



Gold Star Families



WE REMEMBER THEM AS CHILDREN. PLAYING IN A YARD. BLOWING OUT CANDLES. TAKING THEIR FIRST STEPS. WE HELD THEM AS BABIES. AND WATCHED THEM GROW INTO AIRMEN. WE REMEMBER THEM AS OUR FATHERS AND MOTHERS. WHEN WE SAID GOODBYE AND TRIED NOT TO CRY. AND THEN LETTING IT ALL OUT EVERY TIME THEY CAME HOME. CRYING WHEN IT FINALLY SUNK IN, THAT THIS TIME THEY WEREN'T COMING HOME. WE REMEMBER THEM ON OUR WEDDING DAYS, OUR FIRST DATES AND WAKING UP TOGETHER. AND HOW THEY DIED IN SLOW MOTION ON A PHONE CALL OR A LIVING ROOM...WHEN WE HEARD THE WORDS "YOU MIGHT WANT TO SIT DOWN."

THE REALITY IS NOBODY WAS EVER KILLED PEACEFULLY IN ACTION. AND KNOWING THAT WILL RIP YOUR HEART APART WHEN YOU THINK OF SOMEONE YOU LOVED—AND STILL LOVE, ALWAYS—IN THEIR FINAL MOMENTS ON THIS EARTH. THEY DIDN'T DESERVE TO DIE LIKE THAT. BUT THEY BELIEVED OUR COUNTRY DESERVED ALL THEY HAD TO GIVE.

THERE WAS SO MUCH MORE THEY COULD HAVE GIVEN. FOR A GOLD STAR FAMILY, EVERY DAY IS YOUR OWN PERSONAL MEMORIAL DAY.

THE PICTURE ON THE WALL. DRESS BLUES WITH A FLAG BEHIND THEM. FLAG FROM THE COFFIN ON A MANTLE. OR TUCKED AWAY SOMEPLACE YOU CAN TAKE IT OUT AND HOLD IT WHEN YOU NEED TO. WE STILL PAY THEIR CELL PHONE BILLS SO WE CAN CALL AND HEAR THEIR VOICES. WE STILL VISIT THE BASE BECAUSE WE WANT TO BE INCLUDED, BECAUSE WE'RE STILL AIR FORCE. AND IF YOU'RE ON GATE DUTY AND SEE THAT GOLD STAR ON THE BACK OF OUR PASS, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WHAT TO SAY TO US. WE KNOW. AND THANK YOU. THIS IS A CLUB NO ONE WANTS TO JOIN. BUT THIS IS WHERE WE ARE. AND WE'RE AS PROUD AS WE EVER WERE.

GOLD STAR FAMILIES CAN SAY THINGS TO EACH OTHER WE CAN'T WITH ANYBODY ELSE. OUR CIVILIAN FRIENDS LOVE US AND MEAN WELL, BUT THEY TREAT US WITH KID GLOVES. THEY CAN'T EVEN SAY THE WORDS BODY OR KILLED. IT'S *NOT* TALKING ABOUT IT THAT HURTS. WE TALK ABOUT THE PAIN, WE CAN TALK ABOUT EVERY DETAIL ABOUT THE DAY WE GOT THE NEWS, BUT WE DON'T. WE TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY WERE LIKE, AND WE'RE THERE FOR EACH OTHER BECAUSE A GOLD STAR FAMILY UNDERSTANDS WHAT NO ONE ELSE DOES.

A PERSON DIES TWICE. ONCE WHEN THEY BREATHE THEIR LAST BREATH, AND ONCE WHEN THEIR NAME IS NEVER SPOKEN AGAIN. THEY ARE NEVER FORGOTTEN. REMEMBER THEM AS CHILDREN. REMEMBER THEM AS FATHERS. AS MOTHERS AND SISTERS AND BROTHERS. REMEMBER THEM AS THE ONES WE LOVED. BECAUSE THEY WERE OURS BEFORE THEY WERE YOURS. REMEMBER THEM AS HEROES.

AIM HIGH, AIRMAN.