**WELCOME SPEECH**

**FOR**

**PATRICK MORGAN**

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues, and to all my Group Commanders, squadron commanders, Chiefs and first sergeants, thank you so much for being here today to share with me my last and ultimate action as a member of the United States Air Force, and that is to bid you a very fond farewell as I approach the next and greatest challenge of my career…. That of retirement. When I think of it, I have been “practicing” for almost forty years for this day, and here it is. Although, when the going got tough, I may have searched for a glimpse of what retirement might look like, I was, and am, the kind of person who digs his heel in deeper, summons up more strength, more determination, and more focus, and as I stand upon the precipice of the **REALLY** great unknown, my energy and thoughts align on one thing, and that’s **GRATITUDE**. I stand here before all of you as a man deeply thoughtful and thankful for all the experience, support, and connections I have made throughout my service.

Almost forty years ago, I began my career in the United States Air Force as an enlisted airman basic, and I am retiring as a Colonel, physician, and Flight Surgeon. ( **If you think it’s appropriate to make a little joke, you can say**) While I may not be known for my sparkling sense of humor, I guess one ***could*** say that I’ve been quite a “**cut up**” (**and wait for the laugh**). All that happened in between constitutes a wild and unique ride…. One filled with unimaginable challenges, tests, and lessons learned, yet one that I would not have changed for anything.

When I enlisted for active duty in 1978, during the fire and rescue days of the F-4 and A-7 aircraft, I think it would be safe to say I had no idea of what I was in for, but I was in. I knew how much it meant to me to serve my country, and my journey, as do most, began with a single step. As I progressed through the ranks, I continued on my path, placing one foot in front of the other, many times facing the unknown, but every time, knowing I was where I needed to be. From the South Carolina Air National Guard to the 117th Air control Squadron as Air Battle Manager, I searched for what was needed, imagined what my participation might look like, and gave my all, no matter what. I never lost sight of the mission, and that was, and is, to serve.

Somehow, I developed a kind of “lay it on me” perspective, which led me to medical school about halfway into my career in the Air Force. Of course, that decision provided me the opportunity to serve at an even more detailed and nuanced level. Combined with my previous experience, once I received my Flight Surgeon rating and became part of the flying community with the 165th Airlift Wing, I had the privilege to serve in an entirely new capacity…. One that was really wanted and needed. My deployments ranged from providing Flight Surgeon support in Iraq during Iraqi Freedom to Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom, and on to Kuwait, both serving with the 158th. As you might imagine, things got “interesting,” and as I’ve already said, I am grateful for each experience, lesson, and milestone achieved. Along with my comrades, I continued to participate and serve in many varied events… Operation Readiness Exercises and Events, Unit Effectiveness Inspections, Humanitarian Joint Service community healthcare project, Army/Air Force Joint Force/Homeland Response Force Missions, and Covid 19 Pandemic Response events, to name some.

All of the items on my CV, “curriculum vitae” are reminders of where I was, what I did, and with whom those goals were accomplished. Nothing is achieved in a vacuum and, as I said, the overwhelming theme for me today is gratitude. It was George Marshall who said, “The soldier’s heart, the soldier’s spirit, the soldier’s soul, are everything.” I must now add, “So is the soldiers gratitude.” I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to the men and women of the 165th Medical Group, which is comprised of the physicians, Nurse Practitioner, many medics and nurses, the Admin section, Public Health, Bioenvironmental, medical logistics, dental and optometry sections…each one of you that that serve in this arena know that you are vital components that make up the Medical Group. It has been a privilege to serve with you and to make a difference in the lives of so many who sacrifice their lives for the safety of our country. (**If you want to name anyone in particular, do that here**). I would like to acknowledge \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for being such responsive and supportive colleagues through all that we have experienced together.

I’m sure it’s been said that a man is only as strong as those who have is back. There is a group of people whose strength, support, and encouragement have proven what it takes to keep someone going, even in the darkest of times, and for me, that group of people are my family and my special friends. To my my daughter Lindsey, her husband Brian, daughter Harper, my brother Jim, his wife Janet, and my dear friend Hannelore, any acknowledgements I have received, I share with you. I joined the Air Force as a young man, not knowing where my choice would lead, but knowing that, along the way, I would have family and friends like you to keep me going is one of life’s greatest blessings. The thought of returning to you, especially when in the thick of the challenge, is what propelled me forward. (**If you want to make a little joke, you can say)**…. The **GOOD NEWS**…now we get to spend **A LOT** more time together!!!! Let’s see how **THAT** goes!!! (**And wait for the laugh**).

To paraphrase what G.K. Chesterton said, “The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him … or her…but because he loves what is behind him.” To all my colleagues, comrades, family, and friends, thank you for standing behind me for all of these years. Mine has truly been a career of a lifetime. To all of the young people within the sound of my voice, I want you to know that no one knows what is around the next corner or across the next street. It is your duty, as a viable, engaged, committed human being, to be aware, alert, informed, compassionate, and most of all **READY**. That readiness comes with training, enthusiasm, and the willingness to make a positive difference in this world. You will make mistakes…. And you will learn from them. Just know that people are watching and leaning from **YOU**. Continue on and strive to make your mark as you stand on the shoulders and legacies of those in the military that have paved their way for you. That’s what I did, and I am proud to be a part of this infinite legacy. Thank you all!!