

November 2008

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Lt Col Hill's unexpected death has been difficult for the wing. Like many members of the wing, I knew Lt Col Hill for many years. Lt Col Hill and I first met when I was a cadet. Until I became wing commander this year, he was always my superior officer and a mentor to me. When I became wing commander, he enthusiastically reversed the roles and joined my staff. I relied on him heavily and I will greatly miss a friend and fellow volunteer. As wing commander, I am tasked with leading the wing through the good times and the difficult. This is definitely one of the difficult things a commander must do. I, like you, am grieving a loss. It is important to remember that grieving is okay and a normal part of life.

Dealing with grief can be a hard thing. What happens when we try to process the loss of someone dear to us? There is no typical response to loss, no timetable for grieving, and no typical loss. Grieving varies greatly from individual to individual so it is important to respect differences among people. Generally, experts say people experience between five and seven stages of grief. First, we experience shock and then denial when we first react to the loss. Shock can sometimes keep us from being overwhelmed. In this stage, it is almost like one is numb. One might ask oneself, how can it be? The next step in the process is anger. We may feel guilty or remorseful about something we did nor did not do with the deceased or just angry that he or she left us. At this point, the pain of loss becomes more apparent. The third stage of grief is bargaining where people tend to look for a way to keep the bad thing from happening and hope that it is reversible. Depression follows when we realize the magnitude of our loss. Loneliness tends to accompany the other emotions and one may have an acute feeling of despair. As we adjust to life without the person who passes on, we begin an upward turn. Things become calmer and the depression from the last stage begins to lift and we reach acceptance. In this stage, we begin reconstruction and working through life without that special person we lost. The final stage of grief does not ensure that we will not miss the person who died. Instead, it means that we have learned to cope with his or her absence.

How can we cope with grief and loss? There are many ways. One good technique is to express your feelings. One can do this through writing, establishing a memorial in his or her honor, or by being involved in a cause that was dear to the deceased. It is a healthy and necessary part of the grieving process to express our feelings. If you need to cry, then you should do so. Remember, it is okay to show emotion. A second important part of coping is to make sure you take care of yourself. Get the rest you need, eat sensibly, and maintain normal routines. We do not want to grieve the loss of another colleague who failed to care for himself or herself. Col Kuddes, the NCR/CC, wisely emailed me late the night we lost Lt Col Hill and told me to get some rest. I had things to do but I listened because I knew I needed the rest to function properly. Third, if needed, seek assistance. Lt Col Dennis Pearson (kc0tjydennis@yahoo.com) and Major Jerrol Bahner (jbahner@cox.net) are Peer Support Personnel and are available to assist members who are experiencing distress related to our recent loss. MG Courter contacted the National CISM team in the hours following the accident and they reached out to support Kansas Wing as well. I have spoken with several personnel regarding my feelings in the wake of this tragic loss and it helped me a great deal. If it will help you cope, I encourage you to speak to someone.

In order to process what was happening, I also wrote the following eulogy to express my thoughts.

Our fellow volunteer, Lt Col Ed Hill, has been taken from us. He will be greatly missed by all of us who had the privilege of serving with him and because of his interest in humanitarian endeavors, his loss will be felt by a great many more. The news of his untimely death came as a great shock. All of us who knew Lt Col Hill have suffered a heavy loss in his passing and it is difficult to adequately express our grief. No one, whose privilege it was to know him, is likely to forget the candor of his speech, the degree of his dedication, and the warmth of his friendship. In my experience, he never dodged a responsibility and never refused to take on a hard job that needed done. His loss is one that will be difficult to overcome because of his years of service were distinguished further by his integrity and devotion to duty. In his loss, CAP loses the services of a valuable officer and many have lost a faithful friend. Although Lt Col Hill has left us, the example of his life leaves us with inspiration for future deeds. Lt Col Hill lives on in the minds and hearts of everyone he touched in his life. To the members of the bereaved family, we extend our profound condolences, and hope they can draw consolation in the fullness of his life's services to his fellowmen. May Lt Col Hill's soul rest in everlasting peace and may his noble spirit rest deep in our hearts where he will remain our companion as long as there is life within us.

I felt better having put my ideas on paper and having expressed the thoughts that were running through my mind.

Speaking at his service was one of the most difficult things I have ever done but I feel better having shared with others what a wonderful person he was. Make sure you take the steps necessary to help you cope with loss. While every individual will have different needs in this area, please recognize your needs and make sure they are fulfilled.

Another item I want to share with you is that we are taking steps to ensure that the wing will not forget Lt Col Hill or his contributions to our organization. In addition to his memory, that will be with all of us he knew, the Emergency Services Officer of the Year Award in Kansas Wing will henceforth be named for him. A plaque will be made for the wall in the hallway at our headquarters. Each year, we will remember Lt Col Hill and add a name to the plaque recognizing a member who, as he did, made outstanding contributions to the wing.

Finally, to all those who have helped and supported others during this difficult time, I would like to say thank you for all you have done and contributed to the wing in the days following the loss of Lt Col Hill. From National Headquarters to Liaison Region to North Central Region and across the nation we have received condolences and words of support. Members of the wing have served admirably and CAP was well represented at his funeral services. It is important to remember that we all gain strength from each other. The outpouring of support from members of our Civil Air Patrol family has been amazing and much appreciated by all. I am proud of Kansas Wing and I stand with you as we move forward from mourning our loss, as we remember our friend, and as we continue to perform missions for our community, state, and nation.