



Flying the **FREEDOM BIRD**



*“We may be
leaving you over here,
but you will be in our hearts,
thoughts and prayers.
We will be back to take you
home in these ‘freedom birds.’”*

- Message delivered to soldiers being flown to the Middle East.

Flying the American flag out the 747-cockpit hatch once an airplane touched down on American soil quickly became a tradition. In this instance, a flight attendant spontaneously sang “God Bless America” over the PA system while the plane was taxiing. Chapman said you could have heard a pin drop and there was not a dry eye on the plane. After the song was over, the plane erupted in cheers. This is one of Chapman’s most vivid memories of his time spent flying soldiers to and back from the Middle East.

Alumnus Gary H. Chapman (J.D.'82) is a 747-pilot for United Airlines, who volunteered to fly U.S. military-chartered airplanes carrying our country's service men and women to and back from their missions relating to the War in Iraq. United began transporting these soldiers in January 2003, and missions are still being flown today. On these pages, you will find some images Chapman captured during this period. Of the experience, Chapman said it is one of his best since he has worked for civilian airlines.

Before allowing troops to deplane in the Middle East, there was often a message given to soldiers on behalf of the flight crew. On Chapman's planes, the pilot would say, "We may be leaving you over here, but you will be in our hearts, thoughts and prayers. We will be back to take you home in these 'freedom birds.'" ■

Chapman flew F4s and F105s in the U.S. Air Force and subsequently the Reserve and Air National Guard. He served 28 years in active and reserve duty, and retired as a lieutenant colonel.

Family is never far from the minds of our soldiers. As illustrated here, a member of the 4th Infantry Division keeps a family picture close at hand. ▶

At Fort Carson, CO, members of the 4th Infantry Division board a plane heading to the Middle East. ▼



Georgia Army National Guard soldiers pose with some of their weaponry at the Marine Corps air station at Cherry Point, NC. ▼



Returning from service in the Middle East, the first to deplane were two soldiers who had children born while they were overseas. ▶



▲ *Once back on American soil, a Georgia Army National Guardsman unfurls the nation's flag.*

A 3rd Infantry Division soldier, based at Fort Stewart near Savannah, holds a banner mast. ▶

