

On May 27th of 2016, I was fortunate enough to participate as a C5 Flight Engineer in an Air Force Denton Humanitarian Mission to Guatemala City and meet Bob and Kathleen Price, founder and director of the Mission of Love Foundation. The Denton Program is a DOD transportation program that moves humanitarian cargo donated by NGOs to developing nations to ease human suffering. The Mission of Love Foundation is the largest user of the Denton Program in the world. Senator Jeremiah Denton was also Rear Admiral Denton and was held prisoner of war in Vietnam for almost eight years, later writing the book *When Hell was in Session* and was a good friend of Kathleen's.



The 35 pallets on board weighing 88,500 pounds were going to meet Kathleen Price, founder of Mission of Love Foundation, in Guatemala City.

When we picked up the cargo in Youngstown, Ohio, everyone was there to meet the plane. Kevin Massie and crew had a barbeque set up, perfectly timed for us. When we arrived the food was coming off the grill. I remember thinking how thoughtful of a gesture that was. The crew immediately started the upload and preparing for departure. Chief Flynn was able to give tours to the base families that had come out, inspiring future generations. We also met Kathleen's husband Bob, who asked me to say hi to his wife and give her a big hug for him, as she was waiting for us in Guatemala City to distribute aid.

I would later learn, upon meeting her on the ground in Guatemala, this would be the 58th airlift mission she has coordinated to get much needed life sustaining supplies and equipment to people in remote villages throughout the world. The cargo we carried was going to Tecpan, the ancient Mayan capital of Guatemala. Despite Kathleen's vast experience in moving cargo, major obstacles had to be overcome up to the very last moment in order to deliver this aid to the people who were desperately awaiting its arrival. Upon landing we were welcomed by Kathleen, the mayor of Tecpan, Serpio Ordonez, and volunteers that couldn't wait for those back doors on the airplane to open and the first pallets to come off. We learned later the Mayan doctors had not one piece of gauze in their hospitals to treat patients. I went over to talk with Kathy and see what else they might

need from us. She had tractor trailers standing by to whisk the much needed medical supplies, hospital beds, school desks, lockers, chairs, wheel chairs, construction material, clothes, hand maid quilts, material, and giant pallets of corn away. MSgt. Lyons had said leaving Ohio, we have everything, including the kitchen sink. It was hard to tell what we had because of netting on the cargo.



Shortly after arriving in Guatemala the crew realized the standard Air Force cargo downloading equipment was not available. The Aircraft Loadmasters, along with Juan Pablo and civilian airport personnel had to download all 35 pallets with two forklifts, and working through a language barrier, did so in record time. As they were

downloading the volunteers would break down the pallets and smiles were on all. Kathleen informed me that there had been a drought and corn crops were weak. Corn is such a staple in their diet needed for tortillas and for most, only sustenance available. According to Kathy, the most common complaint amongst the children, when they are fortunate enough to see a doctor, is their tummy hurts from being empty. Just a cup of corn would bring a person to tears. Then I turn around to see we had brought 5 pallets of giant bags of corn weighing 2500 lbs. each. They had to be loaded onto the tractor trailers with forklifts. She had also a request to give a tour of the airplane and expressed that for the villagers/volunteers, it would be the biggest moment in their lives and would mean the world. With the help of interpreters and wonderful crew members we were able to show some of the villagers/volunteers around. Kathleen told me later that one of the villagers had a dream, that one day he would be on an airplane and it came true.

In talking to Kathleen after the fact, I was able to see pictures of the distribution of the cargo we had on board and heard first-hand about the distribution. A young boy lays on a dirt floor, crippled with a life threatening disease, we delivered a hospital bed to place him on and gave pediatric wheelchairs to children who had none. Corn was given to the starving widows and children. The Mission of Love surgery team completed their 6th annual Cleft lip/ palate/ facial deformity mission to Guatemala City where they completed 35 severe cases of deformity surgeries in four days.

I feel very fortunate to have met Kathleen and Bob. I've never had the chance to follow the cargo and see it distributed on the ground. I was very happy to see everyone's hard work come together and the smiles on people's faces said it all.

Americans helping Americans help Guatemalans and helping themselves as well.

"You are not here to save the world but to touch the hands within your reach."

Reach is the call sign for the C5 Galaxy and it can touch a lot of hands. I'm very grateful to be such a small part in such a grand gesture of humanity. Thank you for all you do Kathleen!

Sincerely ~ Dana M. Willette





