [Brothers in Arms Foundation](#), as they support the loved ones of fallen heroes.

As we say goodbye to these five Marines, please know how much these families feel your love and support during this most trying time. I'm so proud of the Southwest Hearts on display as our People stepped up to support them.