

THE FOURTH WAVE

AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE
FEDERAL AIR MARSHAL'S PROGRAM

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Dedication

To the flight crews of aviation; the unsung heroes of the heinous acts which took place on the 11th of September, 2001. Since the birth of aviation, these men and women have risked their lives to make air travel possible for the rest of us. Yes, it is a job they chose to do but it has had a direct impact on all of our lives, and made the world a smaller place. The men and women of aviation are, sometimes, the faceless workers of the world and are rarely thanked or praised for the sacrifices they have made throughout the years. They are true heroes. To them, I lower my head and tip my hat.

Chapter 2

A CALL FOR CIVIC DUTIES

September 26, 2001:

It was several days after the attack on the United States of America. The country's collective mind was still united. In a country where it was common to see the flags of other countries flown proudly on the cars and the homes of immigrants, only the flag of the United States waved in the air, now. Entrepreneurial minded people took advantage of this wave of patriotism and sold small American flags that could be attached to vehicles. "Show your patriotism's" the ads proclaimed. "Go out and buy something" the President said. And we did. Americans were still in shock and still very angry. In the era where Presidents proclaimed the end to big government, the people were demanding action on the part of the federal government. Because of the attacks, our transportation systems were on the brink of collapse. Most Americans had given up air travel, for the fear of another

imminent attack. If terror's main goal was to strike fear in the hearts of the masses, it had succeeded.

I walked into the downtown San Diego office that morning expecting to go about my normal conservation law enforcement duties. Not the case. News from the DC Office had already been relayed to our Regional Office located in Portland, Oregon. News to our Division of Law Enforcement from the Department of Transportation. The DOT had initiated a program to steal a few federal law enforcement officers from other agencies until new recruits could be trained and hired. They needed federal agents to *temporarily* volunteer as Federal Air Marshals.

“John, here’s what we know.” My boss told me over the phone from his desk in Los Angeles. “FAA has been flooded with literally thousands of calls and applications from people wanting to be Air Marshals.” I painted a mental picture of Billy-Bob and Bubba standing in line at FAA headquarters waiting to sign up, wanting to “get them some”, not unlike some of the men and women that wanted to sign up for military service after the attacked at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

“We’re going to be looking for volunteers to fill the void until FAA can go through the weeding out process and get some people trained and in the air.”

“I’m in!” I said without hesitation, as if I were Billy Bob, cutting to the front of the line.

“We don’t know when this is all going to take place, John. Were looking around the 8th of October for this wave to get trained but it could be as early as next week.”

Hell, I was single. No real commitments. I was ready to travel at a moment's notice. Leaving at the drop of a hat was not an issue for me. Ironically, I had looked into becoming an Air Marshal in 1990. I had a DEA friend who had switched to the FAA and loved the freedom the program had offered. I love traveling and saw this as a good opportunity to see the world while staying in federal law enforcement. Trouble back then was, Air Marshals were not in the same retirement systems as the rest of the federal LE community. I would have been looking at a normal 30 year retirement program, as opposed to the 20 year package I was working under. Giving up that option made the position, less appealing and aided in my decision to stay with the Service.