

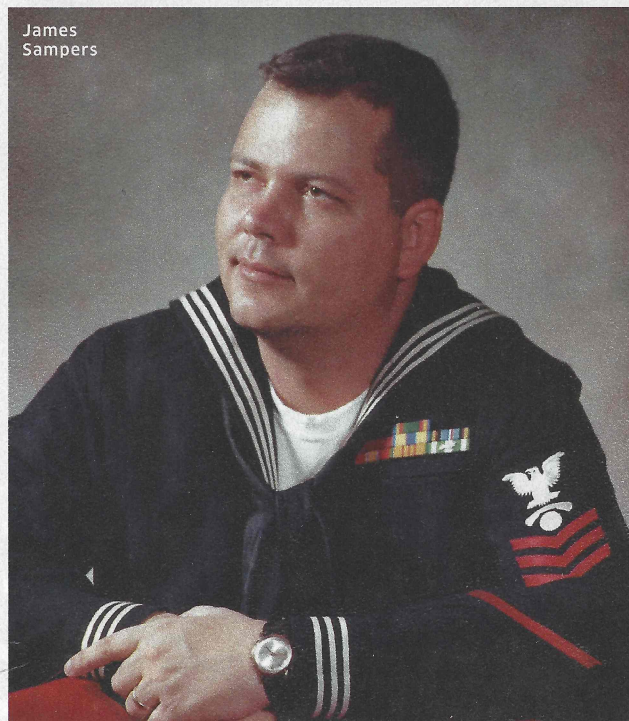
Captain Dean McDavid, Standards Director at United's flight training center in Denver, wasn't sure what he'd find when, late last year, he began working his contacts to locate a Gold Star family—the family of a U.S. service member killed in action—that could use a helping hand.

McDavid leads the Denver chapter of United for Veterans, an employee association for military veterans at the airline, which was newly established in Colorado. The members were anxious to hit the ground running with a worthy objective in mind: to honor the fallen by embracing the living. They had no doubt they could do some good; they just needed some direction. Then, one afternoon, McDavid received the call he'd been waiting for.

Major General Michael Loh, Adjutant General of the Colorado National Guard and one of McDavid's friends from his days in the U.S. Air Force, told him the story of the Sampers family, the widow and children of U.S. Navy Petty Officer First Class James Sampers, who was killed in Vietnam in 1969.

One of his sons, Jim Sampers, had recently been diagnosed with a pre-leukemia condition known as myelodysplasia, which required a stem-cell transplant. His sister, Christina Ribbens, had been cleared as a donor, but there was one problem: She lived in Colorado, and Jim is being treated in Calgary, Canada. With medical bills and other expenses piling up, the cost of airfare for Christina to fly back and forth for preliminary tests and the procedure added another layer of stress to an already difficult situation.

Hearing that, McDavid thought of a way to ease their burden. Working with Transplant Recipients International Organization (TRIO), one of United's nonprofit partners, he



James Sampers



From left: Cathy Bueb, Jim Sampers, Patricia Sampers, and Christina Ribbens

Gone But Not Forgotten

United for Veterans honors the fallen by embracing the living

and his group helped arrange travel for Christina and her mother, Patricia Sampers, using miles generously donated by United MileagePlus members.

"When Christina and I talked, I told her, 'First of all,

we appreciate everything your dad did,'" says McDavid. "I let her know that we were here to support his family members just like he would have wanted."

Christina knew it would make her dad proud to know

his brothers and sisters in arms are still looking out for him. "I imagine if he were here, he would be doing the same thing for others," she says, fighting back tears. "That's the kind of man he was."

Jim, like his sister, was touched, but he's not surprised by gestures like this anymore. From his siblings stepping up without hesitation to donate their stem cells (his brothers, Ron and Steve, were also tested, but neither was a match), to his sister giving him the gift of life, to the love and encouragement he's received since his diagnosis, he is regularly reminded of the goodness in this world. But this experience had the added benefit of reminding him of his father's goodness as well.

"Family was very important to Dad," Jim says, drawing from the images of his father that are etched into his memory. "He was a joker and he loved to tease, but he was very loyal."

The military is itself a family, one in which loyalty stands above all else, even bravery. Loyalty to your country, loyalty to the men and women on either side of you, and loyalty to those who came before you and made the ultimate sacrifice. As they bow their heads in solemn remembrance on Memorial Day this month, Denver's United for Veterans members will reaffirm their loyalty with a commitment to keep fighting for those who fought to their last breath.

"There's nothing wrong with laying wreaths and planting flags next to gravestones," McDavid says. "But we can't forget the loved ones those veterans left behind. As much as anything, that's how we can show our gratitude."

To learn more about how United and TRIO assist transplant recipients, living donors, and their families, visit donate.mileageplus.com