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SACRIFICE

By Colonel Keir Knapp
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Hello fellow members of the 110th Attack Wing, welcome to June Drill. I've been asked to write this month's Jet Stream Journal article and I chose to write about sacrifice. Just recently I had the "bucket list" opportunity

to travel to Europe with my family for a vacation. Both my children attend the University of Michigan and my daughter has spent the last five months in London completing a Study Abroad semester. We decided this was a great opportunity to visit her as well as see some of the sights in England and France.

Visiting London and Paris was wonderful, but the highlight of the trip for me was visiting Normandy and standing on Omaha Beach reflecting on what occurred there 72 years ago. On that cold, cloudy, foggy June morning, thousands of young American men stormed ashore on that beach, waded through the surf, and struggled through the sand under withering fire to free the people of Europe from Nazi tyranny.

We've all read the history books and watched movies like Saving Private Ryan and Band of Brothers. We have all been awestruck and humbled by the courage and sacrifice of our fellow Americans, our fellow soldiers, and airmen that flew overhead... our fellow National Guardsmen! More on this in a minute. As my family walked out onto the beach, we slowly separated and took our own path, lost in our thoughts, contemplating the chaos, the cacophony, the smell...the sheer terror. I walked to the water's edge and reached down to touch the wet sand, not able to speak. I thought about those men, boys really, that despite the machine guns and falling shells, ran down the ramp, did their duty, and made the ultimate sacrifice for their nation.

Later I stood in the American cemetery on the bluff overlooking the beach. I gazed out upon row after row of gleaming white crosses as far as the eye could see. Nine thousand three hundred eighty seven Americans are buried there. Coincidentally, while I stood there, the National Anthem was played and then Taps echoed across the neatly trimmed graves. I unabashedly stood at attention and cried. It was profoundly emotional.

So why am I writing about this? How does this affect you? Here is how: I saw some things that day that really brought it home for me. One section of the cemetery has the names of 1,557 soldiers, sailors, and airmen missing in action engraved into the granite wall. For these servicemen there was no body to bury. The VERY first name on that wall is Leslie Abbot, Private First Class, 262d Infantry. He was from Michigan.

Also, did you know that members of the Michigan National Guard came ashore on that morning? On the north shore of the beach, built upon a German gun emplacement flies the National Guard flag. It is part of the National Guard Monument "In Remembrance of the National Guard Units which participated in the amphibious assault." On that stone is listed the 254th Combat Engineering Battalion. That battalion was part of the Michigan National Guard.

Many of you, members of our current 110th Attack Wing, Michigan Air National Guard, have been called to deploy in the next year or two. You will head out across the globe to do your duty. I have the utmost confidence that you will do it well. Undoubtedly, it will be a sacrifice for you and your family, but deployments are part of military service. As General Vadnais said to me this very week, our number one job is to fight our nation's wars. Don't think of deployments as a burden but rather as an opportunity. An opportunity to serve, to learn, to excel, and to grow as airmen. Embrace the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of previous Guardsmen who showed immense courage almost 75 years ago answering their nation's call, deploying around the world, and proudly representing Michigan and the National Guard.

Editorial Staff

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