

## Fly to Honor



*"Dedicate your own work ... to someone you admire or matters in your life. You can infuse your work with purpose and meaning when you think of it as a gift."*

Daniel Pink,  
*A Whole New Mind*

As Robbie fell into sleep on the next full moon, Red Hawk visited him and the boys went to the ready room of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. Shipdam, England on 27 AUG 1944.

*Group Operations Officer Lt. Col. Turnbull was completing his pre-flight briefing for the group's mission of thirty-four bombers and two radar planes to an aero-engine factory in Basdorf, Germany. After Jack concluded his remarks and the chaplain offered a prayer, Jack continued in uncharacteristic fashion, "Gentlemen, I would like to share with you a gesture of which I have become aware. Technical Sergeant D'Andrea shared with me recently that he has carried a flag of the United States on each of his missions while here—and wrapped the flag around a note of dedication to someone who has been important in his life. He plans to present these flags to these good people upon his return to the states as a 'Thank You' for all of the support they have provided him.*

*"I must tell you how moved I was to hear of this and would ask each of you to consider enacting a similar gesture. I plan to. Not that any of us need any particular extra incentive*

*to do our very best in a war zone—ending this terrible war and returning safely to our families should be motivation enough. But, like Sergeant D'Andrea, perhaps you could think of this gesture as a way to thank someone who has helped you. I am certain they would be moved beyond words to receive such a tribute. This is such a thoughtful, generous, and brilliant gesture that I wish I had thought of it myself!"* Turnbull shared with a rare smile.

*Red Hawk then moved the scene forward to 24 OCT 1944—six days after Jack's final mission.*

*Flight surgeon Colonel Drew Finn arrived at the convent in Petegem-aan-de-Leie/Deinze, Belgium to conduct an investigation into the accident that cost thirteen American lives. The nuns conveyed their sorrow to Finn and recounted to the investigating officer all of the difficult details related to the actual crash of October 18, and the disposition of the bodies.*

*"Twelve airmen perished in the crash, but Colonel Turnbull was alive until around noon the next day," Sister Christine reported.*

*The nuns invited Colonel Finn to sit, and presented him with the flag they had recovered from Jack's flight suit, having returned the contents to their original form.*

*"Please open the flag, colonel," Sister Lutgarde asked.*

*Finn hesitated and then delicately untied the ribbons and placed them on a nearby table. The nuns nodded for Finn to continue. As he gently unwrapped the flag, Finn noticed the two pieces of paper inside. The first paper read:*

*"Fly to Honor"*

*I carry this flag of the United States with me—close to*

*my heart—on this mission in Honor of someone who has helped and supported me during my life. I want each of these people to know what they have meant to me and, more importantly, that the goodness they have rendered upon me has inspired me to share that kindness with the airmen under my command and, I'd like to think, make me a better officer.*

*I am deeply honored and humbled to wrap these precious contents in red, white, and blue ribbons that were sent to me by my younger sister, Anne, in securing a number of packages she sent to me.*

*Should I not return safely from this flight, I would ask the appropriate parties to deliver this flag and note as well as the other flags and notes of dedication, gratitude, and thanks from previous successful missions located in my footlocker at my base, to be returned to my brother, Douglas C. Turnbull, Jr. of Baltimore, Maryland, for appropriate disposition.*

*Colonel Finn glanced at the nuns, whose eyes indicated that he should continue reading the second sheet, which read:*

*"I Fly Group Mission #84 on 18 OCT 1944 to  
Honor"*

*My high school lacrosse coach and math teacher, Mr. D.A. Melosh who recognized and supported my talents and interests and helped me push through an admitted lack of enthusiasm in my academic affairs and helped me become the player, student, and officer that I am today. Thank you, Coach!*

*Colonel Finn slowly slid deeper into the chair, his eyes staring vacantly ahead with his mind stuck between being overwhelmed*

*by such a gesture and the practical reality of determining a proper course of action.*

*"Among Colonel Turnbull's final words were 'There are more. Please find. Please send,'" sister Lutgarde offered softly to the flight surgeon, shaking him from his trance. "Then he thanked us."*

*"There are more?"*

*"We found these other twelve flags on the fallen airmen."*

*"So all of the crewmen had one of these?" Finn asked.*

*"Yes, sir. Here in this box—all properly labeled. We asked permission to take them from all of the victims to ensure safe keeping for all of them."*

*"I have never heard of this before. Carrying an American flag on a combat mission to honor someone? Seems like we should be honoring them," Finn responded, more to himself than to the nuns.*

*Finn carefully pulled each of the airman's flags from the box and read their dedications while the nuns sat quietly. He paused for several minutes to process what he was experiencing. He flipped back to the first sheet of Jack's notes and reread the part that said he had more of these in his footlocker.*

*Finn continued to whisper to himself, "So Colonel Turnbull has more of his own back at his base. It says on each of these from the other airmen that they have a similar collection in their footlockers, as well. This is absolutely incredible."*

*He addressed the nuns, "Sisters, on behalf of the United States, please accept my sincerest thanks for all you have done for these airmen and our country. I wish that this*

*situation had not intruded into your lives as it has and that it would have had a more pleasant ending. I thank you for your care and attention in particular to Colonel Turnbull's fight for life. I will share your efforts with my superior officers and his family if I am fortunate enough to have the chance. May God continue to bless you and help move this terrible war to a speedy end."*

*After completing his investigation and arriving back at Shipdam, Finn found the notes for each aviator in their footlockers and pored over each one. He pondered the monumental task at hand—thirteen airmen's personal belongings to prepare for return to their families, thirteen letters to grieving families, scores of "Fly to Honor" dedications, and, with some remarkably good luck, a visit to the Turnbull family in Baltimore at some point after the conclusion of the war.*

*Red Hawk turned Robbie's attention to the work Finn performed on Jack's case.*

*Finn slowly flipped through Jack's dedications again and attempted to visualize the reaction the recipients might have when they became aware of Jack's gesture of gratitude to them. Finn read them:*

*Mission #64 30 SEP 1944 to my mother, Elizabeth Turnbull and my late father, Douglas C. Turnbull, Sr. Words here cannot convey the support they have provided me in every respect.*

*Mission #67 2 OCT 1944 to my sisters Helen, Libby, and Anne, and my brother Doug. I am the luckiest brother in the world to have these four people as*

*my siblings (one flag for each).*

*Mission #75 7 OCT 1944 to my mentor, teammate, and coach Oster 'Kid' Norris. All of the time we shared together, all the experiences, all of the advice. I cannot express my gratitude enough.*

*Mission #80 11 OCT 1944 to My flight instructor Jack Carroll, a fellow Hopkins alumnus and Phi Kappa Psi fraternity brother. Thanks for your dedication and patience in teaching me the art of flying.*

*Mission #82 15 OCT 1944 to my teammates at Johns Hopkins University and the U.S. Olympic Lacrosse team of 1932, courtesy of Mr. Church Yearley.*

*Mission #84 18 OCT 1944 to My high school lacrosse coach and math teacher, Mr. D.A. Melosh, who recognized and supported my talents and interests and helped me push through an admitted lack of enthusiasm in my academic affairs and helped me become the player, student, and officer that I am today. Thank you, Coach!*

*Red Hawk moved the scene again, this time to the home of Jack's brother, Doug, as he received a letter from Colonel Finn.*

28 OCT 1944

Mr. Douglas C. Turnbull, Jr.

Baltimore, Maryland

Dear Mr. Turnbull,

*I write to share my grief in the loss of your beloved brother, Lt. Col. John I. "Jack" Turnbull. I had the good fortune to be assigned to Jack's Bomb Group in Shipdam, England. I must tell you that he was an incredibly talented officer, pilot, and leader. As flight surgeon for our group, I was tasked to perform the investigation into the accident that claimed Jack's life. The full report will not be released to for some months, I suspect, but I did want to share at least some preliminary details with you and your family.*

*I have sent a letter of condolence and Jack's personal belongings to your mother as Jack's next-of-kin indicated in his service record. That shipment should arrive in the coming days or weeks. She will receive all of the possessions found in Jack's lockers at Shipdam.*

*My report will state that the most likely cause of the crash was a midair collision between the plane Jack was on and another in their group. The entire formation was in a terrible thunderstorm—which they couldn't fly around or over. Two airmen were able to parachute out and reported that it seemed that the planes had clipped wings, causing each to go into an unrecoverable tailspin. Jack was serving as command pilot on one of the planes, which means that he was in charge of the entire formation but not actually at the controls of his aircraft. It seems to have been an unfortunate mishap that*

*sometimes befalls our airmen in the conduct of such difficult and dangerous operations.*

*It is also with the deepest possible sense of humility to be the officer honored to be able to relay to you specifically upon Jack's request that this accompanying United States flag, wrapped in ribbons sent by his (and your) sister, Anne. Please remove the ribbons and unfurl the flag, and you will see two notes written by Jack. As you will see, Jack specifically requested that these items be sent to you for proper disposition.*

*Jack did not die in the crash—though the other twelve victims had—but valiantly fought for his life overnight in a nearby convent. He achieved only brief and intermittent moments of consciousness. The nuns who tended to Jack so passionately and dutifully say that Jack's last words—broken between long pauses early in the morning—were, "There are others. Please find. Please send. Thank you." Perhaps we should all be so lucky to be thinking of others and thanking people in our final moments.*

*I am also in the process of making arrangements to send similar flags and notes to the families of the other twelve airmen lost in this accident. Apparently Jack had made a plea to all of the airmen in his Bomb Group to consider incorporating this type of gesture of gratitude in all of their work and missions. It seems the men took the request to heart—literally.*

*I must tell you that I have never heard of such a gesture until this situation. Jack is said to have referred to the source of these tributes as one of the airmen assigned to the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group—a sergeant D'Andrea, who, I regret to inform you, perished on the*



*same mission as Jack and the eleven others. I intend to research this 'program' inspired by SGT D'Andrea in order to convey its tremendous significance to his family. I'll bet Jack took particular joy that this gesture was originated by one of the airmen in the group as opposed to an officer. Jack always had a particular fondness for the work and sacrifice of the enlisted men.*

*Though I simply cannot imagine **how** you will be able to properly conduct this request of your brother, I am certain that you **will** well and faithfully discharge your duty with the utmost dignity, sincerity, graciousness, and professionalism that would bring Jack great pride, joy, and honor.*

*Please accept my deepest condolences and best wishes that Jack's tributes to your mother, sisters, Mr. Carroll, Mr. Yearley and the rest of his team, Mr. Norris, and Mr. Melosh will leave a legacy of goodness, thoughtfulness, and gratitude that will adorn his already lustrous military career and heroic actions on behalf of our country. Please convey to the recipients my deepest sorrow on Jack's loss but also my deepest respect for him—and them for having contributed so meaningfully and powerfully to Jack's life and service.*

*Most Respectfully,*

*Drew J. Finn*

*Col., U.S. Army Air Corps*

## It Can All Change in Seconds



*"Life offers absolutely no guarantees."*

Douglas C. Turnbull Jr.

Robbie received an e-mail from Bruce which read: Robbie, I hope you are well. Attached are four letters that should be self-explanatory. I hope you will heed the sentiments of my father. Will be in touch soon. Be well. Bruce.

Robbie opened the attachments in order of date.

17 JUN 1955

Dear Mrs. Turnbull and Family,

Please accept my sincerest thanks for presenting the Lt.Col. John I. Turnbull Award to me in memory of your son. To have received it from you personally, in front of my parents, family, friends, and teammates—not to mention the 5,500 or so fans in attendance—at last week's North-South game at Homewood Field was certainly the highlight of my lacrosse career.

I am sure that you know better than I that this award represents the very pinnacle of the game of lacrosse. Many players in our game

equate this honor to the Heisman Trophy given in football and none of us even dares to believe ourselves worthy. There were certainly many other players on the field that night that I thought would have been more deserving than me to receive this recognition.

Though I never played lacrosse in high school (my school did not offer it—so I played baseball!), it did not take me long to learn of the rich history of this game. To have a coach (Dinty Moore) like I have has been truly special as he has shared much of the deep meaning of the game with me, and the significance of Jack's (and Doug's) role in the history of the game.

Now that the Turnbull Award has been presented to me, I can only hope to represent it with the dignity and honor of my predecessors, and, of course, Jack himself.

I head off to flight school shortly. I will aspire to make you proud. My sincerest thanks.

Very Respectfully,

*Percy Williams*

ENS USN

June 21, 1955

Dear Percy,

Thank you for your kind letter of June 17. We are all thrilled by your selection for Jack's

Award. I must say that your play in the North-South game was quite spectacular—four goals and two assists!—and reminded me so much of Jack—skilled, tenacious in your riding when your team lost the ball (Jack would have appreciated that the most), and great team play. I am certain that such play is representative of how you conduct all of your responsibilities and will translate very well and closely to your career as a navy pilot.

We have, of course, been so proud of each of the previous recipients, but your chosen path of taking to the skies in defense of our country gives my heart a little extra warmth.

Congratulations of your spectacular career to date and we all wish you the very best as you head off to flight school. Our thoughts and prayers will be with you. I hope you will keep me posted of your endeavors.

Please convey to your parents my pleasure in speaking with them.

I hope that it is appropriate to wish you, "Fair Winds and Following Seas."

With Much Admiration and Gratitude,

*Elizabeth Turnbull & Family*

March 18, 1959

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Williams, Lee, and Jack,

It is with great sadness that I have learned of the loss of your son, husband, and father, Percy. Coach Moore called me last night. He and I are heartbroken over the loss of a truly remarkable young man. I know that my feeble words here will do little to ease your suffering but I if I can grant you even a second of solace, I will be glad of it.

I hope that you will recall our meeting at Homewood Field at the North-South game in June of 1955. Percy played a remarkable game.

At halftime, my (now) late mother, Elizabeth Turnbull, and I presented Percy with the Turnbull Award. We spoke with Percy briefly during the ceremony—then we all gathered for some time after the game. It was a great honor and pleasure meeting all of you. Your pride and joy in your son was clearly evident.

Percy sent our family a letter of thanks not long after the game—one that my mother cherished. I have included a copy here.

Your family's loss mirrors ours, if I might say. You, see, my brother Jack perished in an unfortunate plane crash, which was determined shortly after to not be attributable to his actions.

I understand from Coach Moore who was

fully briefed by Navy officials as to the circumstances of the accident that it seems Percy's aircraft may have experienced a "flame out" of his engine and that his efforts to restart it were unsuccessful.

So our families are left to grieve the loss of two truly magnificent young men. We have taken solace over these last fifteen years in the knowledge that Jack was doing what he did best and loved most to do—fly planes in defense of our country.

And from our meeting with Percy and everything we have heard of him—his life seems remarkably similar.

For the Entire Turnbull Clan,  
With Deepest Condolences,

*Douglas C. Turnbull, Jr.*

March 19, 1959

Dear Bruce,

I must share some sad news with you. You recall Percy Williams, the young man who received Jack's Award at the Naval Academy in 1955. I am sorry to report that he has perished in a navy plane crash off the USS *Intrepid* in the Atlantic Ocean near Gibraltar. I learned of this tragedy in a phone call from Percy's Naval Academy coach, Dinty Moore.

You'll see in the enclosed letter that my mother was extremely fond of Percy as he reminded her so much of Jack. She would be completely heartbroken to learn of this news were she still alive.

Coach Moore told me that LTJG Williams launched off the port catapult and it is believed he had a flame-out about a mile or so forward of the ship. It was guessed that he tried to restart his engine, which is why he didn't eject—but it was too late. The plane went into the sea, and sunk immediately. By the time the helicopters got there, there was no trace of the plane or pilot, not even an oil slick.

I think of Mum and the suffering she—and all of us—endured with Jack's loss. Percy's family will obviously suffer similarly. Percy, though, leaves behind a six-month-old son and a young wife expecting their second child. Please keep them all in your thoughts and prayers.

As I think of all of the lessons I have attempted to pass along to you—Percy's accident might represent the most central one: that life offers absolutely no guarantees and that everything for which you have worked so hard can change in seconds. This accident was certainly not the fault of Percy—yet he is gone.

My father used to tell us, "Don't take anything for granted." Sometimes things are outside of your immediate control. You can train and train and train for all situations—but sometimes you simply must yield to fate.

So I beg you to work hard to acquire the skills you need to be a great army officer and insist that those under your charge do the same. Teach them that they must prepare with the utmost resolve. But they must also understand that such work will certainly not guarantee their safety or successful completion of the specified mission. Those of you who have taken up the call of your country must know the perils inherent in such pursuits.

Jack and Percy knew it as they took to the skies. All mariners, submariners, and airmen know it. Everything can change in seconds—so work hard to ensure that you control everything you possibly can.

Don't take anything for granted.

Keep working hard to acquire every single ounce of knowledge you can.

With Love and Admiration for Your Pursuit of Leadership in the Armed Forces of our Country,

Dad



## He Never Forgot Your Kindness



*"There is no wisdom greater than kindness."*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

On the next full moon, Red Hawk and Robbie traveled through time to Baltimore, Maryland, December 1, 1944.

*"Robbie, Doug has just received the letter from Col. Finn that we saw last time. As Jack requested, Doug is now about to personally deliver all of the flags to their recipients. His first decision was to meet with his sisters and mother. As you can see, they are just finishing dinner."*

*After dessert, Doug invited the entire family to his living room for an announcement. Mum, 'Libby,' Helen, and Anne and her husband Marshall McDorman sat close together.*

*"Thank you all for coming tonight. I have a short presentation that I would like to make on behalf of Jack," Doug began with solemnity.*

*The family began to look at each other in confused silence.*

*Doug continued, "Three days ago, I received a letter and package from the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's flight surgeon, Col. Drew Finn. Mother, this package is different from the one you received last week with Jack's personal effects from England.*

*After I read Colonel Finn's letter to you, I was stunned to receive this separate letter and the contents of the package."*

*Doug read Col. Finn's letter aloud to the family. At various points, each family member wiped away tears from their eyes. Anne took it particularly hard.*

*"In addition to that letter were these notes that Jack had left in his foot locker and the ones on his person when he flew his final mission."*

*Doug read the first note—"Fly to Honor." As he read the part about the ribbons provided by Anne, she broke down in tears, struggling to catch her breath.*

*"Each of you has your own special flag and note from Jack." Doug walked slowly to each of his sisters and bent over to hug them, and present their flag and note. The women wept and pressed their flag and note to their chest. Finally, Doug presented the last flag and note to Mum.*

*"Jack included three other flags to be delivered, as well. I thought I would let you know who they were." Doug read each of them, once again eliciting more tears from everyone.*

*"I will plan to visit each of these good people in the coming week to present their flag to them. If any of you would like to come with me, I would be glad to have the company."*

*Anne immediately responded, "Doug, please let me come."*

*Red Hawk shared with Robbie that Doug and Anne had delivered all but the last flag and wanted Robbie to see that scene.*

*Doug and Anne arrived at the home of Mr. D. A. Melosh at 10 am on December 8, 1944, exactly as they had*

*requested on the phone the day before.*

*"Good morning Doug, Anne, what a pleasure to see you. Please come in," Mr. Melosh offered. "You know my wife, Barbara."*

*"Yes, sir," Anne smiled. "So good to see you both. Thank you for having us." She handed a small floral arrangement to Mrs. Melosh.*

*"Oh, so nice. Thank you," Mrs. Melosh beamed. She hurried to her kitchen to get a vase and placed the flowers in it without missing a beat of the conversation.*

*The Meloshs offered tea and cookies to their guests and all sat down in the family living room.*

*"Barbara and I are so sorry for the loss of Jack. You know how well I have always thought of him," Mr. Melosh began. "Please convey our deepest condolences to your mother and sisters, once again, would you?"*

*"Yes, sir," Doug answered, "Thank you. You were always so good to him. He always told us that you understood him more than all of his other teachers. Our family is so grateful for all of your efforts on his behalf."*

*"It was truly an honor, Doug. I think I may have been a bit more sensitive to Jack than some others because I shared his, should we say, lack of excitement for academic pursuits, at about the same age."*

*"Yes—I think we can say that," Doug agreed with a smile.*

*"Mr. Melosh, we are here today to offer a tribute that Jack made to you during his time in the Army Air Corps," Anne said.*

*The Meloshs looked at each other silently.*

*Doug unsnapped the briefcase he had brought with him and removed the letter that Lt. Col. Finn had sent to him. He read it to the Meloshs who continued their silence.*

*Then Anne read the "Fly to Honor" note. Still total silence.*

*Then Doug read the personal note to them.*

*"This is the actual flag that Jack had on his person on his final flight," Doug whispered and knelt as he offered it to Mr. Melosh, who now began to weep. "He wanted you to have it. He dedicated other flights in similar fashion, as did his entire crew under Jack's encouragement. But Anne and I could not agree more that his final flight should have been dedicated to you for all you have done for him. We can't thank you enough."*

*Melosh paused for several moments, so overcome with emotion. He wiped back his tears and took a few slow breaths. "I really don't know what to say, Doug," Mr. Melosh stammered. "I was a teacher for forty years and I have never been so moved by a gesture. Oh, my goodness." He looked at his wife, who was sobbing softly into a handkerchief.*

*"I was an army officer myself and have never heard of anything like this. I am eighty years old. I have never heard of this before. I don't know what to say."*

*"We didn't know about any of this either. You don't need to say anything," eased Anne. "Just know that Jack was grateful to you—and we are sure hundreds and hundreds of other young men are, as well. He never forgot your kindness. Thank you."*

*Robbie and Red Hawk waved goodbye to each other without a word.*