



## The Takeoff- October 2020

Zach, Capra, Cap, son, brother, cousin, friend, etc. whatever he was to you in your life just know he was a huge blessing and I'm sure he impacted your life in an amazing way. When I was asked to write a letter about Zach and I's friendship I was shocked, honored, and sad because I'm still in such disbelief that he is no longer here. I'll never forget when I received the news I will always remember exactly where I was and what I was doing. Although Zach was called home early he still lived an amazing life and his memory will live on forever through "Tailwinds of Hope".

Zach and I met back in 2013 when I checked onto the USS Harry S. Truman. When you start working at any new place (especially on an aircraft carrier) nerves settle in really quickly. Luckily for me, I met Capra and a few other guys that he was friends with, they took me right in and made the transition a lot smoother. While we were on deployment we created memories that will last a lifetime hitting many foreign ports together, exploring the country on tours that were offered to us, and most importantly making sure we always got a hotel each port so we could sleep in an actual bed. I'll never forget when we were in Bahrain, myself, Capra and our friend Kay all went out for the day. After a long day of wandering the city and shopping, we went to an Irish pub which was full of different people from all over the world. Kay and I may have had a little too much to drink, but it didn't matter because we had the best person to take care of us and that was Zach. After getting us from the pub to the base I realized I left my wallet in the taxi, which is the literal definition of finding a needle in a haystack. Zach could have just taken Kay back to the boat and left me behind to ensure they would make it back before curfew, but come on do you think he would do that? Nope, Zach got us both back into a different taxi, took us back to the pub, and helped me search every taxi that was outside of it until we finally found it. That's when I found out how big Zach's heart was and how much he truly cared about people. He risked getting into trouble for someone he just met a couple of weeks prior, I knew right then that these are the types of friendships that grow and prosper. That's just one of many memories (probably not the best at first but we definitely laughed about it later) that were made during our friendship.

Being out to sea you are forced to be with those people for 8-10 months at a time, 24 hours a day, you eat, sleep, shower, and do everything else with those people. After going through that sometimes you just don't want to be around people anymore when you get back. That definitely wasn't the case for Zach and our friend group because we went from friends and grew into a family. Zach was the first one to get military housing off the boat when we got back so instead of making me stay on the boat, he let me sleep on his couch until I got my place to stay, because yet again that's the type of person Zach was. Some of my favorite memories with Zach include watching the Broncos play the Panthers in the Super Bowl at 3 am because we were in Dubai. Going to the Notre Dame



vs Navy football game in Washington DC after going to Baltimore for the weekend. Going to a bunch of haunted attractions one weekend in Philadelphia for Halloween with the childhood friends I grew up with, and so many more. Every off day we were all together either at someone's house playing Madden or having our weekly taco Tuesday family dinners, we didn't care what we were doing as long as we all had each other.

Being that I lived so close to my home town of Baltimore and Philadelphia, Zach and some of the other guys would come home with me often. I remember the first time I brought him home I went upstairs to take a shower, when I came back down he was nowhere to be found. I called him and he picked up and said "hey I went to grab a beer with your dad" and in the back of my mind I was like thanks for the invite but all I said was "alright sounds good see y'all when you get back" it just felt normal like we grew up together. Throughout the years we had a lot of good times and we had things that would pop up that made our friendship stronger. He got to meet my family and I got to meet some of his. He was there for me when my father got sick and when my father passed away. We would bond over how much we looked up to our fathers and how amazing they were, how one day if we were half the man that they are we would be okay. We talked a lot about how getting out of the Navy was the best choice for him and how successful he was going to be. We talked a lot about how I think the Flyers are better than the Avalanche, and how he thinks the Broncos are better than the Ravens. Although we would never agree on those last two topics, ever since Cap passed away his teams always have a special place in my heart and I'm always hoping for the best for them because I know he's up there cheering them on.

Zach had everything going for him and he was going to make a difference in this world and still luckily his name is still making a difference each and every day. Zach will always live on in my heart and through this organization that his amazing family has worked so hard on. Thank you so much for giving me this honor, I could sit here and talk all day about Zach. I would like to end this letter with this, Zach loved his family so much and he is up there smiling down on all of you because he's so proud of everything you've done to honor his name, and who knows maybe he's grabbing another beer with my dad!

Fair Winds and Following Seas,  
Nicholas Cullison  
October 4, 2020