



## INTERNATIONAL COMMANDER RUSSELL “RUSS” GRAY



Born and raised in Waltham, MA. In 1967 he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, going through Basic Training at Amarillo AFB, TX, then Technical Training at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, TX. He served as an aircraft mechanic on fighter aircraft for 7 years with assignments in Myrtle Beach, SC, and in Southeast Asia at Tuy Hoa AB and Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam. Returning stateside, he was assigned to McConnell AFB, Wichita, KS, and a year later, he was sent to Spangdahlem AB, Germany.

In 1975 he retrained and transitioned to the C-141 Starlifter aircraft as a Flight Engineer at Norton AFB, CA. After flying for 15 years, accruing nearly 5,000 flying hours and achieving the rank of Master Sergeant (E7), it was time to retire. Lady Virginia was also on active duty in the USAF, and was on an unaccompanied assignment to Zaragoza AB, Spain, so he retired to join her as her *dependent!* Then the USAF decided it was time he saw Lackland AFB, in San Antonio, TX.

In 1997, after Lady Virginia retired from the USAF, he was hired by United Airlines to be a ground school instructor at their Flight Training Center in Denver, CO. That is where he began his Masonic journey. He was raised to Master Mason in November of 2005, became an El Jebel Shriner in December of 2005 and immediately joined their Legion of Honor Unit. In May of 2006, he reached 32<sup>nd</sup> degree Scottish Rite Mason. In 2009, while serving as Commander of the El Jebel LOH, he was recruited by the Central States Shrine Association (CSSA) LOH and was honored to be their Commander in 2012. During his tenure as CSSA Commander, he served on the committee to revise the Drill Competition Rules with Lt Commander Eddie Daffern and was awarded the IALOH Distinguished Service Award later that year.

He retired from United Airlines in 2014 taking on a new title of House Spouse with Lady Virginia working for the Department of Veterans Affairs. This afforded him the opportunity to stay active with the Shrine, the LOH and his Blue Lodge. He also continued to be an active leader with the Special Olympics Colorado, Aurora Program, supporting his son Vince's athletic efforts.

In 2016, Lady Virginia received a job offer from the VA in North Las Vegas, NV, so they sold the snowblower and off they went to Vegas. He joined as a plural member of Zelzah Shrine and served as their Commander in 2017 and 2018. He served as Past IALOH Commander Dave Ginapp's Chief of Staff for one year and was elected to the IALOH line as the 8<sup>th</sup> Lt Commander in 2018. Since then, it has been an incredible journey making new friends and reconnecting with fellow veterans and their families/friends.

Russ cherishes the camaraderie and esprit de corps shared within the Legion of Honor. He looks forward to seeing as many members possible as he and his family visit Associations and Unit meetings to strengthen the Military and Masonic ties that bind us together as a brotherhood.