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'Clear to Take Off'

An unexpected way to fight brain cancer

By Kim Hamilton - News Editor

Most everyone faces unexpected, dramatic moments in their lives.

Three years ago, Brian Kissinger faced his moment, almost dying from brain cancer. Out of that experience, was born a way to use his expertise as an airplane pilot to help raise funds and awareness about brain cancer.

Kissinger is a native of Morehead and a brother to Sharon Morrison of Morehead.

In April, he plans to fly across the United States in a 1942 World War II L-4 Cub.

Take-off is Monday, April 2, from St. Louis, Ohio. His first stop is set for the Farmers Airport in Morehead.

This idea came to him as a dream that kept him going during the 22 months of chemotherapy that followed a six-hour surgery.

"Having gone through all this and learning how many other people are being diagnosed with brain tumors each day, it is now my focus to help others," he said. "It is hard to believe that each day in the United States, 500 adults and children are diagnosed with a brain tumor. There is still so much that needs to be done to raise awareness and research money to fight back."

At the age of 18, Kissinger joined the Air National Guard and at 19, he received a two-year Air Force ROTC Scholarship.

Photos



In April, Morehead native Brian Kissinger plans to fly across the United States in a 1942 World War L-4 Cub to raise money for brain cancer research. Take-off is Monday, April 2, from St. Louis, Ohio. His first stop is set for the Farmers Airport in Morehead. / (Click for larger image)

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"The focus of my life completely changed. I became an 'airport bum' and began washing and waxing airplanes in exchange for flight time while I was still a student at the University of Florida," he said.

"I flew solo within a matter of weeks. I fell in love with the sensation and freedom of flight. My years in the Air Force were rich in so many ways, and I am proud of serving in the Special Operations Command, flying MC-130s (Combat Talons) as a navigator and electronic warfare officer. No question about it, planes became a key point in my life," Kissinger added.

Considering that he has survived a brain tumor, Kissinger smiles when remembering the nickname he picked up when living overseas more than a decade ago.

"Everyone seemed to misspell Brian as B-r-a-i-n. I saw no point in taking offense over it, but found it something to laugh about. I did not expect, however, that it would be a message about what was ahead," he said.

The executive director of the National Brain Tumor Foundation weighed in on Kissinger's efforts and said more focus is needed on this disease.

"What Brian is doing is so very important, not only to those diagnosed with brain cancer, but for their friends and family who are trying to understand and help," said Rob Tufel, MSW, MPH. "There are over 120 different types of brain tumors, both malignant and non-malignant. Secondary brain tumors - those that spread from a cancer in another part of the body - affect 15% of all cancer patient."

Brian Kissinger named his project "Brain's Flight."

The purpose is straight forward, he said, to fight brain tumors by raising money and awareness.

"My financial goal is to raise \$100,000 for research," he said. "I can think of no better reason to fly than to help others in need. I will take off at the beginning of April and plan to cross the United States in about five weeks."

He will stop at Air Force bases and general aviation airports, to be met by Air Force buddies, fellow pilots and even patient care representatives for programs managed by the National Brain Tumor Foundation.

"This flight will be the first mission of this old 'warbird' in years," he said of the L-4 Cub airplane. "In World War II, it was used at Fort Sill to train pilots to fly combat missions before being decommissioned.

"I can see no better reason to bring it back into service on one more mission," he said.

To help, contact his personal online page at www.firstgiving.com/brainsflight.

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To learn more about the organization, call 1-800-934-CURE (2873) or visit www.brainumor.org.

Other scheduled stops:

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