

Taking to the Skies with a World War II Hero

A Man and a Legacy



The sky has always seemed to bring me happiness, whether I am on the ground looking skyward, flying in a plane—or jumping out of one. So, I knew I wanted to help when I heard about the opportunity to join an Honor Flight participant, Charlie, in celebrating his 100th birthday. Charlie served as a Merchant Marine during World War II (WWII) and decided he wanted to go skydiving to mark his centennial milestone.

As a Southwest Airlines Military Ambassador, combat veteran, and recreational skydiver I knew I had to connect with Charlie and join him on this special day. I took several COVID-19 tests before heading out to meet Charlie, and I also quarantined ahead of the big day to ensure I adhered to all CDC precautions and guidelines. I flew to Phoenix to meet Charlie and a few others with Honor Flight who wanted to cheer on Charlie. As soon as I met Charlie, I knew he was a special man. At 100 years young, Charlie is quick-witted, making just about anyone smile in a heartbeat, myself included. He took one look at my bright pink helmet and quickly noticed a sticker that said “life is short, so am I,” and said that’s a sticker for him too. I asked him why he wanted to skydive and he said at his age, there isn’t much else he hasn’t done. We talked a little about his time as a Merchant Marine during WWII, and he naturally played it down to just him doing his job and delivering supplies across the Pacific Ocean during WWII. When in reality, his ship was loaded with ammunition anchored off Iwo Jima, Japan, and highly susceptible to attack.

A Leap to Remember at 100 Years Young



Shortly after we arrived at the skydiving facility, Charlie and I loaded a Super Twin Otter plane, along with some of his other supporters. I was lucky enough to sit across from Charlie as we climbed up to 13,500 feet. I can honestly say out of my 500 skydives—I have never seen anyone this excited to jump out of a plane. Charlie was smiling ear to ear the entire time and I didn't detect the slightest bit of nervousness from him. As the door opened at 13,500 feet, I watched his smile grow even bigger, and I waved as I jumped out of the plane. As soon as I was out the door, I flipped to my back so I could watch Charlie and his instructor jump out of the plane from a few thousand feet above me. This might be the one and only time I teared up from happiness in freefall. Once we landed, the first thing Charlie asked was, "when are we going to go up again?" I can't begin to describe how much happiness he exuded, it was contagious. His happiness made my year.



Supporting Our Veterans

As a veteran, I am proud to work for a Company that is incredibly military-friendly and supports one of my favorite organizations—[Honor Flight](#). This organization supports and transports veterans who served in the WWII, Korean, and Vietnam wars to visit the memorials dedicated to honoring those who served and sacrificed for our country. I highly encourage you to participate in an Honor Flight trip once they resume. There are also opportunities to welcome veterans back to their home airport after their trip. As a Military Ambassador, I've personally taken part in these welcoming flights home and it is amazing to give them the welcome home they deserve. To participate in an Honor Flight trip, please contact your nearest regional Honor Flight Hub. A listing of Hubs can be found [here](#).

While the pandemic has made connecting with veterans or military service members infinitely more difficult, there are still opportunities to show our love to these incredible heroes by donating your Rapid Rewards Points to Honor Flight through our [Points for a Purpose](#) program. You can also put your Heart in Action now by sending notes of inspiration and hope to bring joy and encouragement to our veterans. You can help by sending a note to the address below expressing your appreciation

of all of our servicemen and women. Honor Flight will make sure these notes of inspiration get in the hands of the deserving veterans while they await their next trip.

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Honor Flight

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