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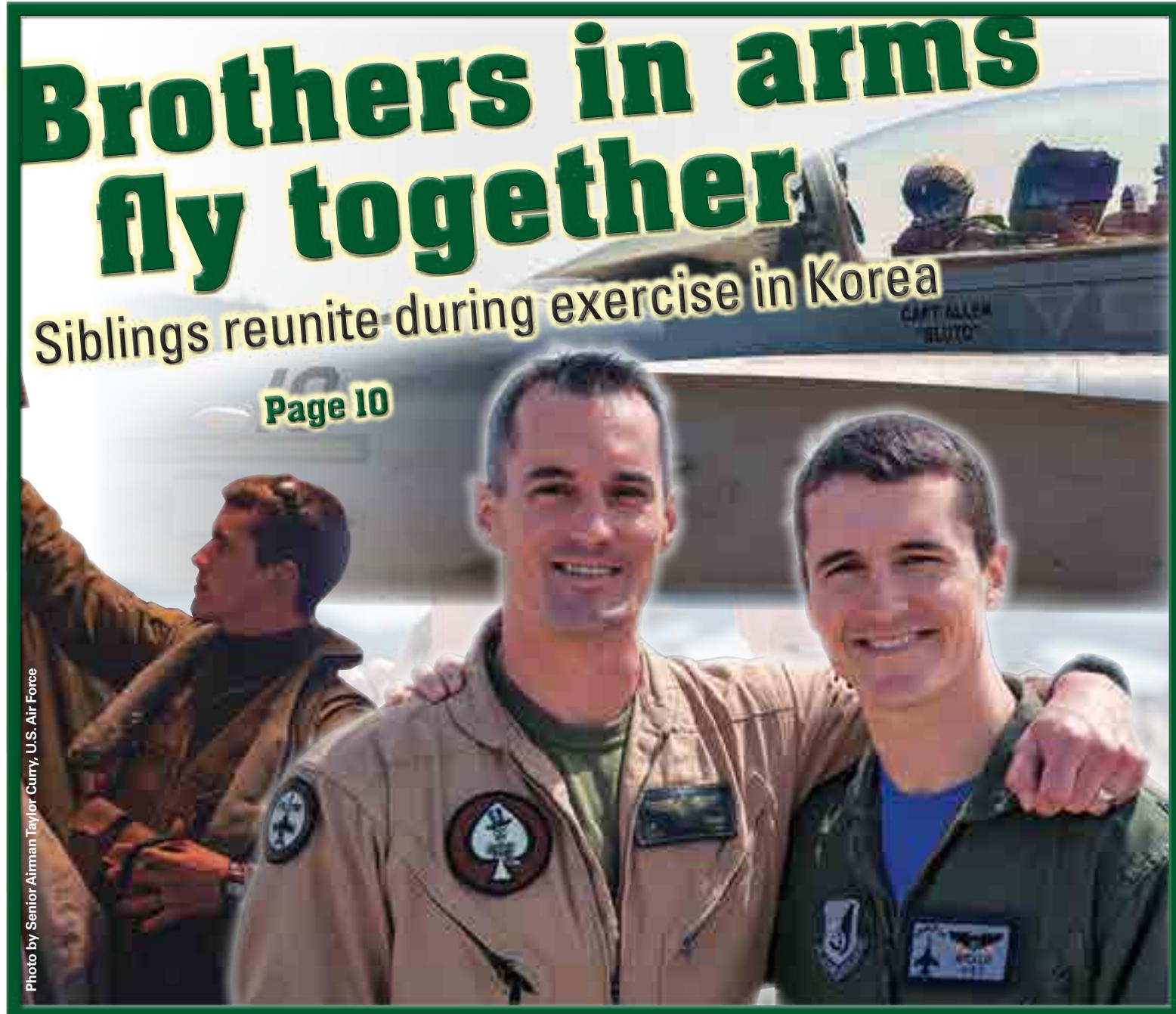


Photo by Senior Airman Taylor Curry, U.S. Air Force

# Brothers in arms fly together

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# Space-A Spontaneity

## 'You will save us thousands: just do it.'

*Editor's note: Travel junky Kat Nickola share another great adventure with us. This one took place in March. To follow Kat's adventures, go to [www.ramblingfamily.com](http://www.ramblingfamily.com).*

BY KAT NICKOLA,  
STRIPES KOREA

This morning I woke up to an amazing opportunity. I spent some time yesterday searching for and pondering spending big bucks to go see my sister in Germany. It's been so long since we have visited her, and she and I have been talking about doing a trip this spring. I

was holding off for finding our assignment - in case we end up in Europe I didn't want to spend a lot of my own money, just to be sent by the AF a few months later. But that news still hasn't come and is driving me nuts.

Anyway, all this has been going on in my brain lately. The pros and cons of buying tickets to Germany, the uncertainty of whether its well spent if we get stationed in Europe, or whether I would waste an opportunity to make one last Asian visit with that money.

Well, this morning a solution apparated! I often check the space-A facebook page at Osan figuring out if I could do an Asia to Europe hop, but it's hard as I cannot make two stops in CONUS (because of a rule for dependents

travelling without their sponsor). So I try to mentally work around that, but in general, Pacific military craft stay on the west coast and Atlantic stay on the east coast; very rare is a flight connecting the two with a single-landing in the states. It's irritatingly complex and nonsensical. Retirees can do it, and so could I 6 years ago... I digress.

This morning an even rarer thing happened: a flight from Korea to the east coast! What?! I had to call and verify. From Korea, I always have a stopover in Japan, perhaps Hawaii, rarely Alaska, and need to compete again for onward travel... never have I seen a

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# SPACE-A: Take advantage of the free hops

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flight to Delaware!

Needless to say, it was a busy morning of decisions. Am I ready to go? Is my husband OK with this? Should I do it? His thoughts and advice were essential and sound: this is a rare opportunity, the kids haven't seen their family in nearly two years, you will save us thousands: just do it.

So we spent the morning packing. In reality that took only about an hour, but the kids' schoolwork prep took a while longer. I don't want to bring entire teachers guides, so I photo those pages. I don't want to bring bulky workbooks, so I pull the pages we will need. I also tried to get any of our reading books on my kindle, and we had a few things to finish up.

Luckily, roll call was late afternoon and my husband was still on nights, so we spent the morning with him and all had lunch at the BX together before dropping him at work and finishing our own Africa school unit at home; we homeschool.

At the terminal we were the only people trying for the flight until roll call when one other dude showed up. So, with 73 seats available, four were used for space-a. It was too easy. They didn't even scan our bags or anything! It was just, "hey let's walk out to the plane" and we went out the back door.

A C-5 has seating upstairs - it's full of old style cushy airline seats, but rear facing and with only two windows at the emergency exits. Slightly claustrophobic. But free. I hung out by an exit window texting family while the kids ate their subway dinner. My husband was also going to takeoff just before us and we got to see him taxi past! It was really cool to know we were flying at the same time. I'm sad he can't come along. Maybe he will see our little blip on his radar for a bit and feel the love.

Other than landing, our flight was uneventful. We mostly slept, but Avi got sick when we were landing. All that sleep and the odd laying-back feelings gave him a yucky stomach.

Now, we do have a layover in Alaska, which is hopefully not too long. The crew doesn't seem to know. The Elmendorf space-a board shows our flight departing late tonight (as in tomorrow night for us - back in time), the other passenger seems to think we would stay over, and the crew was vague. We will see! I don't care; it's free.

We have been at for 15 hours and been fairly productive. Just got checked in for the onward flight to Dover after a wild and cold, but surprisingly stress free layover.

First, the kids just wanted to play in the family room at the



terminal, and I was happy for that while I attempted to send messages to the fam. I also wanted to check out "to-do" things here, feeling that surely this base has something either fun or cultural for us to waste an afternoon doing. The internet, however, is out!

Spoke with the passenger service rep and he recommended we go to a place called Arctic Oasis: an indoor playground with wifi and a nice café. Sounds great. A one stop shot for what we need. He also verified for me, nay, promised me, that the terminal would remain open all night because roll call was at 0145. They usually close at 2200 for cleaning; he said he would "make sure that doesn't happen." No need to get lodging only to leave in the middle of the night. I agreed that was great.

So we spent the afternoon at Arctic Oasis. The YMCA runs an on-call base taxi service shuttle, which took an hour to arrive. No matter, kids had fun playing out in the cold ice covered ground. The sky and the view is gorgeous, though the temp is at ONE degree!

Arctic Oasis was all it was promised: a free indoor playground and rock climbing wall.

There was even a bouncy castle or for an extra buck, which we took advantage of. After some hours there, living on fumes and snacks, the kids were pooped and hungry... Bummer that the café was under renovation.

We walked three blocks (big, Alaska blocks) and through a field to the nearest food: BK where I encountered the nicest BK employee ever! He cheered me up and we had a great late lunch/ early dinner.

The BK folks called the shuttle for us to return to the pax terminal and it was there in a minute! I expected a long wait, so we packed up our leftovers and road along to drop off another passenger. It was a great tour of this giant base, and fulfilled Zoe's desire to see what base housing looked like.

Back at the terminal was

chaos; quite different from the empty morning. Apparently a different flight had taken off and returned; all the pax (lots of kids) were waiting for news. My kids enjoyed playing for a bit, but their BK food soon wore off and they glazed over to watch the Cars movie which I borrowed from the front desk (they have a big list).

Before it was over, the place cleared out when everyone else found out their flight pushed to tomorrow. Good for us. We needed a nap!! So, around 7 p.m. we snuggled into the comfy couch and woke up at dark. It was about 10 p.m., Zoe had made an amazing wood block castle, Avi was still asnooze, and I went out to the desk to verify they weren't closing, only to find that they were! I mentioned the guy this morning and the new shift personnel were a bit peeved he would say they would stay open. CRAP! Now I have nowhere to be for a few hours in the middle of an Alaskan night.

The rep said one of the lodging buildings was open 24 hours with a lobby / rec room and was not far away. So, I reluctantly packed us up, woke Avi and bundled up for the dark freezing night. It was only two blocks and we shortened it by cutting across lots, but we were frozen when we got there.

The place was warm, and empty and ripped apart under a remodel! No carpets, wrecked wooden stuff everywhere, paint and plaster all over! The rec room was full of equipment so we wandered the empty, but oddly fully lit halls, upstairs and found an open door to the "staff" room. It was just fine and had some bonus cardboard to sit on instead of nails and plaster dust! Though it felt like we were homeless people squatting in an abandoned building, we didn't care. I was surprised at how much we didn't care... just ate our BK leftovers, played some Uno and watched That Darn Cat on my computer to occupy our time. Good thing we were wide awake!

The trek back to the terminal at 1 a.m. was the coldest I've ever felt! We are all wearing layers and our winter coats and gloves,

but the cold bit right through!! Both kids had amazing attitudes all day and even this last obstacle didn't faze them.

Avi said we should be warm if we went quicker, so run we did. The air was so cold it hurt my lungs. The sky was beautiful! Just as we thought we'd freeze to death we flopped into the terminal.

Our continued journey is a go! The passenger rep got us checked in and then roll called some new passengers; we won't have the plane to ourselves this go. I bought two box lunches, and we settled into the playland for a bit. Will get going at 3 a.m.!

Mom and dad should be keeping track of our arrival via the Dover pax terminal, I sure hope! I was able to send and receive a few emails and texts during our afternoon at Arctic Oasis, but otherwise it's been a communication-less evening.

The announcement went over the loud speaker that we were heading out to the plane a bit early, so the gaggle of us SPATS (space a travelers) lined up at the departure gate. There were a couple young guys and a few retirees joining us; one with a tiny dog! The screening process was the same at any airport, but once all 9 were through security we walked out to a blue military bus waiting in the darkness of 3am.

The bus drove us all around the flight line to where our gigantic C-5 was being loaded. It is an incredible site to see a plane like this, rear entrance opened, being loaded with pallets. A giant vehicle with a platform brings the pallets and then raises itself up to the level of the open cargo deck and they are slid on. Outside the plane there were lots of other vehicles and people prepping. We waited a while until the load master called over the radios that he was ready for passengers. Another rep from the terminal drove a set of air-stairs up to the lower level

door and our bus driver pulled closely behind. Again we waited for news that we could board.

Avi was first out the bus and first up the stairs. Inside the door, we were on the cargo deck - mostly empty but for a few pallets of netted-down equipment, and our luggage- there is a steep ladder to the seating area on the upper deck. Again, Avi was first up. I could tell he felt like a pro as the loadmasters crew gave him warm a, "welcome back". Zoe scooted up after and I followed. We claimed two rows across the aisle, in the back middle where the heat works best.

The seats on a C-5 are really wide and comfy, spaced with lots more legroom than an airline, in rows of 3 and 3. Avi and I sat across from Zoe. As we got settled, a crewman brought

our 2 box lunches. On most flights you can buy one of these for \$5. It's typically a meat and cheese sandwich, a piece of fruit, a water, a soda and 2-3 package snacks like chips and granola bars.

We noshed down a good bit while the plane was readied... this involves lots of weird mechanical sounds followed by the engines starting up.

Eventually, we packed our leftovers and could sense movement as we rolled along to taxi to the runway. No windows to tell. It's an odd sensation taking off backwards, too. Instead of being pushed back into your seat, it's like being pulled forward down. Our lunchbox (because they are delivered, literally, in a box) leftovers went sliding down the floor-turned-ramp.

Zoe laid down and slept before we even leveled out, and Avi was soon to follow. I dozed, seated, for a bit and then tried to spoon with Avi on our seat. No luck, our seat choice was a bit cold so we were too bulky with coats on. Instead, I got him settled and laid down across the row with his packed pillow and one of the available scratchy wool blankets. I went to lay on the empty row in front of Zoe and fell asleep.

I only woke a couple times before realizing we were about ready to begin descending to land! I found our lunch box had slid all the way past 8 rows of seats and was caught near the front under some escape gear and rope. Then I sat down with Avi's head on my lap for landing!! Both kids slept through that. So, a successful start to our spontaneous space-a adventure. We will visit with family in PA for a bit and then try for onward travel to Germany and visit my sister.

After a week visiting family we hopped an easy space-A from BWI to Ramstein and spent a few weeks visiting my sister in Germany.

The trip home... that was another story....

