

## A Flight to Remember in Historic CAP Aircraft for Former U.N. Ambassador



Some of Lt. Col. Sichan Siv's most memorable moments have been spent in the air, like his 1976 flight to the U.S. as a refugee from Cambodia, and his 2018 ride on Air Force One as it carried the body of the first of two presidents he served.

On March 3, Siv added the latest chapter to those memories. The 33-year Civil Air Patrol member rode in the CAP aircraft that had flown over the still-smoking ruins of Ground Zero on Sept. 12, 2001 — the only nonmilitary craft in U.S. airspace that day. The New York Wing aircrew was carrying out a mission to take high-resolution photos of the devastation below after the previous day's terrorist attacks.



The aircraft, N9344L, affectionally known as "44 LIMA" and now assigned to the Connecticut Wing, is slated to be retired this month for permanent display at the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, Ohio.

Siv had dreamed of riding in the historic aircraft. He got his chance on one of its final flights when N9344L, call sign CAP912, took off from Hartford-Airport with Maj. Brian Proulx, Connecticut Wing director of operations, at the controls.

Proulx piloted N9344L over Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton and then over Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Massachusetts.

"Flying in this plane, because of the role it played that September morning, is very emotional and brings back strong memories," said Siv, a member of the Texas Wing's Alamo Composite Squadron in San Antonio.

Siv, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and presidential assistant in the White House from 1989-1993, called it the second most memorable flight of his life, surpassed only by his Air Force One flight nearly 5½ years earlier.

Making this week's experience even more special was a stop in New Haven. When Proulx noted they were near the Connecticut city, Siv asked if they could land there for a moment.

On the ground, he told Proulx that "this was very emotional for me. I arrived here 48 years ago with \$15 to my name, and after paying the cab driver for the drive to the Wallingford home of my sponsors, I met them with a mere \$2 in my pocket."

That landing in June 1976 marked a new beginning for Siv, who was born in Pochentong, Cambodia, near the capital of Phnom Penh. After his father's death, he and his siblings were brought up by his mother, Mae.

He has never forgotten her words: "Never give up hope."



Growing up, he was fascinated with the U.S., its space program, and aviation. He eventually earned his bachelor's degree and became a high school teacher.

By the early 1970s, after the Vietnam War spilled over into Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge began to attack the capital. Siv made the decision to leave his teaching position and join C.A.R.E., a U.S. relief organization assisting refugees.

In 1975 the leaders and the wealthy left the country. By April the U.S. Embassy began evacuating those with American connections or sympathetic to U.S. efforts. Siv was scheduled to be on one of the last helicopters leaving the country, but he was trying to feed some 3,000 refugees and missed the flight by 30 minutes.

He fled on bicycle, using fake passes, and headed for the Thailand border. Just short of his goal, he was captured and sent to work on a logging crew. While riding on a logging truck, he jumped off, then spent three days traveling through dense jungle until he finally crossed into Thailand, where he was again captured and placed in a refugee camp.



Sponsored by a couple from Wallingford, Connecticut, he subsequently emigrated to America, arriving in New Haven. He went on to earn a full scholarship to Columbia University and received his master's from the School of International Affairs in 1981.

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***—Lt. Col. Sichan Siv***

Siv became a U.S. citizen in December 1982. While attending a UN reception he was invited to the Reagan White House. In 1987, he began working on then-Vice President George H.W.

Bush's campaign for president, and after Bush's election he became a presidential assistant in the office of public liaison.

In 2001, as President George W. Bush's first term got underway, Siv was named a U.N. ambassador, serving in that capacity till 2006.

After the elder Bush passed away Nov. 30, 2018, Siv was one of only five nonfamily members invited to ride on Air Force One when it transported the 41st president's body from Texas to Washington, D.C., to lie in state.

On the flight Monday he brought along mementos from both presidents' terms in office — portraits, coins, flags, and pins, along with a doll that belonged to his late wife.

"I wanted to commemorate George (H.W.) Bush" Siv said, "and honor a legacy of ... (a) member of the Greatest Generation with this sortie."

In doing so, he also created a connection between what he regards as his two most memorable flights—the Air Force One journey and one of historic N9344L's last trips.

Col. James A. Ridley, Sr. Northeast Region Chief of Staff

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