



Guest Column: Four freedoms — our Thanksgivings

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One morning my wife invited me to sit on the back patio of our new home. Our house is modestly landscaped and we look upon a small greenbelt. There were plenty of birds of all types at the feeders and in the wood line. A mourning dove caught my eye and reminded me of an encounter from a prior year.

It was the first year of my retirement from active duty and, while we were waiting for our home to be built, we moved into a townhome apartment complex just outside of Carlisle Barracks. We were fortunate to be “camping out” in a new development that also attracted several international fellows who brought their families with them for the yearlong stay in America.

On a sunny but bitterly cold November morning, my wife received a call from a neighbor — a general officer from a foreign military. It seemed that a dove was so affected by the cold that it could not fly away and was just sitting on the back patio of his residence. He asked if there was a shelter or animal rescue that would take the bird. I paused for a moment and thought, “This man has been in combat, been severely wounded, and has seen death. And he is worried about a dove.”

My wife found a veterinarian who was open on a Saturday afternoon and would take the bird as part of a rehabilitation program. The vet office, however, was located about 30 minutes away. So, the general and I drove in his car with the dove in a pet carrier.

On the way to the vet’s office, the officer mentioned what a good year it was for his family. His country had been battling insurgents for several years, and he was an assassination target (his predecessor in Carlisle had been killed by a suicide bomber). So, back home he could not shop, attend religious services, or go to movies with his family. He always traveled in a separate vehicle with a driver and bodyguard. Here in the U.S. he spent time with his son, attended social gatherings with his wife, and was involved in several communal activities.

As we traveled over the roads and highways, he pointed to the open fields and potential ambush sites in a matter-of-fact way. Six months into his stay in America, he was already thinking about the change that would occur when his family returned to their native country.

Many of our Army War College International Fellows will return to regions of high tensions and ongoing conflict. This past month we received word that two of our international graduates were in dire straits. One is a general officer who was kidnapped by insurgents and for whom negotiations are currently underway for his release. The other is a colonel who was gravely wounded defending his nation’s borders from a powerful adversary — his mission was to “hold

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at all cost". While recognized and awarded for his personal bravery, his country's prospects for continued confrontations remains high.

There are so many things we take for granted in our country. I am reminded of Norman Rockwell's "Freedom" series of paintings based on the 1941 speech by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt — Freedom of Speech; Freedom of Worship; Freedom from Want; and Freedom from Fear. It seems that a great freedom that we do not acknowledge or appreciate is the freedom from fear in our everyday living.

It takes a contrast with those who experience such hardships to realize that we do have something special in America — probably more than we deserve and something that we should hope for others to experience. This reflection also reminded me that the dove is symbolic of peace and tranquility. With all the turmoil we observe and experience in our lives, I hope that a dove appears for each of us.

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