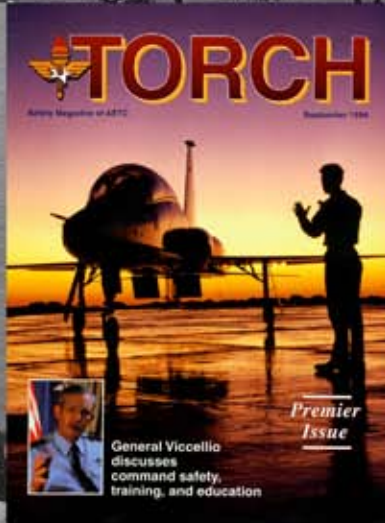
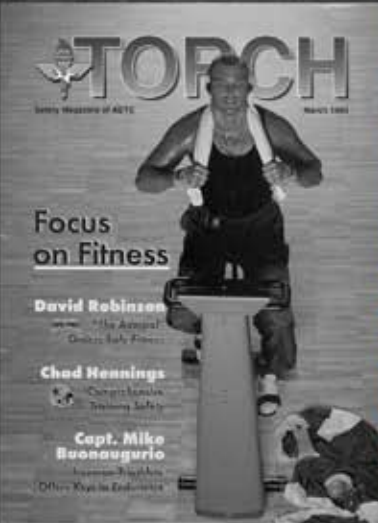
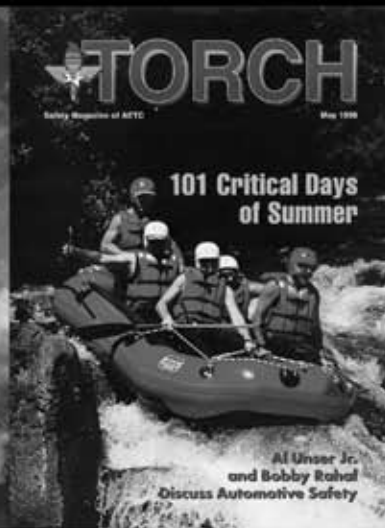


*** SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE ***

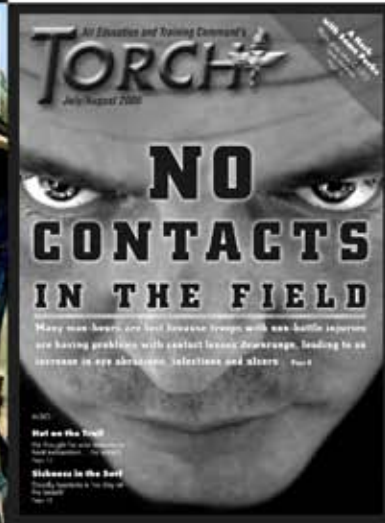
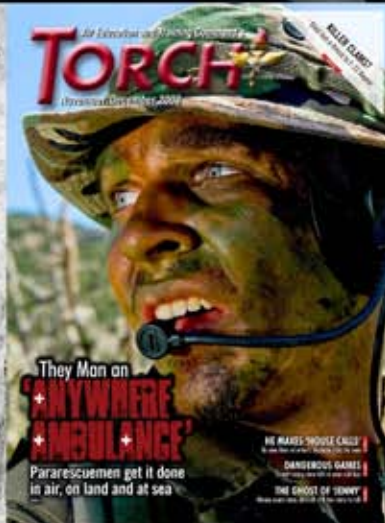
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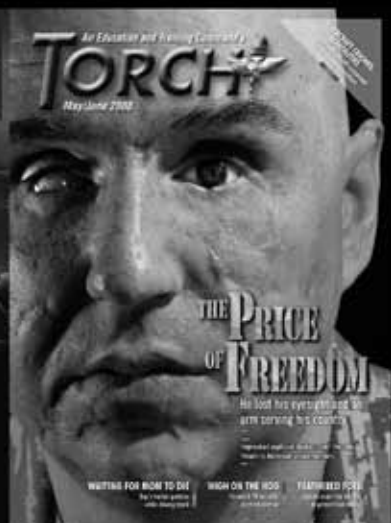
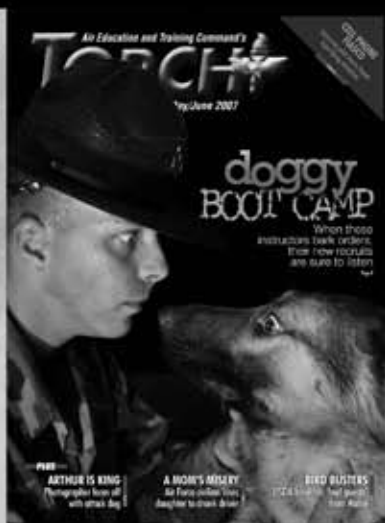
OUR FIRST 15 YEARS

ESTABLISHED IN 1994, TORCH HAS BEEN GOING STRONG EVER SINCE. OUR READERS AND THEIR STORIES HAVE BEEN OUR LIFE-BLOOD.





www.torch.aetc.af.mil



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FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Col. JOHN W. BLUMENTRITT
AETC Director of Safety

FIFTEEN YEARS AND ...

FIFTEEN MINUTES OF FAME

This year marks the 15th anniversary of Torch Magazine. That's 150 issues, 4,200 pages and nearly 2 million words all aimed at getting people to think about mishap prevention.

While we have interviewed famous people such as movie star Jimmy Stewart, Tonight Show icon Ed McMahon and basketball pro David Robinson, our staple this past decade and a half has been otherwise normal people unexpectedly earning their 15 minutes of fame ... or in many cases, 15 minutes of shame. More importantly, brave men and women have shared many of these stories for no other reason than to help ensure others wouldn't suffer the same fate.

There have been stories that have made us cry, like the tragic accidental drowning of an Air Education and Training Command dad who was trying to save his 5-year-old daughter at the lake. She lived; he died.

There have been stories that have made us laugh, such as the black bear that mauled an unoccupied sport utility vehicle just to get at a bucket of fried chicken a hunter had left there – the sort of real world antics that surely served as inspiration to a classic cartoon character ... that picnic-basket-stealing Yogi Bear.

There have been stories of human tenacity that have shocked us, like the plight of Capt. Jon Counsell, an F-15 pilot who survived a high-speed ejection that nearly tore off his limbs.

There have been stories that have angered us, such as the one about the drunk driver who crashed into a school bus full of children, killing 27 people, including 10-year-old Patty Nunnallee, daughter of Lt. Col. Jim and Karolyn Nunnallee.

And there have been stories that have kept us on the edge of our seats, like the harrowing tale of Tech. Sgt. Chuck Fouch, who risked his own life and suffered injuries while pulling a woman out of a burning building.

While telling these life-lesson accounts, Torch has earned 115 Air Force, Department of Defense and national awards for such things as overall publication, writing, photography, design, graphics and editing. But that's just icing on the cake. The magazine's real measure of success is its ever growing popularity with our Air Force family. Combined with hard copy subscribers, on-line subscribers, and news and photo releases, we have nearly 200,000 readers per issue and are distributed throughout the United States and to military members around the world.

In the feature section of this issue, we will peruse some of our past with you by reprinting a selection of our readers' favorite stories over the years. I also will share a personal flying safety story of my own on page 30, which, coincidentally, happened 15 years ago. ... You might say it was my 15 minutes of fame.

We hope you enjoy this look back. We look forward to our next 15 years with you!

John W. Blumentritt

“Brave men and women have shared many of these stories for no other reason than to help ensure others wouldn't suffer the same fate.”

A BONA FIDE HERO

Wow! Master Sgt. Davide Keaton ("He Makes House Calls," November/December 2008 issue, page 14) is a bona fide hero. It's hard to believe there are still people in the world today who would use women and children as human shields. Thankfully, there are also still people like Sergeant Keaton, who will come to their rescue.

*Fran Smithe
Via e-mail*

PROUD DAD

I am Senior Airman Jackson Rogers' father. He was featured in the November/December 2008 issue of Torch ("They Man an Anywhere Ambulance," cover story). Thanks from a proud dad!

*John Rogers
Des Arc, Ark.*

A REAL TEAR JERKER

I cried for 15 minutes after reading the article "Dangerous Games" in the November/December 2008 issue of Torch (page 16). What a senseless loss of a beautiful little boy. I can't even imagine the parents' heartache. If anyone plays games with their vehicles or gives in to road rage after reading an article like this, then they simply have no soul. Vehicles are dangerous and need to be treated with respect.

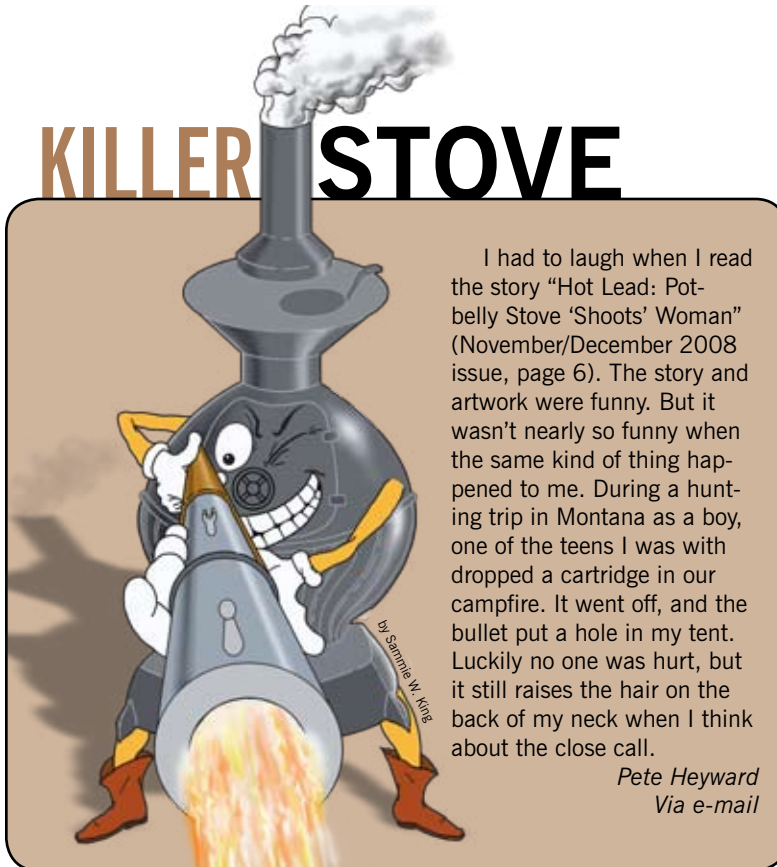
*Samantha Snell
Via e-mail*



LETTERS TO TORCH

Have a comment or complaint? Letters to Torch may be sent via e-mail to: torch.magazine@randolph.af.mil. Or mail to Torch Editor, HQ AETC/SEM, 244 F Street East, Suite 1, Randolph AFB TX, 78150-4328, or fax to DSN 487-6982 or commercially to (210) 652-6982. For customer service, call DSN 487-5818, or commercially at (210) 652-5818. Please include your name, address and phone number.

KILLER STOVE



I had to laugh when I read the story "Hot Lead: Pot-belly Stove 'Shoots' Woman" (November/December 2008 issue, page 6). The story and artwork were funny. But it wasn't nearly so funny when the same kind of thing happened to me. During a hunting trip in Montana as a boy, one of the teens I was with dropped a cartridge in our campfire. It went off, and the bullet put a hole in my tent. Luckily no one was hurt, but it still raises the hair on the back of my neck when I think about the close call.

*Pete Heyward
Via e-mail*

NEVER GIVE UP

A fellow veteran informed me about your article "The Price of Freedom" (May/June 2008 Torch, cover story). After reading it on-line, I was moved that Staff Sgt. Matt Slaydon is not giving up (after losing his eyesight and an arm from an improvised explosive devise explosion in Iraq). That is the person I know.

I was stationed with Sergeant Slaydon in the 61st Fighter Squadron, Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., from 1995 to 1999. I worked right alongside him and learned many things.

*Jamie Sarber
Via e-mail*

2009 TORCH CALENDAR

Congratulations on all the wonderful work you do infusing safety into our daily lives. Torch Magazine is staple reading for the pilots and support troops in the 45th Airlift Squadron. Additionally, you guys knocked it out of the park again with your 2009 calendar, which copies are displayed prominently around my squadron. Our squadron makes safety a top priority, as evidenced this past year when we were one of Air Education and Training Command's nominees for the Air Force Flight Safety Plaque.

For the 2010 calendar, I would like to offer a recommendation: Many tend to forget that AETC owns C-21s as part of the 45th AS at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. Since our lovable Tweet is headed out of the inventory, there is a vacant spot that could display our safe and reliable Learjet!

Keep up the great work, and hope to see us in 2010!

*Lt. Col. Jimmy "Vegas" Canlas
Keesler Air Force Base, Miss.*

I received the calendars. Just wanted to let you know they are great as usual. The pictures are fantastic! I shared the calendars with my co-workers, and they loved them! Keep up the good work.

*Karen Shelley
Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio*

I really enjoy your calendars. I actually handed out some to a nearby middle school as well ... the kids there absolutely LOVED them!

*Maj. Sean Gradney
Sherwood, Ariz.*

We enjoy your magazine very much and share the calendar among our students at the 419th Tactical Fighter Training Squadron, 4th Wing, Cold Lake.

*Lt. David Penney
Cold Lake, Alberta, Canada*

Our flight from the 58th Special Operations Wing is handing out 2009 Torch Calendars and Torch magazines during the School to World convention in Albuquerque. Every year, the Torch material is very much recognized at our booth.

Thank you so much ... you are the greatest!

*Senior Airman Elisa Eagen
Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M.*

These last two years, I have asked you for calendars for My Trucker Buddies. The children in this program have really enjoyed the pictures they contain. I'm a retired E-8 from 24 years in the Navy, but I don't mind promoting the Air Force to make My Trucker Buddies happy!

The Trucker Buddy program is a pen pal interaction with children. Truckers send cards and letters to their Trucker Buddy classes and other things that we feel will help the teacher and be enjoyable for the children. The letters and the Torch Calendar aid in teaching children writing skills and geography ... and the Air Force definitely gets some good public relations out of it.

*Max Kelley
Via e-mail*



Here at the Bateman Library, we have active duty members and retirees who love to have a copy of your calendar and snap them up. Thanks for a fine magazine!

*Brenda Griffin
Langley Air Force Base, Va.*

I am an Air Force reservist currently assigned to U.S. Air Forces in Europe, but I love the Air Education and Training Command Torch Calendars!

*Chris Bazeley
Cincinnati*

The Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps at Indiana University distributes the Torch Calendar to 60 cadets and six cadre. I also gave one to Indiana University's director of safety management, and he loved it.

*Jackie Harding
Bloomington, Ind.*

WHAT'S KILLING OUR AIRMEN?

AIR FORCE LOSES NEARLY 600 'FAMILY MEMBERS' IN LAST 10 YEARS

By **JILLIAN SPEAKE** / Photo illustration by Tech. Sgt. **MATTHEW HANNEN**

KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. — Although Maj. Gen. Frederick Roggero, Air Force Safety Center commander, has several priorities concerning safety in the Air Force, it is no surprise that ground safety has quickly made it to the forefront of his priority list.

During the last 10 years, on average, the Air Force has lost about eight Airmen each year to mishaps that occur while on duty.

"That's a tragic loss; but what's worse is when we look at that same 10-year time period, we lose almost 60 Airmen each year to off-duty ground mishaps," Roggero said. "If you're doing the math, that's almost 600 Airmen lost over the last 10 years."

Of those 60 a year, almost 50 Airmen were lost in car and motorcycle accidents. In 2008, the Air Force experienced the fewest off-duty vehicle fatalities ever; however, the total loss was still 32 men and women.

"When our Airmen are inside the gate, on duty and doing some of the most dangerous work possible, enforcers like leadership, supervision, tech orders, and guidance help our Airmen think through the steps of operational risk management," Roggero said. "When our Airmen are outside the gate is when they are probably in the most danger."

For this reason, safety officials have placed heavy emphasis on automobile and motorcycle safety in an effort to create a culture of risk managers by educating and training Airmen to remain vigilant regarding on- and off-the-job safety.

"If we can focus in on car and motorcycle accidents and save one Airman's life, then it's worth it," the general said. "We can't sit back and not take action; we're not going to walk past a problem."

One way the safety center is trying to create a culture of risk managers is by educating Airmen about some of the most common risk factors associated with car and motorcycle mishaps. The four most common factors are referred to as "FAST" by those inside the safety world.

The "F" stands for fatigue: "Our Airmen get off work and they want to make it some place for a three-day weekend," Roggero said. "They get on the road and some are going to drive and drive and drive until they get to where they're going."

The "A" stands for alcohol: "We see that over again where alcohol is a factor in these fatal accidents," the general continued.

The "S" stands for seat belts: "It's surprising in this day and age that we still have to tell folks to wear a seat belt," the general said. "Several of our last fatalities have been rear passengers who were ejected from the vehicle because they didn't have a seat belt on. So it's amazing that we have to put an emphasis on seat belts, but we do. There are some people who are still obviously not getting the message."

According to safety officials, the odds of a fatal outcome when not wearing a seat belt are seven times greater than when one is worn ... not very good odds.

And finally, the "T" stands for too fast or too much speed for the conditions.

"So fatigue, alcohol, seat belts and too fast," Roggero said. "If we can attack those four things from a leadership standpoint, we can remind folks that those four things are killing our Airmen and we need to save their lives."

One of several initiatives Roggero is concentrating on is a focus on the spring spike in motorcycle fatalities, which has occurred during March and April during the past three years. In the past, the Air Force has focused a lot of energy on its winter safety campaign and 101 Critical Days of Summer campaign, offering commanders tools such as talking points, briefings, videos, etc., via the Air Force Portal. In between those two campaigns, however, safety officials have been seeing a trend where there is a spike of accidents during March and April. During fiscal 2006 through 2008 this time period was the second most dangerous time for our Airmen who chose to ride motorcycles.

Nearly 16 Airman die each year as a result of motorcycle accidents. Experts at the Air Force Safety Center say when people get on motorcycles, their risk increases by 30 percent because there is less protection around the body and less stability on two wheels versus four.



The Spring Spike focus is the Air Force's first dedicated safety program to cover that timeframe.

In the past three years during the spring months, the Air Force has lost 12 Airmen in motorcycle fatalities and has lost two others to permanent disabilities and two more to partial disabilities.

Several studies have shown the spike in motorcycle accidents can be attributed to several vulnerabilities motorcycle riders face during the springtime.

First, not all riders are preflighting or inspecting their equipment as they should be, so the condition of the bike is also in question, the general said.

Second, the riders' skills have declined during the wintertime because they haven't been riding the bike in several months and often need a little time to shake off the rust, he continued. Safety officials recommend riders coming off a long break should practice riding skills in a safe environment before riding in heavy traffic or in other challenging situations.

Finally, car drivers may not be used to seeing bikes on the road, so the four-wheel drivers are often unaware or unsure how to operate safely around a motorcycle rider.

Of the almost 50 Airmen the Air Force loses in a 10-year average, more than 30 of those are from car accidents and around 16 are the result of motorcycle mishaps. Based on those numbers, it would seem that four-wheel accidents would be the primary focus for the safety center. However, when you compare the number of automobile drivers in the Air Force to the number of motorcycle riders, then it is no wonder why the Air Force Safety Center continues to focus on motorcycle safety.

In fact, experts at the safety center say when people choose to

get on a motorcycle, their risk increases by 30 percent because there is less protection around the body and less stability on two wheels versus four.

And then there's the issue of sports bikes, which made up more than 80 percent of motorcycle class A/B mishaps in fiscal 2008.

"Sport bikes are a different class of bikes," the general said.

"They are race-ready bikes with lights put on them, and their thrust to weight ratio is tremendous.

"You can go zero to 100 in less than nine seconds, but it takes great skill to drive those bikes," he continued. "Just about anybody can do that going straight; but when the road starts to turn, that's when skill comes in — and unfortunately that's where we see a majority of our Airmen die on motorcycles. Typically the visibility is not great, it's at night, and a lot of the time it's on a deserted road. They go into the corner too fast, there's something unexpected on the road, or the road condition isn't exactly track perfect, and they lose control and impact something at a higher rate of speed. That's what causes them to die."

In a proactive initiative to ensure riders are matched with an appropriate motorcycle for their level of skill, all of the service safety chiefs and service secretaries have begun working with motorcycle manufacturer CEOs on a Dealer Code of Ethics. The Dealer Code of Ethics will be presented to the motorcycle dealers around installations and asks the dealers to take the skills of the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines into consideration when they're recommending a bike for that person.

"We've got a lot of good motorcycle riders in the Air Force, but there are some where the skill level doesn't quite match the capability of the bike," the general said.

Along with the Spring Spike Focus and Dealer Code of Ethics, the safety center is focusing its efforts into preventive programs such as Alive at 25, Save-A-Life Tour and the Rider Coach Instructors and Trainers program. All of these programs focus on awareness and education to help Airmen protect and preserve combat capability through mishap prevention.

In addition to these safety initiatives, the general also emphasizes the importance of thorough decision-making skills.

"One of the things that we have to do to target that 18- to 26-year-old group is really explain to them that their decisions don't just affect them," the general said. "When they're doing their risk management, what they need to do is ask themselves, 'Could my family accept the consequences of this? Could my friends accept the consequences? Could my unit accept the consequences?' A lot of them don't think through those questions.

"What you're doing out there on the streets when you leave the gates doesn't just affect you," the general added. "Friends and family will be affected by your potential poor judgment."

And although many of these decisions come down to personal choice and responsibility, the general also recognizes the need for a strong wingman culture where Airmen look out for Airmen and influence each other to make the best decisions.

"Our studies show that 75 percent of the time wingmen can affect a decision of a fellow Airman," Roggero said. "So don't walk past a problem ... use the opportunity to save an Airmen's life today."

Ms. Speake is with the 377th Air Base Wing Public Affairs at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. (AFNS)



LOVE HURTS

ROMANTIC DINNER TURNS INTO 'HAND SANDWICH'

A 20-year-old Marine had a hot date and decided to make her a romantic dinner at his apartment.

On the menu? Garlic chicken, baked potatoes and a sautéed vegetable medley.

He chopped up some bacon and threw it into a frying pan to have fresh bacon bits for the potatoes. While the bacon began to sizzle, he took a sharp knife and began mincing a garlic clove in preparation for the chicken. He worked the knife like a top chef, quickly mincing the garlic in short, rapid chops.

But when he looked up to check on the progress of his simmering bacon bits, he continued working the blade like a machine.

A warning light started to go off in his brain an instant before he sliced the tip of his left thumb off.

With blood dripping on his cutting board and the tip of his thumb and nail sheared off, that would have been enough to cancel dinner plans for most people. But this was one tough Marine, and he had one hot date.

He grabbed three paper towels and crudely wrapped his thumb to absorb the blood, then tied off the Brawny bandage with a rubber band.

By this time, his bacon bits needed to be stirred or turned. Behind on time, he decided to try to save a few seconds by

grabbing the handle of the pan and flipping the bacon just like he'd seen done by professional chefs on TV. Again, the warning light in his brain went off an instant too late as hot bacon grease splashed onto the electric range and immediately ignited.

Holding the pan handle with his right hand, he instinctively reached over with his left to help steady it. But this jerking motion only splashed more grease out of the pan, which landed on the paper towel bandage he had on this left thumb ... which in turn caught fire from the flames dancing on the stove. This "romantic" dinner was quickly turning into a "hand sandwich."

He smothered his thumb torch with a nearby damp hand towel, then panicked and threw a glass of water on the grease fire — again realizing the error just an instant too late. Of course, water is ineffective on a grease fire and actually causes it to spread.

He then dumped a box of salt on the stove fire, which doused most of the flames, patting out the rest with a damp dish towel.

Billowing smoke filled the kitchen and dining room, setting off the fire alarm.

The frazzled Marine threw open windows to allow the smoke to escape and opened the front door.

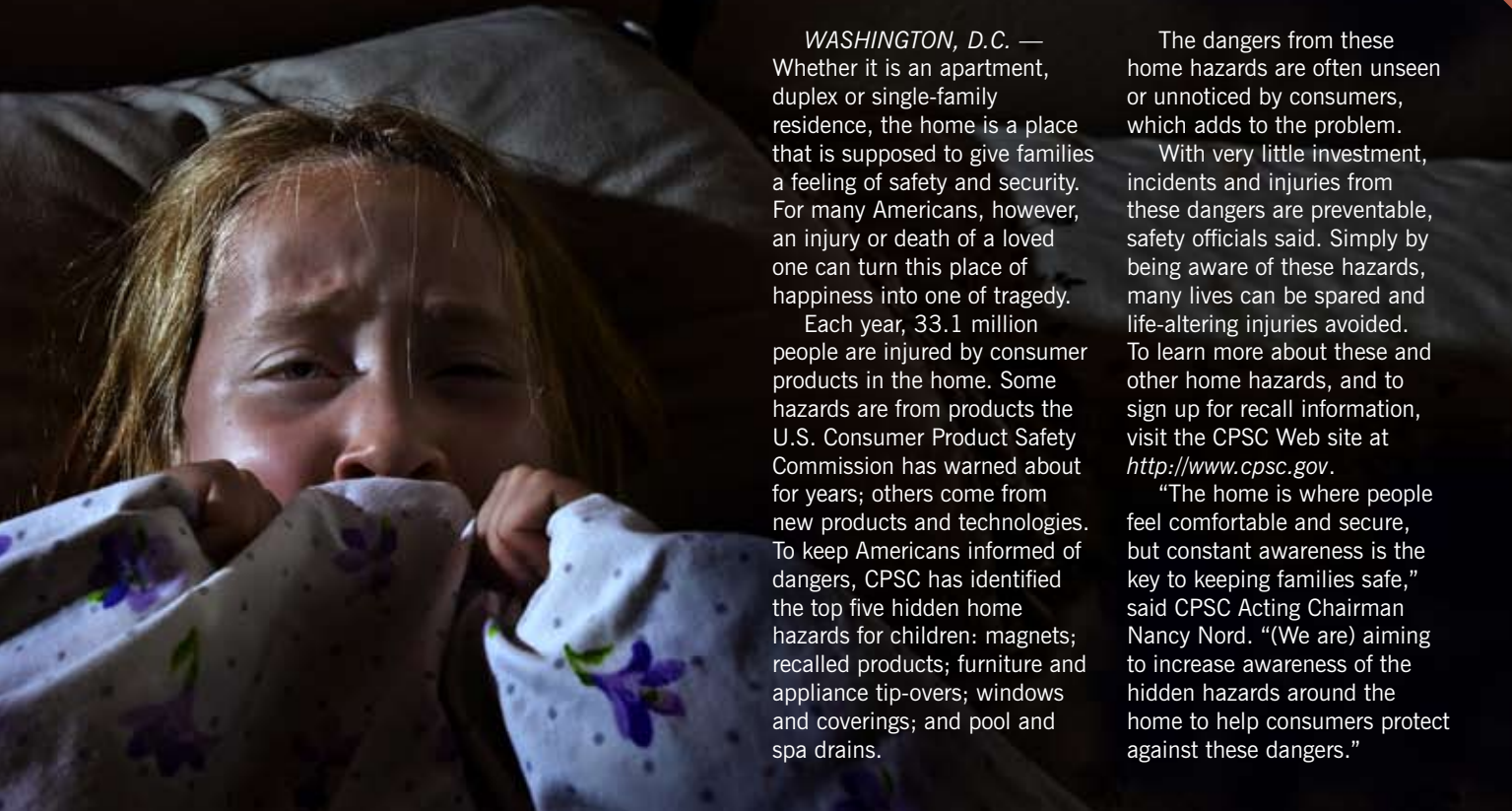
There stood his hot date.

Love really does hurt.

— Tim Barela



Photo illustration by Tech Sgt. Matthew Hammen



WASHINGTON, D.C. — Whether it is an apartment, duplex or single-family residence, the home is a place that is supposed to give families a feeling of safety and security. For many Americans, however, an injury or death of a loved one can turn this place of happiness into one of tragedy.

Each year, 33.1 million people are injured by consumer products in the home. Some hazards are from products the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has warned about for years; others come from new products and technologies. To keep Americans informed of dangers, CPSC has identified the top five hidden home hazards for children: magnets; recalled products; furniture and appliance tip-overs; windows and coverings; and pool and spa drains.

The dangers from these home hazards are often unseen or unnoticed by consumers, which adds to the problem.

With very little investment, incidents and injuries from these dangers are preventable, safety officials said. Simply by being aware of these hazards, many lives can be spared and life-altering injuries avoided. To learn more about these and other home hazards, and to sign up for recall information, visit the CPSC Web site at <http://www.cpsc.gov>.

"The home is where people feel comfortable and secure, but constant awareness is the key to keeping families safe," said CPSC Acting Chairman Nancy Nord. "(We are) aiming to increase awareness of the hidden hazards around the home to help consumers protect against these dangers."

1. MAGNETS:

Nearly 10 million magnetic toys have been recalled. Today's rare-earth magnets can be very small and powerful making them popular in toys, building sets and jewelry. Those same traits also make them a choking hazard. They can cause internal problems as well if they make it to the stomach. Watch carefully for loose magnets and magnetic pieces, and keep them away from younger children (less than 6).

2. RECALLED PRODUCTS:

Each year, there are about 400 recalls. CPSC is very effective at getting dangerous products, such as hazardous toys, off store shelves. But once a product gets into the home, the consumer has to be on the lookout. Get dangerous products out of the home. Join CPSC's "Drive to One Million" campaign and sign up for free e-mail notifications of recalled products at <https://www.cpsc.gov/cpsclist.aspx>.

3. FURNITURE TIP-OVERS:

Furniture, TVs and ranges can tip over and crush young children. As a matter of fact, these mishaps cause an average of 22 deaths per year. Deaths and injuries occur when children climb onto, fall against or pull themselves up on TV stands, shelves, bookcases, dressers, desks and chests, to name a few. Verify that furniture is stable on its own. For added security, anchor it to the floor or attach it to a wall. Free standing ranges and stoves should be installed with anti-tip brackets.

4. WINDOWS AND COVERINGS:

An average of 12 deaths occur annually from window cords, while an average of nine deaths and an estimated 3,700 injuries to children happen annually from window falls. Children can strangle on window drapery and blind cords that can form a loop. Parents should use cordless blinds or keep cords and chains permanently out of

the reach of children. Also, kids love to play around windows and are prone to falling out of them. Window screens are designed to keep bugs out, not to keep kids in.

5. POOL AND SPA DRAINS:

The suction from a pool drain can be so powerful that it can hold an adult under water, but most incidents involve children. Missing or broken drain covers are a major reason many entrapment incidents occur. Every time you use a pool or spa, inspect it for entrapment hazards. Check to ensure appropriate drain covers are in place and undamaged. Pool and spa owners should consider installing a safety vacuum release system, which detects when a drain is blocked and automatically shuts off the pool pump or interrupts the water circulation to prevent an entrapment.

— U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission



1994-2009

Our First 15 Years

Established in 1994, Torch has been going strong ever since. Our readers and their stories have been our life-blood. Every Airman who enters the Air Force gets a chance to read Torch, and we're happy to say many of them become loyal followers. Together, we've expanded worldwide to nearly 200,000 readers per issue. The next several pages will reflect on some our readers' favorite stories over the past decade and a half. Enjoy!





Photo by Tech. Sgt. Matthew Hannen
Digital composite by David M. Stack

A Little Bit of All of Us

An interview with Jimmy Stewart ... actor, Airman

By Brig. Gen. **JAMES M. STEWART**
 Introduction by Capt. **LAURA DiSILVERIO**
 Photos courtesy of the **AIR FORCE MUSEUM**



Jimmy Stewart

would say if I crashed such an expensive plane.” (Smith initially opposed Stewart’s promotion to general.)

In addition to his military flying, Stewart bought a war surplus P-51 and, along with a pilot friend, Joe De Bona, spent hours modifying it for the Bendix Transcontinental Air Race. On their third attempt, with Joe De Bona flying, they won the race and set a Bendix record for propeller-driven aircraft.

After retiring from the Air Force in 1968, Stewart continued to fly small private airplanes. He stopped flying in 1981.

“I gave up my beloved little Piper Super Cub,” he said, “because my hearing was failing. I miss it. I had 45 years of flying, and I guess that’s long enough. I had a good run.”

No matter how you look at it, Jimmy Stewart’s had a good run. Before his death July 2, 1997, he wrote some words on flight safety for a 1995 issue of *Torch*.

Like Clarence, Gen. Jimmy Stewart earned his wings.

Flight discipline remains just as important today as it was in my day.

During World War II, I was leading B-24 formations against Germany, to Bremen, Frankfurt and Berlin. Flight discipline was important, and there were safety rules to prevent combat and non-combat losses.

However, we were at war. There was a mission to fly, and rules were bent to get the job done. Unfortunately, there was a cost for this inefficiency. We lost a lot of aircraft and pilots, especially during training.

Every loss was tragic. It would be naive to think all losses were avoidable, but too many of them were. You don’t lose as much sleep over a crew that did everything within its power, yet was beaten by the adversary. You

he encountered engine trouble on a flight but landed safely, then-Colonel Stewart said, “All I could think of was not my personal safety, but what Senator Margaret Chase Smith

have many more restless nights when you lose a comrade in an avoidable accident. The responsibility for an avoidable crash does not rest only with those directly involved — it’s a tragedy shared by all.

Most aviators have heard this reminder by an anonymous author:

“We should all bear one thing in mind when we talk about a troop who rode one in. He called upon the sum of all his knowledge and made a judgment. He believed in it so strongly that he knowingly bet his life on it. The fact he was mistaken in his judgment is a tragedy ... not stupidity. Every supervisor and contemporary who ever spoke to him had an opportunity to influence his judgment. So a little bit of all of us goes in with every troop we lose.”

From my personal experience, the best indicator of a squadron or wing with the right outlook on safety is a professional aviation attitude.

As a commander, the best you can do is observe attitudes. Call it what you will, but a pilot’s attitude toward the mission, his commanders, his enemy and his aircraft are an important indicator of what to expect. The attitude he displays is not only indicative of what to expect from him, it is also indicative of what to expect from the younger, less experienced aviators in the group. Young pilots will do what they observe, not necessarily what they are told. Follow the rules — maintain flight discipline — at all times. It’s the right thing to do and somebody with less experience may be watching.

Remember, we all have the chance to influence the judgment of every pilot we command, train, fly with, or speak to. Make sure the little bit of you in every pilot helps him come home safely. ✈️



Then Maj. Jimmy Stewart discusses mission details with a crew prior to take-off.

Actor, architect, aviator. All aspects of James M. Stewart.

Most people know him as Jimmy Stewart, the actor. They laughed as he chatted with an imaginary rabbit and encouraged him as George Bailey helping Clarence the angel earn his wings.

Few realize he intended to become an architect and actually received his bachelor’s degree in architecture from Princeton University.

Even fewer know him as an avid aviator, a combat pilot and retired Air Force Reserve brigadier general.

Entering the military as a private in 1941, Stewart’s private pilot’s license and leadership attributes catapulted him to a commission and a pilot’s slot by January 1942. Following basic training at Moffett Field, Calif., he instructed in AT-9 advanced trainers at Mather, Calif.

During World War II as a squadron commander, and later as the group operations officer for the 453rd Group, Stewart flew more than 20 combat missions over Germany in the B-24 Liberator as a command pilot. At the end of the war, Stewart was a colonel, serving as the chief of staff, 2nd Combat Wing, 2nd Division, 8th Army Air Corps.

He opted to remain in the Air Force Reserve when the war ended and attained the rank of brigadier general in 1959 with an assignment in the key billet of deputy director of operations at Headquarters, Strategic Air Command.

Former SAC commander Gen. Curtis LeMay wrote of Stewart: “There was never any doubt in my mind that he was trained and capable of carrying out his mission as a reserve officer in a manner far above the average reserve officer, and I would have been most happy to have him in my command in any capacity.”

Continuing to fly, both for the military and privately, Stewart completed transition training in the B-47 and the B-52. Following one tour of duty where

'The Admiral'

Basketball star David Robinson talks safety

By Capt. **KEN MURRAY**

Photo courtesy of **NBAE/GETTY IMAGES**

What if your "office" was 50 feet wide and 94 feet long and your area of responsibility was designated by paint on the floor and a 10-foot-tall basket hanging at each end? What if night in and night out there was more pushing and shoving going on in your area than you experience standing in line at the commissary on payday? That's the type of work environment that David Robinson of the San Antonio Spurs faced on a daily basis before his retirement in 2003.

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md., and a former active duty lieutenant, Robinson carries many military memories and attributes with him in his personal life.

"I've always had a love for the military," Robinson said. "My father was in the military for 20 years, so I got a taste of Navy life early. I wasn't at all averse to going to the Naval Academy."

As a role model for many youngsters, one of Robinson's positive and more visible attributes is his on-court actions prior to every game he plays. While many players from both teams lollygagged around during the national anthem, Robinson stood at attention, crisp and tall as a fresh new recruit in his first week of training. In 1996, Robinson spoke to *Torch* and discussed some of the safety factors that influenced his daily life.

Alcohol and Seat Belts

The academy stresses so many things that it's hard to single out one or two safety-related issues that I've adhered to over the years. That said, I always wear my seat belt and never drink and drive.

I'm extremely sensitive to drinking and driving, especially with other people

that I'm around. I think that's because I went to the academy. And there's no question that the use of seat belts for you and family should be automatic in this day and age.

Fitness Program

You just don't jump into fitness. The only way it's really going to help you is if it becomes a part of your lifestyle. Take (your program) at a pace that is



David Robinson of the San Antonio Spurs goes up for a dunk against the Los Angeles Lakers.

comfortable for you to start with, so that you don't burn yourself out right away.

Also, it's better to train with a partner, someone that will keep you motivated and keep you accountable. If you skip your training one day, it gets much easier to skip the following day, and the next day.

Dietary Concerns

A quick (or fad) diet is not really going to help you. If you change the way you eat by cutting down on your fats and

eating smarter foods, it becomes a part of your lifestyle. You begin to like the "different" (healthier) foods that you're eating, and you begin to eat them all the time. That's what changes your body.

Everyone's body is a little bit different. I believe that vitamins help by safely increasing your energy level, and supplements can help depending on when you take them. If you take them right after you workout, they help you recover more quickly and prepare you for your next workout (but consult your doctor before starting supplements).

Weight Lifting

Lifting weights keeps my body fat low and keeps me in good shape. I wear a weight lifting belt when I do push presses or squats.

When lifting weights, I try not to concentrate on any one area such as upper body or lower body, but perform whole body workouts (this helps ensure no one muscle group is over stressed, which can lead to injury). During the off-season, I'll work out at least four times per week and then relax that schedule when the basketball season begins (to allow more recovery time for muscles).

On the Bike

I hate running long distances (which can also be hard on the joints). I would rather ride my bike 25 or 30 miles to work on endurance (which is a lower impact exercise than running, thus cutting down on the possibility for stress injuries).

Also, always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle to protect you from any serious head injuries.

Transition to Civilian Life

The military develops well rounded individuals. It helps people develop many social skills that are usable in civilian life. Without a doubt, the number one quality that I took from the military and brought to the civilian world was discipline. I have a tremendous amount of respect for discipline and rules of order and that has helped me in my career. It's helped me out on the court and in my personal life including the management of my finances and safety. 🍀

Painful Past

It's been 21 years since retired Lt. Col. Jim Nunnallee and his wife Karolyn lost their 10-year-old daughter in the worst drunk driving disaster in U.S. history. Twenty-seven people, mostly children, burned to death, and the drunk driver went to jail. But for the Nunnallee's, this tragedy is far from over

By **TIM BARELA**
Digital composite by **DAVID STACK**

Born March 29, 1978, at Bitburg Air Base, Germany, Patricia Susan Nunnallee weighed 7 pounds, 7 ounces and was 20 inches long. Her face looked so much like her father's, it was as if God had used carbon paper to make her. ...

It was Monday morning, May 8, 1988, the day after Mother's Day. Karolyn Nunnallee rushed to get her two daughters off to school on time, while throwing together her own bags. Her mother was ill and in the hospital, and she was going to fly to Fort Meade, Fla., later that morning to be with her.

It was never easy being stationed so far from family, but such was the life of a military wife. Her husband, Jim, was an F-4 and F-111 fighter weapons systems officer in the Air Force. For the Nunnallees, home was where Jim hung his flight cap, and presently that meant Fort Knox, Ky., where he was commander of Detachment 3, 507th Tactical Air Control Wing, serving as an air liaison for the Army.

Before going to catch her school bus, 10-year-old Patty handed her mom two red roses she had meticulously fashioned from tissue paper.



Ten-year-old Patty Nunnallee, along with 26 other people on a bus, lost their lives to a drunk driver.

"Mom, please give these to Grandma. They'll make her feel better," said Patty, who also had made some for Karolyn the previous day for Mother's Day. Karolyn smiled, gave Patty a tight squeeze and a kiss, and shoed her out the door.

As Patty ran to catch the bus, she slipped and fell in an irrigation ditch. Her pants were soaked. She hurried back into the house to throw on some dry jeans,

then hugged and kissed her mom one more time before finally making it to the bus by the skin of her teeth.

Karolyn didn't know it then, but she'd later thank God that Patty had slipped. Because of that, she got an extra hug and kiss from her oldest daughter that morning, and it would be the last time she'd ever see Patty and her beautiful smile again.

... Patty's giggle seemed to start in her toes, then work its way up until her entire body shook. She'd laugh so hard she'd have to hold her sides, and her face would nearly turn purple, her favorite color. Her best friend was Jill Williams, and they did everything together, from dressing Barbies to catching lightning bugs for Patty's insect collection. They especially liked listening to music and playing the game of Life. ...

On Saturday, May 14 (five days after Karolyn left), Patty and best-buddy Jill were returning from King's Island Amusement Park in Ohio. Jill had invited Patty to go along on the church-sponsored event, and the day had been a blast. Sixty-three weary children either dozed or talked about the exciting day as the bus buzzed along the dark highway, still some 60 miles from home at about 11 p.m. Four adults were also on the bus, including the driver.

Little did they know, another driver on the road that night was about to change their lives forever.

Earlier that afternoon, 35-year-old chemical plant worker Larry Mahoney had gotten off work after pulling a 12-hour, all-night shift. He stopped at a bar and had a beer. Later, after dinner, he shared a six-pack with a friend as they installed a truck radio. Still later, he drove to another friend's house and continued drinking beer. No one kept tabs on how many he drank, but it was enough that his friends initially confiscated his keys.

But after Mahoney promised he would go straight home, his drinking buddies returned the keys. Mahoney hopped into his '87 Toyota pickup and headed home. Drunk — his blood alcohol level was .24, more than twice the legal limit — and confused, Mahoney entered Interstate 71 headed north in the southbound lane. Cars swerved and flashed their lights. Semis blew their horns. But Mahoney continued in the wrong direction.

He was totally oblivious to the fact that he was about to steal sons and daughters away from parents, and rob siblings of their brothers and sisters.

... Patty doted over her younger sister, 6-year-old Jeanne. She taught Jeanne how to read and to tie her shoes. In third grade, Patty wrote a story about her sister called "Jeanne, Jeanne, the Bouncing Machine," which won first place in a writing contest. Patty and Jeanne also played nursemaid to three Guinea pigs, which they named after candy bars, Snickers,

Butterfinger and Kit Kat. Jeanne stuck to Patty like Velcro. ...

As Mahoney rounded a bend in the highway, he slammed head-on into the church bus. Initially, the collision did more damage to Mahoney, the crushed truck cab punching a hole in his knee and collapsing his lungs. To the 67 passengers aboard the much bigger bus, it felt more like a thump, "as if we'd hit a deer," one teen would later say.

But when Mahoney's truck smashed into the right front of the bus, it ruptured a gas tank. One instant the worst injury was a bruised arm, the next the bus was a blazing inferno.

MAHONEY WAS TOO DRUNK TO REALIZE HE WAS GOING NORTH IN THE SOUTHBOUND FAST LANE.

The youth minister, who had been in the front of the bus, jumped up screaming, "Get out! Get out! Get out!" He was on fire and quickly succumbed to the flames.

Patty and Jill, the two inseparable friends, had been sitting on the right side of the bus in the second row from the front. Their seat was almost directly under the ruptured fuel tank.

They never had a chance.

They were trapped between the fire and the bottleneck of people trying to escape out the back of the bus. The girls, along with 25 other people including Jill's mother and sister, died in the blaze.

A little after midnight, a knock at the door woke Jim, who was still playing Mr. Mom at home with Jeanne, while Karolyn was away. Lee Williams, Jill's dad, was at the door, his face wrought with worry.

"He told me there'd been some kind of accident and we needed to meet down at the church," Jim said. "Neither of us knew at that point what had happened."

They'd later find out that Patty had been killed, and Lee had lost his entire family. Jim called Karolyn, who returned home immediately.

"We were in shock, devastated," Karolyn said, as her eyes welled. "You never expect to outlive your children. At first, I tried to make myself believe there had been a mix-up. I couldn't accept that Patty was gone. She was more than a daughter to me; she was my friend."

... Patty and Karolyn shared a love for crafts. Karolyn taught Patty to crochet and needlepoint, which wasn't an easy task since Patty was left-handed and Karolyn right. They'd also decorate the



Though severely injured and his truck crushed, Larry Mahoney, pictured in this 1988 People Magazine feature, survived his night of drinking and driving. Twenty-seven victims on the bus weren't so lucky.

Crash photos by Bill Luster for the Courier-Journal, Louisville, Ky.

“PATTY WASN'T KILLED INSTANTLY. SHE DIED A HORRIBLE, PAINFUL DEATH.”

house with the changing tree leaves in the fall. They loved to talk about anything and everything, especially over a plate of Patty's favorite food — Karolyn's homemade spaghetti. And boy could they shop. They'd shop till they'd drop. ...

Mahoney's massacre is still the worst drunk driving disaster in U.S. history. In addition to killing 27 people, 14 more were seriously burned. One little girl, the only one to survive from the front of the bus, had to have a foot amputated because it was burned so badly. The flames also seared off a 14-year-old boy's ears and eyelids. He survived but had to go through dozens of surgeries and was permanently disfigured.

“At first I took comfort because my dad [a doctor] said Patty had probably died with her first breath from toxins produced from the burning bus,” Karolyn said. “But later the autopsy showed that she was probably the last one to die. Her blood had more toxins in it than anyone else's who died, which means she was breathing the longest.

“Patty wasn't killed instantly. She died a horrible, painful death. My daughter suffered, and so did the rest of the victims. That's probably the hardest thing to accept.”

Mahoney was sentenced to 16 years in prison. He served nine years and two months, after getting out on parole for good behavior.

He was paroled Sept. 1, 1999. He got to start his life over.

Patty didn't.

... Patty was a straight A student and a bookworm. She loved Nancy Drew Mysteries. She won two writing competitions and a speech contest. Even as a fourth grader, she had her career all planned out. She'd go to the Air Force Academy to get her education paid for (if she had she would have graduated in

2000). Later she'd go to Harvard Law School, because she'd heard it was the best. She wanted to be a judge. She even went to career day at her school dressed as a judge. ...

Jim and Karolyn don't waste their time hating Larry Mahoney.

“I always figured if anyone severely wronged my family, I would want to kill them,” said Jim, now a retired lieutenant colonel living with Karolyn in Fort Meade. “But for whatever reason I never felt that way. I don't want to see him [Mahoney]. I don't want to talk to him. But I don't hate him, which is probably good because that kind of anger could eat you up like a cancer.”

Instead, the Nunnallee's have channeled their emotions to try to eliminate this type of tragedy through education, awareness and the telling of their story of sorrow and pain.

Karolyn said the biggest obstacle to overcome is a general apathy when it comes to drunk driving, the most frequently committed violent crime in this country.

“Every week drunk drivers kill enough Americans to fill a jumbo jet airliner,” she said.

People in general know the dangers of drinking and driving, but some continue to do it anyway because they believe it

won't happen to them or they simply don't plan ahead and use poor judgement after becoming impaired, Karolyn said.

Having Patty's life snuffed out by a drunk driver is a tragedy beyond comprehension. However, the Nunnallee's weren't even close to being the only family with a heartbreaking story to tell. The year Patty died, 22,000 Americans were killed by drunk drivers.

Karolyn said the solution to drunk driving deaths is so basic.

“If you're under 21, don't drink,” she said. “If you're over 21 and choose to drink, don't drive. It doesn't get any simpler than that.”

Since Patty's death, the number of drunk driving fatalities has gone down on average. But the results still can get discouraging.

“Nobody should have to lose their child or loved one to a drunk driver,” Karolyn said as her eyes welled and her voice cracked. “We miss Patty terribly.”

... Patty will always be 10 years old. In a cedar hope chest her dad built, there's her diary where she writes about a boy named Chris. “He's so cute. I'm in love.” But most of the pages remain blank, unfinished. Then there's the Girl Scout sash with badges that still haven't been sewn on. A needlepoint, only partially complete. A life interrupted. ♣



Jim and Karolyn Nunnallee don't want others to lose their loved ones to drunk drivers. So they share Patty's tearful story in the hope that lives will be spared.

Dad Drowns

Tragedy strikes while trying to save daughter

By Maj. **MARK CARTER**
Photo by **BOB WICKLEY**

In May 1998, an Air Education and Training Command teammate died while trying to save his daughter. The tragic mishap truly pulls at the heartstrings. And as is so often the case, it didn't have to happen.

The young father was out on the lake, trying to get in some quality family time boating with his three children. A few days prior to the outing, he'd purchased an inflatable "jet ski" toy for the kids. Perhaps showing a little bit of his own youthful exuberance, he couldn't wait to get to the lake.

When his wife had to work during part of the day they'd planned at the lake, he decided to take the kids out by himself, despite his wife's request that he wait for her. But he apparently figured everything would be fine in her absence. He had taken a safe boating course; he was a



An Airman drowned when he tried to save his 5-year-old daughter at the lake. The daughter survived.

good swimmer; and he'd ensure the kids were wearing personal flotation devices.

They had only been on the lake about 20 minutes when, as he was towing his 5-year-old daughter behind the boat, the inflatable toy hit a wave, causing it to capsize on top of the little girl. Not being able to see her resurface, the father stopped the boat and dove into the water in search of his daughter, leaving his two young sons alone on the boat.

According to the oldest son, the father resurfaced three or four times before going under the final time. The little girl apparently resurfaced out of the

father's sight thanks to her life jacket. Boaters responding to the boys' frantic yells for help rescued the daughter.

The father's body was recovered two days later.

While it may seem cruel to critique an individual who died trying to save the life of his child, the awful truth is this mishap was set in motion before the family got anywhere near the water. When the father made the decision to go boating with only one adult present, a dangerous and deadly chain of events set into motion.

With only one adult present, there was no safety valve, no extra set of adult eyes or hands to help. The father was essentially on his own in a hostile environment. In his rush to have some family fun, he ignored the potential risks to his family and himself. The other awful truth is, especially after he failed to resurface, all his children remained in peril and could have suffered a similar fate had it not been for the boaters who responded to their cries.

No doubt, the children in this story know their dad loved them dearly. But just as certainly, they'd prefer he was alive to hold them and tell them so. ✚

The Ring's the Thing

Flesh torn off finger

By **AL BELTRAN**
Photo by **DAVE NOLAN**

Ever wonder why people are always harping at you about wearing rings on the job? Well, read on.

On June 3, 1995, I was working at a car wash fund raiser for our annual organization picnic at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. It had rained almost the entire week before, so we were expecting a good, brisk business.

Around noon, five vans pulled up, and we started the same superior wash, rinse and dry service we'd been giving all morning.

Since we only had two ladders, one to wash and one to rinse, I decided to hop up on a rear wheel to reach the top of one of the vans. I held on to the luggage rack with my left hand as I washed the top of the van with my right. When I was done, I hopped off the van. As I did, I felt a tug on my left hand.

When I landed, I looked at my hand.



A civilian worker lost his finger at Randolph AFB, Texas, after his ring got caught on the top of a van luggage rack.

My ring finger was a bloody mess.

My wedding ring caught momentarily — just long enough to tear most of the flesh from around my ring finger.

Upon my arrival at the Brooke Army Medical Center emergency room in San Antonio, the medical staff X-rayed my injury and cut the ring off my finger.

The ring was an old-fashioned, double-band, gold and silver ring, which I'd worn for 34 years. It took the ER people an hour and a half to cut it off. The most painful part came when bare metal touched a live nerve, sending a sizzling electric shock through my whole body.

The ER doctor diagnosed my injury as

a ring avulsion: The finger wasn't broken, and the tendons were intact; however, the flesh was mangled all around the finger. He referred me to orthopedics.

When I saw the orthopedic doctor on duty, his first prognosis upon seeing my injury was not comforting: "Well, the finger must come off."

This wasn't the option I had in mind, but he must've known from previous experience. I consulted two other doctors and the senior orthopedic surgeon on staff before I agreed to consider amputation. The arteries and veins were too damaged to be reconnected.

Since I lost my finger, I've had many people tell me about catching their rings while working around the shop or the house. Fortunately, none of these people had lost their fingers. I guess I was just careless enough to not be lucky.

A wedding ring is generally considered a positive symbol of love in our society; nonetheless, it can be a double-edged sword. Remove your rings, all your rings, when working around machinery, on ladders, or before you partake in or enter into other potentially hazardous situations.

Don't let your symbol of love be the cause of your pain. ✚

Charged Sarge Lightning bolt zaps Kirtland instructor

By **PAT MCKENNA**
Photos by **DAVE NOLAN**

Ray McKinney knows better than most that smoking is bad for your health. On Oct. 4, 1996, McKinney, a technical sergeant at the time, stepped outside the Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., NCO Academy, where he was teaching, to light one up. But he got lit up, instead. A blazing bolt of lightning streaked down from the sky and zapped the sergeant with 30 million volts.

In a flash, McKinney collapsed to the ground, smoldering like a half stubbed-out cigarette butt.

A co-worker had warned “Mac,” as friends know him, not to venture into the storm. But McKinney, craving a nicotine fix, rebutted, “Nobody ever gets hit by lightning,” and then trudged into the rain with umbrella in hand.

Moments later, while the sergeant stood puffing away beneath a gnarled 40-foot-high cottonwood tree, a zigzagging, white-hot saber of energy scored a direct hit on him.

Mother Nature 1, McKinney 0.

Investigators later surmised the strike had crashed through the cottonwood, splintering branches and blasting off bark, raced several inches along the ground and then bored through McKinney’s left ankle to send 10,000 megawatts surging through his body. In a nanosecond, the pulse burst through his right ankle and zeroed in on a rod of rebar imbedded in the nearby concrete drill pad, where it fizzled out.

When the smoke cleared, McKinney lay face down in the mud, lifeless as a log. The jolt had blown him out of his combat boots, launched his glasses 20 feet away, shredded his uniform to tatters, and fused his umbrella into a tangled slag heap. Sometimes it just doesn’t pay to be a well-grounded individual.

Every bit of metal on McKinney, including his watchband and glasses, burned an imprint into his skin. All, that is, except his wedding band and POW/MIA bracelet, strangely enough.

Inside the NCO Academy, instructor Master Sgt. Paul McCarthy heard the ear-



A 10,000-megawatt lightning strike hit this tree and surged through Ray McKinney (center). He’s alive today, thanks to the quick-thinking actions of Master Sgts. Gary Staggs (left) and Paul McCarthy, among others.


splitting thunderclap, saw the strobe of brilliance, and then rushed to the window, closely trailed by fellow instructor Master Sgt. Gary Staggs.

“Whoa! I think the lightning hit the tree,” McCarthy said.

Staggs countered: “Whoa! I think it hit Mac, too! Look at him, he’s on the

ground! ... Smoking!” Staggs bolted out the door to McKinney’s side, while McCarthy dialed 911 for help.

Steam and smoke rose in sheets off the stricken sergeant, and the smell of ozone and scorched flesh wafted through the air. For an instant, Staggs hesitated in rolling his friend over.



“He smelled charred and burnt inside, because steam had seared his throat.”

— Master Sgt. Gary Staggs

“I was afraid of what I might find,” said Staggs. “And I was right. He was a mess: Blood covered his face and oozed out his eyes and ears. He looked bad; I didn’t think he was going to make it.”

Within seconds, a swarm of students and instructors converged on McKinney, grabbing hold and hauling him inside while a torrent of rain pelted down and lightning crackled around them.

Master Sgt. Tony Cherry, a medic by trade, made a cursory exam of McKinney, but found neither a pulse nor respiration. The high-voltage jolt had short-circuited the sergeant’s heart, seizing it in his chest. Clinically, McKinney, the father of three with a set of twins on the way, was dead.

Cherry and Master Sgts. Dan Fischer and Steve Hyndman quickly began cardiopulmonary resuscitation on the ashen-faced McKinney, but not without some trepidation. That’s because McKinney reeked, and we’re not talking smoker’s breath either.

“He smelled charred and burnt inside,” Staggs said, “because steam had seared his throat.”

After a dozen or so compressions, the trio restarted Mac’s stalled heart; however, the beat faded in and out three times before striking up a solid, steady rhythm. Minutes later, emergency medical technicians arrived and whisked the sergeant away to the nearby Veteran’s Administration Medical Center in Albuquerque, where he was stabilized. Emergency room doctors later transferred him to the University of New Mexico Medical Center, where he remained unconscious and in critical condition for several days with third-degree burns over 33 percent of his body.

McKinney awoke from his coma two days later, remembering nothing of the strike or the hours leading up to it.

“I came to in the hospital and didn’t have a clue as to where I was or why I was there,” said the 33-year-old McKinney, who hails from Fremont, Neb. “All I knew was that everything was bandaged, I had tubes coming out of everywhere ... and I hurt.”

For two months, McKinney, usually a real live wire, stayed confined to bed, and then spent an additional six months on crutches. Unfortunately, the bolt’s aftershocks left him permanently hobbled; the shock caused severe nerve damage to his lower legs.

“I can barely feel my feet,” he said. “And what I do feel is constant pain.”

In December 1997, the Air Force medically retired McKinney because of his disabilities. Today, he manages a

delivery service in Albuquerque and still thinks often of the incident that nearly killed him.

“Some people say I’m lucky to be alive, but I don’t think I was very lucky to get hit,” McKinney said. “I am extremely fortunate, though, to have worked with such a group of fast-acting, quick-thinking people. I would’ve died out there if it weren’t for them. It just goes to show that all the self-aid and buddy care training we get in the Air Force pays off. I’m living proof.”

Today, McKinney is deathly afraid of lightning, and stays indoors at the first sight of a dark cloud. Says Mac, “It scares the hell out of me. What’s really spooky is now I can predict when a storm is within five miles — the hair on the back of my neck stands on end.”

In some ways, the bolt also served as cosmic electroshock therapy, enlightening McKinney and compelling him to make positive lifestyle changes.

“The whole ordeal has forced me to reprioritize my life,” he said. “I don’t sweat the small stuff anymore, and I focus my energy on more important things, like my family.”

And did McKinney get the message and stop smoking?

“Yeah, I eventually quit smoking,” McKinney said, with a twinkle in his eye. “And I gave up cigarettes, too.”

Death's Door Complacency can prove deadly in the hangar

By **LAWRENCE SIMEK**

Photo by **STEVE THUROW**

I remember reading an article that told of a sergeant crushing her head in a hangar door. The article said that her coworkers could do nothing but stand there and watch her die. It seemed unbelievable at the time. But almost a year later, I witnessed another sergeant do the same thing and fully understood how helpless her coworkers must have felt.

As with all mishaps, there's a chain of events that must occur to bring about tragedy. In this case, there were several. First, the door controls had been wired illogically — that is, the left switch moved the hangar door to the right, and the right switch moved the door to the left. The doors were being repainted, and tape and paper covered the outside switches. Also, the doors were open about one foot — a real no, no.

The sergeant needed to bring a crane into the hangar, so he asked the painters if he could open the door. When they said yes, he reached through the opened doors and hit the switch farthest from him. ...

He lived for another 15 agonizing minutes.

The human skull is sturdier than you would think. Huge hangar doors won't crush the skull — nature made it strong, and it flexes quite a lot. Unfortunately, the tissue under the skull, like the sinus cavities and temples, can't take this kind of pressure. When the sinuses rupture, it's impossible to stop the blood from flowing. Even if this

happens in an operating room with the best doctors, people bleed to death.

The fire department had to be called to wash away all the blood.

I now understand when historians write: "The streets were as a river of blood after the battle."

Everything happened so fast, I didn't have time to mourn initially. That lasted until a few days later when I went to get a condolence card for the victim's family.

As I looked for the best card, all I could think about was his wife and kids having to live without him, and his mother and father not being able to see their son anymore. I'm sure I was a sight, biting down on my hand as hard as I could to keep from crying out in anguish.

As with most mishaps, this one would have been avoided had the rules been followed. But it's easy to succumb to complacency. Maintenance troops see the signs warning that *hangar doors must be fully closed or opened not less than 10 feet*. But many ignore the warning and open the doors just enough to get through — especially when cold weather sets in and they want to keep in the heat.

As with most warnings, events have occurred in the past that led to the logic behind the warning. Hangar doors are definitely no exception.

For those who work around hangars and haven't applied the operational risk management formula to hangar doors, the process is long overdue. Take the time to talk about scenarios with hangar doors that might lead to an unnecessary hazardous risk. Formulate a plan that helps reduce these risks and, ultimately, may help prevent another mishap.

The bottom line is awareness and following the established safety guidelines.

The next time workers open a hangar door just enough to get a toolbox through, tell them for their own safety to follow the warning. As a supervisor, keep alert to the actions crew members. It's the little, seemingly unimportant things that can cause a lot of heartache and end with having to explain to families why they are now widows and orphans.

Don't let complacency be in your epitaph. ✕



An Airman's head was crushed by a hangar door that was not opened the proper distance. He died in the mishap.



During an attack demonstration, Arthur, an 87-pound German shepherd and a military working dog at Lackland AFB, Texas, takes down photojournalist Tech. Sgt. Matt Hannen, who finds himself on the wrong end of the camera.

Arthur Is King Photographer faces off with military attack dog

By Tech. Sgt. **MATTHEW HANNEN**
Photo by **TIM BARELA**

Arthur had a reputation for having a few screws loose. But I must have been crazier than him, because I taunted him into a tussle. I should have known better; Arthur also is known for having a short fuse. As he unleashed his fury upon me like a 300-pound defensive lineman blindsiding a helpless quarterback, I began to crumble to the ground and thought, “What did I get myself into?”

As my head bounced off the ground like a basketball, one thought penetrated the haze with crystal clarity: “I didn’t get myself into this; my evil editor did!”

Four weeks earlier he told me he wanted me to do a story on military working dog training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. I agreed.

Then, he added with an ornery twinkle in his eye, “Oh, by the way, I’d like you to let one of the dogs attack you (heh, heh, heh).”

You see, Arthur is an 87-pound German Shepard with 42 bone-crunching teeth and a bad attitude.

When my editor first informed me of my next writing and photo assignment, I thought he was joking. After all, we do work for a safety office. But, no, despite his cackling, he was quite serious. I’m starting to think he has a life insurance policy out on me.

Nevertheless, I saluted smartly and began to prepare for my mauling. After all, it was one more EPR bullet: “Performed in an outstanding fashion as puppy chow.”

The “attack Matt Hannen day” came like a mosquito diving for a meal. I met with Staff Sgt. Shawn Alexander, one of the dog trainers, and he handed me a rather bulky suit. The suit is nearly 3 inches thick and made of a sturdy synthetic fabric to protect you from the dog’s bite. When I put on the ensemble meant to turn me into a chew toy, I looked like the Michelin Man. And even on a comfortable 70-degree day, I roasted under the heavily padded garment.

Alexander and his team coached me on how to “survive” the brutal assault, and gave me a few safety tips: “Keep your hands inside the arms of the suit. Move with the dog to prevent pulling muscles or straining joints. Keep your arm out and your head back, because the dog will latch onto the first thing he sees.”

Safety briefings are always important. And for this one, in particular, I was all

ears. I especially took note of that tip to keep my unprotected head back ... no sense in getting my face chewed off.

Finally, the moment of truth.

Arthur didn’t seem to like me any better than my editor did. He sunk his teeth into my arm, and then my leg. Even with the protective suit, I could feel the nearly 500 pounds of pressure per square inch that Arthur’s mouth was reputed to deliver. Trapped in his vice, he proceeded to try to tear off my limbs.

As the trainers drug him off, I stood up and thought to myself, “Well, that wasn’t so bad.”

Then my editor, who, not surprisingly, had volunteered to shoot the photographs of my altercation with Arthur, said with relish, “OK, we’ll have to do this a few more times (heh, heh, heh).”

A half a dozen violent confrontations later, I had no doubts about the capability of a military working dog attack and suppression. Any thoughts of beginning a life of crime disappeared immediately with the first onslaught.

Soaked with sweat, exhausted, sore and sporting a throbbing headache, I sat down on a bench while the trainers helped me get out of my suit. They pulled the legs of the suit, and I shot off the bench and fell on my rear with a thud. My foggy brain could only make out one thing ... a familiar cackling rising through the din. 🐾

When four Airmen went bear hunting, little did they know that it would be them who'd be in a Fight for Life

By Capt. **DON LEWIS**
Photos by **DAVE NOLAN**

Floating down the river, the hunters suddenly spotted a black bear. Silently, they slipped out of the boat into icy 40-degree, knee-deep water and drug the vessel a little farther than the length of a football field. Then they beached the boat and began stalking the bear.

The bear caught their scent and scampered away. The hunters fired a few shots at their fleeing prey, but it managed to escape into the thick woods of the Alaskan wilderness.

The hunters turned around to head back to the boat when they saw the craft shift slightly. They started running.

Too late.

Their only link to civilization was floating down river and heading out to sea — along with all their supplies! And they didn't need the frosty breeze to remind them that nightfall would soon be upon them.

What was supposed to be an adventurous bear-hunting trip for four noncommissioned officers from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, nearly turned into a disaster after the hunters made a series of mistakes.

Master Sgt. Brian Alvarez, Staff Sgt. Bryan Spake and Staff Sgt. Bob Summers, 354th Communications Squadron, and Master Sgt. Sean Kazmar, 354th Security Forces Squadron, set out for Valdez, Alaska, April 28, hoping to return a week later with a trophy bear.

They were lucky to return at all.

Initially, the team carefully planned their trip, calculating what they needed versus what Summers' boat could carry to their camp site near Valdez, about 15 miles west of Columbia Glacier. But on April 30, 2000, two days after their trip started, things began to unravel.

At mid-afternoon, they sat down to eat. Anxious to pursue a bear they had seen on their way to camp, they quickly polished off their late lunch and set out



Four hunters fought for their lives when a black bear hunting trip in Alaska went terribly wrong.

in the boat. If they'd known what was to come, they may have taken more time to savor that meal.

Soon after the hunters started up the river, they spotted a black bear and quickly pulled to shore.

Spake jumped out of the boat. "I was going to go with him, and I knew I should have," Kazmar said. "But then I thought, 'He'll be fine.' [Big mistake!] You should never let anyone go out there alone."

Kazmar, Alvarez and Summers continued a few more miles up into a bay and spotted a second bear. That's when they dragged their boat through the water and beached it, convinced that it was secure with the bulk of it on the sandy shore (big mistake number two).

Kazmar and Alvarez began stalking the bear first, with Summers following shortly thereafter. He joined Alvarez and

Kazmar, who, by that time, had already shot at the fleeing bear.

That's when they turned and saw their lifeline dislodge and begin floating away.

"When we reached the beach, the boat was already about 100 yards away," Alvarez said. "The water was probably 40 degrees, which made the distance seem like miles. Still, I kept thinking I could make it."

Summers thought he could make it as well, but the memory of a recent cold-water drowning of one of his friends coursed through his veins.

"I needed to try, but the thought of my friend drowning was powerful," Summers said somberly.

The trio worked their way around the cove to a rocky ledge that allowed them to get within 40 yards of the drifting boat.

Already waist deep in the water, Summers tried to swim for it (mistake

number three). “My heels slammed against my butt and wouldn’t move — my hamstrings were cramped tight,” he said.

Summers barely made it back to the rocks using just arm power. Alvarez also made several attempts, but to no avail. They watched helplessly as the boat drifted toward sea and out of sight.

Soaked and shivering, they regrouped. They’d have to stay the night. But at least they had each other. Spake, on the other hand, was somewhere down river by himself with no clue as to what had happened to his partners.

Not much was said that night. They made good use of one of the few survival tools they had — waterproof matches — to light a fire. All three realized they were in real danger. Kazmar’s rifle had one remaining round, and the ample supply of bear sign made it a precious commodity. Later, he would contemplate using the lead tip of that bullet to try to write a note to his wife and kids.

Sleep came in fleeting 10-minute naps. “The following morning, when we got up, we knew we’d make it,” Summers said. “We made it through the night.”

One thought consumed them — find Spake. The terrain, though, proved to be daunting. Rocky, seaweed-covered shorelines, sheer cliffs, and deep snow provided no safe passage. At the end of the day (May 1), they found themselves exhausted only four miles from where they had begun.

Relentless rain dampened their spirits and their attempts at an effective fire that second night. Though they found plenty of water to drink in the spring run-off that flowed all around them, they hadn’t eaten all day.

On May 2, the third day since losing the boat, they were cold, tired and hungry. But the trio set out again to find their friend, taking turns urging each other on over the treacherous terrain.



With bear sign all around, the hunters had more to worry about than just being stranded in the wilderness.

That night, while camped beneath a big tree, they managed to set a roaring fire, which had just as much a positive psychological effect as it did physiological. And better yet, Alvarez made an important discovery.

“I found a bed of mussels on the shore,” he said. “When we threw them on the fire, they opened up, and we ate them. They were good.” They also heated and choked down an ample supply of seaweed, joking that it was Caesar salad.

Their spirits bolstered, they set out on the fourth day (May 3) and quickly realized the shoreline was taking them too long to get to Spake.

Kazmar’s rifle had one remaining round, and the ample supply of bear sign made it a precious commodity.

“We didn’t know how he was,” Kazmar said. That worry kept them going. They decided to climb a 1,600-foot mountain, sure that they’d be able to see their base camp, where they had stowed a rowboat.

The group scaled cliffs and traversed crevasses. Summers and Alvarez were wearing waders, which had worn badly. Summers’ feet swelled so much that at one point he had to stick them in snow to squeeze them back into his waders.

The day proved to be a trial. When they got to the top, they didn’t recognize the landscape beneath them at all.

“That was a punch to the gut,” Kazmar said gloomily.

Dejected, they made their way down the mountain to a soaked shoreline where they couldn’t get a fire going.

That fourth night was their low point. They had to resort to using skills they had learned in such training environments as Air Force Arctic Survival School.

“We had our feet in each other’s armpits to try to stay warm — anything to share body heat,” Kazmar said.

The next morning (May 4), they were sitting on a hillside warming themselves in the first real sunshine they’d seen since the beginning of their ordeal.

“We were planning for the long haul,” Alvarez said. “We were talking about building a cabin.”

Then a plane flew overhead without any acknowledgment of their attempts to signal it.

That did it!

They decided to build a signal fire — a big one! Setting a good blaze near a stand of trees, they watched as the trees accepted the flames one by one. Soon, a good portion of the hillside was on fire. The three sat nearby and waited, knowing the hillside would burn until it reached the snowline, and that any nearby boats or planes would be sure to see the smoke.

Soon, thereafter, Alvarez saw a boat driven by Fred and Judy Millbocker of Anchorage. Elated, they hailed their rescuers and set out to find Spake. It didn’t take long before they spotted his “S.O.S.” signal spelled out in logs on the shore near where they dropped him off. Then with great relief, they saw Spake himself, waving them down.

Spake had waited the first night until well after dark for his friends to return, staying warm by running up and down the beach. The next day, he saw Summers’ boat drift by with no one aboard and no apparent damage.

Knowing something was wrong, he built a small shelter and settled in. He managed to shoot a deer and fed on it while he waited for rescue.

More importantly, he stayed put where passing aircraft or watercraft could spot him and where he knew his friends would look for him — if they were still alive.

Summers’ boat was found and towed in by a local fisherman. Though it cost him some money to recover it and his gear, it was relatively unscathed, with the exception of a few minor scrapes.

The men have since regained the weight each lost during their ordeal. They also learned a harsh lesson about getting complacent, letting their guard down and taking the wilderness and Mother Nature for granted.

“I know I’ll never again go 10 feet into the woods without everything I need to survive in there for a long time,” Kazmar said.

Added Summers, “I’ve been out in the bush more times than I can count. I thought I was bigger than Alaska. ... I don’t think that anymore.”

Charles in Charge

His home destroyed and most of his family's personal belongings ruined, Tech. Sgt. Chuck Fouch still managed to save one thing from the devastating fire ... a life

By **TIM BARELA**

Digital composite by **DAVID STACK**

Frantic, blood-curdling screams rang in his ears as if he were trapped in a horror movie.

Twice, Chuck Fouch desperately had tried to climb the stairwell to the burning apartment building to attempt to save the woman trapped within the inferno. Twice, billowing black smoke had turned him back, as impregnable as a fortress.

Each time, the thick smoke sent him stumbling onto the lawn, hacking, coughing and gasping for air. The last time, he had to retreat some 20 feet from the building. It's a good thing, too. For as he took big gulps of fresh air to replace the smoke burning his lungs, there was an explosion inside the building that blew out the windows, and flames and debris shot out some 15 feet. Had he still been near the building, he would have been skewered and fricasseed.

Somberly, he thought, "That's it. There's no way anyone could have survived that."

Miraculously, though, the woman shrieked again, this time a low, gurgling scream.

Chuck turned and looked back at his wife Mona who sat in the parking lot with their four children safely tucked away in their van. Their eyes met. Then, as his wife and children watched, Chuck turned and disappeared into the smoke. ...

For the events that transpired after he braved the inferno, "Chuck" — Tech. Sgt. Charles L. Fouch III — earned the 2001 Pitsenbarger Award, an annual Air Force Sergeants Association honor that recognizes an Air Force enlisted member for heroic acts that save a life. He received the award Aug. 22, 2001, at AFSA's



The Fouch family barely managed to escape an apartment fire in Wichita Falls, Texas.

annual convention in St. Louis.

Fouch, an aerospace propulsion technician instructor from the 361st Training Squadron at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, risked his life and ignored his own serious injuries to rescue a neighbor trapped in a burning apartment complex.

On May 20, 2000, Fouch awoke with a start to a strange tapping at his bedroom window (he'd later say "it was angels" rapping on the panes). He looked at the clock: 3:45 a.m. As his sleepy eyes focused, he saw a strange orange glow seeping through the shutters.

"When I opened the shutters, I saw

a fire raging in the apartment stairwell across from mine," he said. "This was no water sprinkler or extinguisher fire. It was huge!"

The roaring blaze threw sparks and debris at the Fouch's apartment window.

Chuck and Mona quickly evacuated their four children.

After seeing his family safely away from the flames, Fouch called 911. Then he started shouting, trying to wake people and tell them to get out. Fire already had engulfed the front of some apartments, so residents had to escape out of back windows. One couple had to drop their

baby boy out of a window. Fortunately, the infant survived unscathed. Another occupant had to tackle and restrain a man who tried to go back into his apartment to save his two dogs. The dogs perished.

"It was chaotic, but a few of us still tried to account for everyone," the 36-year-old Fouch said.

Just when it appeared everyone had made it safely out, the Airman heard the shrill screams.

"She was on the second floor above my apartment," he said.

Her teenage daughter had made it out, but apparently the woman had tripped over a piece of furniture while trying to make her way blindly through the smoke, Fouch explained.

"Two neighbors and I tried to get to her twice, but each time we were overcome by heat and smoke inhalation," he said.

On one of the failed attempts, a small break appeared in the rolling smoke for just a split second. In that instant, his eyes met those of the victim. She had managed to crawl to the stairwell landing between the two floors. But as quick as that glimpse came, the deadly smoke "swallowed" her up again and sent Chuck reeling.

"I just couldn't breathe," he said of his desperate attempts to get to the woman.

Finally, after the heat grew so intense that it blew out the apartment windows, Fouch made a third and final attempt.

"The woman somehow survived the fire, the smoke, the explosion ... but by the tone of her last screams, I knew she was dying," he said. "I looked back at my wife, and then for a moment, I don't remember a thing."

His wife does.

"Chuck looked at me, then he disappeared into the smoke," Mona said. "I'm confused and shaken, and I'm thinking, 'Why's he not coming to us?' It seemed like he was in there forever. It was long enough that our 8-year-old son [Dominic] asked me, 'Is Daddy coming back out?' I said, 'Of course he is!'"

But inside, she wasn't so sure.

Meanwhile Fouch made it to the stairwell landing.

"I didn't recall how I'd gotten there," he said. "The last thing I remembered was looking back at my wife. Then I'm on the breezeway in blinding smoke, and my shins are hitting something."

Suddenly, he realized it was the wounded woman.

He tried to grab her, but her skin and nightgown had melted, making her too slippery to grip.

"So I scooped her up in my arms and headed down the stairs," he said.

On the second or third step, Fouch's right foot slipped and went sideways between the steps. He was trapped.

"At that point I kind of panicked," he said. "I jerked my leg hard a bunch of times to get free."

His frantic pulls were so intense that he shredded the tendons in his ankle and the ligaments in his knee.

"Then I calmed myself down so I could think straight," he said. "Once I did that, I rotated the foot and freed myself."

On the last step, he lost his balance once again. His right hand reached out to brace himself against the wall. Unfortunately, he ended up grabbing a piping hot metal mailbox that left third-degree burns on his hand.

"That certainly woke me up, but it did keep me from falling," he said.

Finally, he reappeared from the smoke with his neighbor in his arms. Others tended to the woman while Fouch staggered to the lawn and collapsed.

"I saw him fall," Mona said, "but then he got up and came over to us. He said he needed to go to the emergency room."

Meanwhile, paramedics and the fire department arrived.

"I thought, 'Finally!' Fouch said. "But in actuality only six minutes elapsed from the time I called 911. It seemed like an eternity — a lot happened in that six minutes."

A lot indeed. The complex, which had eight apartments, was all but destroyed. Six apartments were gutted. After smoke, heat and water damage, the other two may as well have been.

The woman, who turned out to be the wife of an Air Force major (her name is being withheld to protect her privacy),



Reminiscing on the rescue with his grandma, Tech. Sgt. Chuck Fouch visits the rebuilt apartment and the stairwell where he found the burn victim.

suffered burns to 70 percent of her body. That was externally. Internally, she was even worse off. After treatment in a burn center, multiple surgeries and months of physical therapy, she still was recovering from her wounds.

Fouch doesn't consider himself a hero, but the people of Wichita Falls and Sheppard AFB certainly do.

"Sergeant Fouch is a [noncommissioned officer] who's well grounded in his moral principles," said Lt. Col. Wayne Styles, 361st TRS commander. "He's always doing what's right, no matter the situation. In this case, he made a courageous decision at a critical point and saved someone's life."

Fouch, though, credits the rescue as a miracle from God.

"Let's review the facts," he said.

"I didn't make the decision to go into the burning building — I didn't even remember how I got there. It was so hot, the mesh on my boots melted, but I don't remember struggling with the heat. The smoke was so thick, I couldn't see the victim; yet, I didn't struggle to breathe. I hurt my leg bad enough to be on crutches, but I still managed to carry a woman down stairs and out of a burning building. And let's not forget the 'angels' tapping at my window to wake me up.

"We were lucky more people weren't seriously injured."

Fouch says he learned a lot of lessons from this ordeal.

"Don't hesitate to evacuate," he said. "I believed my family and I had plenty of time to get out of our apartment. But less than three minutes later, flames engulfed 80 percent of the complex."

He also said people should keep their escape routes free of furniture or other obstacles that could cause them to trip in a low-visibility, confusing environment. No coffee or end tables should obstruct exits. ... This is believed to be what hampered the victim's escape, he said.

Additionally, Fouch discovered that it's smoke inhalation that actually kills most people and caused most of the victim's life-threatening injuries. Many of the items fire burns produce toxic fumes, so fire safety officials recommend people cover their face with a wet towel and keep low since smoke rises.

These days, the Airman also pays extra attention to what's plugged into his outlets.

"Don't overload electrical wiring," Fouch said. "Overheated electrical wire is believed to be the cause of the fire."

And one final piece of advice:

"It's stupid to go back into a burning building," Fouch said. "Even though that's what I did, I don't recommend it." ❁



The Devilled Egg Made Him Do It

Never trust a devilled egg. A 28-year-old civilian employee was busy preparing devilled eggs in the officers' club kitchen. While shelling the hardboiled eggs, parts of the egg and shell fell on the floor. The worker finished shelling the eggs and picked up what he thought was all the egg from the floor. But he had "counted his chickens before they hatched."

He turned to walk away from the table when his foot slipped on a piece of the evil egg.

The would-be chef attempted to catch himself but was unsuccessful. He fell hard, injuring his right leg. Immediately following the accident, the worker was rushed to the clinic. He suffered a muscle strain and a torn meniscus in his knee that required surgery.

But the devilled egg's work wasn't done. The employee spent 36 days on quarters, and the injury ran a tab of \$12,600! Talk about egg on your face.

Bear Bait

A 25-year-old man was supposed to meet some friends in the Colorado Rocky Mountains to go on an elk hunting trip. He was going to be late getting up there, so on the way he bought a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken that could feed him and his buddies after the day's hunt.

When he arrived at the site, he donned all his hunting gear, grabbed his rifle and set out to find his friends and to stalk elk.

When the hunting party returned later that evening, the man noticed the rear and a side window to his sport utility vehicle had been smashed in, and there were dents and scratches along the back and side of the vehicle.

It turns out, a black bear sniffed out the KFC and couldn't resist it. He mauled the vehicle inside and out, to include tearing up the vehicle's leather upholstery as he clawed his way to the yummy drumsticks.



The forest ranger later told the man that bears would be able to smell a bucket of KFC from 20 miles away, and the temptation would be irresistible to them. It was the perfect bear bait.

Too bad it didn't work on the elk.

Over the Top

Remember Sylvester Stallone in the arm-wrestling movie "Over the Top"? Well, an airman first class attempted his own version of this "ultimate test of manhood" with not nearly the same triumphant result.

In the midst of a heated arm wrestling match, the Airman seemed about to prove his dominance, using his right arm to advance his opponent's arm toward the table. But while gaining leverage, things went awry.

The Airman's limb snapped like a twig, fracturing his forearm.

In excruciating pain, he was transported to a local hospital, where he underwent surgery. During his recovery, he lost nine workdays — five in the hospital and four on quarters — and it cost thousands of dollars to fix the mangled arm.

Now that's a script Sly probably would have rejected.

Wrapped Up in His Work

A civil engineering ground maintenance team received a work order to replace a base perimeter fence. The job called for the team to stretch the fence in 100-foot pieces, and then affix it to the posts. To do this, they used a nylon strap, attaching one end to the fence and the other to a bulldozer.

Unfortunately for a 43-year-old Air Force civilian worker, he was working on the fence when somebody lowered the bucket of the bulldozer, which severed the strap as easily as cutting through Scotch tape and sent the fence rolling back like a giant slinky. The fence wrapped around the worker and sent him flying off a 4-foot wall onto the street. Luckily, there wasn't any traffic at the time. However, when the man struck the asphalt, his coworkers had to untangle him from the persistent grip of the fence.

An ambulance took him to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with bruises across his entire chest, along with smaller scrapes and bruises smattered at various points across the rest of his body.

After getting so wrapped up in his work, he spent the next four days at home.

Dating Tips

Dating tip number 1: *When letting a young lady into your vehicle, ensure you secure the door before driving off.*

An Airman was on his first date with a stunning brunette. He drove an old pickup truck, but the young lady didn't seem to mind. Trying to be a gentleman, the Airman opened the passenger door for his date, let her get in, then shut the door. The problem? Doors on old trucks sometimes take some extra muscle to shut tightly. Unfortunately, unknowing to either party, the door didn't secure.

Dating tip number 2: *Always ensure your date buckles up.*

The young lady made the next mistake on her own. Not wanting to wrinkle her dress, she didn't put on her seat belt. The drive and the conversation went well, until they came to a sharp turn in the road. Perhaps distracted by his date's beauty, the Airman took the corner a bit too fast.

Dating tip number 3: *Don't let your date's first "kiss" be with the pavement.*

The passenger door flew open, and the passenger flew out. The distraught Airman slammed his brakes and ran to the woman's aid. Miraculously, the young lady only sustained some minor scrapes, bruises ... and a tattered, wrinkled dress.

Just the same, she didn't give the Airman a second date.

Falling in Love

A 21-year-old senior airman sat on the top railing of a house deck waiting for her sweetheart. This top edge railing was made from a 2-by-6 piece of lumber and was about five feet above the ground.

While sitting facing the house, her boyfriend walked up to her to embrace her. However, the clumsy companion's bodyweight and momentum caused her to lean backward.

She and her boyfriend lost their balance and fell off the deck.

She landed on her back on sandy soil and shrubbery. Her sweetheart faired better. He cushioned his fall by landing on top of her.

The Airman suffered muscle spasms in her neck and back. Her next "date" was with a chiropractor.

Nailed It!

You probably don't have a lot of reasons to smile when you have a nail embedded in your nose, but one firefighter has reason to be happy.

He and his unit were training on a rooftop prop. The mishap fireman cut the rafters with a chainsaw when he hit a nail that must have been lodged only loosely in the sheeting.

In full personal protective gear with eye protection, the fireman felt the nail slide by the goggles and embed itself a half inch into the bridge of his nose ... right between the eyes.

Without safety goggles, the nail would have struck his eye.

After rushing him to the hospital, X-rays showed the nail penetrated the bone, fracturing it. Luckily, there were no other problems. The nail was removed, and the fireman sent home. He worked the next day ... eyes intact.

Incidents like these should make you ask yourself before starting any home or work project, "What personal protective gear should I be wearing?"

These short stories on pages 24 and 25 were written and compiled by Tim Barela from interviews, as well as command, Air Force and civilian safety and newswire reports.

Curiosity KO'd the Captain

A captain was injured in a softball game because he took the advice "keep your eye on the ball" a little too seriously.

Well, it seems his team was at bat, and he was on first. His teammate hit the ball.

The captain took off like a rabbit to second base, as the first baseman fielded the ground ball.

It looked as though the base runner was clearly going to make it to second, but he couldn't stand the suspense. He looked back to see if the ball was coming.

It was.

The softball hit the captain in the face causing a contusion to his eye and proving the term softball is relative.



Don't Drink It!

An 18-year-old boy asked his 10-year-old brother to hold his soda pop while the teen played a game of basketball with his friends. Of course, the teen gave his little brother strict instructions before he took to the court: "Don't drink it!"

Some of you might remember a similar commercial on TV, but this real-life incident turned out a little differently than the TV ad version.

While keeping a wary eye on his older and stronger sibling, the 10-year-old kept stealing gulps of the refreshing drink whenever his brother wasn't looking. Had his attention not been on

his brother, the youngster might have noticed the small swarm of bees buzzing around the soda can. About three of them made their way inside the can, attracted to the sweet "nectar" inside.

Shortly thereafter, the 10-year-old got more than he bargained for as he took another big swig. He swallowed a couple of the bees, which promptly stung him inside his throat and stomach. It didn't help that he was allergic to bees.

The boy had to be rushed to the hospital, in severe pain and having difficulty breathing. He recovered under a doctor's care.

He also learned a valuable lesson about opposing an older brother that a dozen "noogies" never would have accomplished.



Out of the Woods

After blacking out in a fighter aircraft dogfight and nearly having his limbs ripped off in a 730-mph ejection, an F-15 Eagle pilot began a long struggle to regain his health and return to the cockpit

By **TIM BARELA**

Photos by Master Sgt. **ANDY DUNAWAY**

"In the woods" is an expression fighter pilots sometimes use when they are in trouble. If F-15 Eagle pilot Capt. Jon Counsell had been any farther in the woods, he'd have been tree bark.

On May 5, 1994, he survived one of the fastest ejections ever recorded. Unfortunately, bailing out at 730 mph, the wind forces nearly ripped his limbs off, threatening his life and his flying career.

Earlier that day, Counsell noted that he was a few check rides shy of realizing a dream he boldly stated when he was 12 years old and still diggin' potatoes and thrashin' wheat at his parents' farm in Moses Lake, Wash.: "I'm gonna be a fighter pilot!"

Those weren't just words. He took flying lessons when he was 15, and on his 16th birthday, he flew solo for the first time. After his solo flight, he went to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get his driver's license.

"So I could legally fly a plane by myself, before I could legally drive a car by myself," he said.

Counsell followed that up by earning distinguished graduate recognition in the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Central Washington University. Later he graduated first in his class at the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training program at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. That honor enabled him to handpick the aircraft he would strap into for the next several years. He chose the F-15, an aggressive jet that fit his personality to a T.

By the time the day of his mishap rolled around, Counsell was at Tyndall

AFB, Fla., learning to fly the Eagle in the six-month, highly intense F-15 training course. He was just two weeks from being a full-fledged, card-carrying fighter jock. But first he had to pass a test straight out of a scene from *Top Gun*. He had to engage in a one-on-one dogfight against an instructor pilot. The Air Force calls it basic fighter maneuvers. But that's a pretty tame moniker for something that can peel your eyelids back and steal enough oxygen from your brain to knock you out quicker than an Iron Mike Tyson uppercut.

It's a roller coaster ride on steroids.

Both nervous and exhilarated, Counsell, who was 25 and cocksure, secretly hoped he could gun his instructor, whose call sign was "Spitter." But he would settle for a good showing with no major mistakes.

Once in the air, the pilots went through a series of maneuvers that made pro football running back Barry Sander's catlike moves appear super slow-mo in comparison. With his more experienced instructor pilot holding nothing back at this stage of training, Counsell's ego and hopes of gunning Spitter were seemingly singed with the first thrust of the afterburners. Spitter made short work of his student four straight times. In this dogfight, Spitter appeared to be a ferocious pit bull picking on a Chihuahua.

"I was getting my butt kicked," said Counsell, the frustration evident in his hazel eyes.

On the first four encounters, Spitter simulated being a bandit 6,000 feet back and locked onto Counsell's jet. Counsell's job was to survive the initial threat and then lose the enemy, either bugging out to fight another day or shooting him down if the bandit made a big enough mistake. Since it wasn't going well for the young upstart, Spitter suggested Counsell assume the role of the bandit. This way



Capt. Jon Counsell, shown here at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, in 2000, considers himself "out of the woods" after surviving a high-speed ejection in an F-15. He blames himself for the mishap.

the instructor pilot could demonstrate the maneuver that would help his student survive future engagements.

They started the fifth dogfight at 20,000 feet with Counsell in hot pursuit. But as suddenly as it began, it was over. During an unexpectedly hard turn, pulling nearly eight Gs, Counsell blacked out.

That's when May 5 became a date Jon Counsell will never forget, even though he will probably never remember the events of the day.

Counsell had passed out in what is known as G-induced loss of consciousness. Gs are gravitational forces experienced on a pilot's body as he makes high-speed turns. At eight Gs, Counsell's 6-foot-2-inch, 200-pound frame would endure forces equivalent to 1,600 pounds — roughly the weight of an adolescent African elephant.

Out for 23 seconds, Counsell awoke disoriented, with his Eagle heading toward the ocean at 730 mph. That's

faster than some rifle bullets! He was rapidly approaching the 10,000-foot altitude where pilots have to make the tough decision to bail out of an out of control aircraft.

Counsell pulled the ejection handle. Then a few seconds of hell.

He catapulted into a granite hard slipstream, with wind speeds three times stronger than those in a tornado ripping at his body. The wind tore his helmet from his head like an angry linebacker, then nearly ripped off his limbs.

His lower right leg folded over his shoulder, shredding three ligaments in his right knee. The violent force also yanked his left leg to the same side as his right, where it first hit a brace on the seat, fracturing the shinbone and the fibula in five places. His lower left leg then folded up toward his right shoulder, tearing three ligaments in that knee as well. His left arm, which he had used to pull the ejection handle, flailed around the back of the seat, hitting the oxygen bottle and breaking two bones in his forearm. His shoulder also dislocated, chipping part of the shoulder joint.

“Believe it or not, I was lucky,” he said. “Had my left leg blown to the other side, I would have been pulled apart like a wishbone.”

While his \$40 million jet crashed into the Gulf of Mexico like a giant harpoon, Counsell’s broken body floated down into the water on the end of a parachute.

He had been in the gulf for two hours when a Pave Low helicopter from the 20th Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla., arrived with pararescue swimmers. What they found must have seemed ghoulish. Counsell’s face was so battered and swollen, he couldn’t see. He’d been bleeding into the shark-infested waters, and complained bitterly of the salt water stinging his wounds. His legs dangled uselessly, like a puppet without strings. His left foot faced the wrong direction.

When he reached the hospital at Eglin AFB, Fla., doctors rushed him into the emergency room to stabilize him. After that, he was flown via C-130 to Keesler Medical Center at Keesler AFB, Miss. Doctors there attempted to put Counsell’s limbs back together again, but they were about as optimistic as all the king’s horses and all the king’s men. Humpty Dumpty would have been an easier fix.

Initial prognosis? The pilot probably would never walk again. And there was a good chance his mangled left leg would have to be amputated.

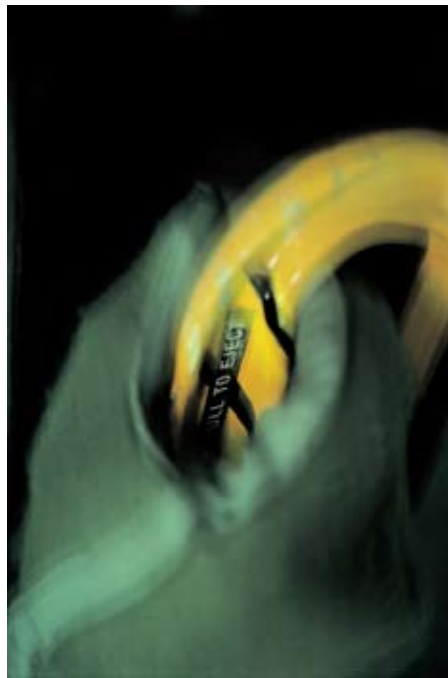
Because of a nasty concussion and the trauma involved in such a disaster,

Counsell actually doesn’t remember five days of his life — two days prior to the accident and three days after that.

“I guess that’s your body’s defense mechanism. I should probably be grateful that I can’t remember,” he said, though he admits he’s still curious. “Heck, I could have won the lottery the day before the accident, and I’d never know it.”

What Counsell does know is that the accident was his fault. He didn’t prepare well enough for the G maneuver by properly using his anti-G straining maneuver, a muscle-tightening technique used to help the heart keep blood flowing to the brain. Fatigue also played a part, after flying four intense encounters prior to the mishap.

Counsell pulled the ejection handle. Then a few seconds of hell.



Another factor that may have contributed is he inexplicably forgot to zip his G-suit “comfort zippers” along the thighs. The G-suit helps force the blood from the lower body to the chest, so the heart can pump it to the brain, keeping an adequate supply of oxygen there for flying such maneuvers.

“I failed, the airplane didn’t,” Counsell says matter-of-factly. “You can’t hold eight Gs for long — especially if you don’t prepare properly.”

In comparison, the bottom of the first hill on a roller coaster — the one that sends riders screaming at the top of their lungs and holding on for dear life — never pulls more than about two and a half Gs. Imagine a ride three times as intense.

“At eight Gs, your head gets very heavy, and it’s difficult to turn or move your arms and legs,” Counsell explained. “The heart can’t pump at a high enough pressure to keep an adequate supply of blood in the brain.” The G-suit helps, but a proper anti-G straining maneuver is key. This tightening of the muscles forces the blood out of the lower body to the chest. Pilots also take rapid, deep breaths of air, which take up more room in the body and help increase blood pressure. All this gives the heart the ability to pump blood to the brain and keep pilots conscious.

“On the positive side, knowing I’d messed up made my resolve to recover even stronger,” he said. “I had some things to prove to myself and others.”

When doctors told Counsell he might never walk again, he responded like Christopher Columbus’s countrymen when the explorer tried to convince them the world was round. Not only did Counsell not even consider being confined to a wheelchair a possibility, he made another proclamation as bold as the one that 12-year-old boy had made so many years before:

“I will fly in the F-15 again.”

But it wasn’t enough to say it.

Counsell had so many wounds that when it was all said and done, his body told the story with 39 scars — nine of which were 6 inches or longer. He had more screws, rods, plates and staples than the Tinman. They held together both legs, with similar devices in this left forearm and shoulder. There wasn’t much chance of him going through airport security without sending the metal detectors into a frenzy.

Additionally, for several months his left leg just wasn’t getting any better. The broken bones weren’t healing, and doctors feared a bone infection would soon set in. If that happened, they would have to take the leg.

That’s when surgeons decided to remove some bone from Counsell’s hip, pulverize it and make a cement-type paste that would hopefully help fuse the bones back together.

It was a long shot, but it was better than the alternative. Doctors performed the operation, and within weeks the leg finally showed its first signs of mending. (Although, to this day, his left leg is a quarter-inch shorter than his right and

“It took me three years, one month, four days and six hours to return to the Eagle.”

doesn't touch the ground when he stands at attention.)

It took three months for Counsell to graduate from a wheelchair to crutches.

“It was a big day to get rid of the wheelchair,” he said with a grin. “It had been symbolic of not walking again, so it was a big mental boost to leave that albatross behind.”

Once Counsell was on crutches, there was no holding him back. As a matter of fact, when doctors finally removed his casts, they found them full of hay and dirt. “I cheated,” he said, smiling sheepishly. Unable to keep the restless fighter pilot down, he had been working in the potato and hay fields on the family farm where he was supposed to be recuperating.

Over the next two years, Counsell went through nine major surgeries. Surprisingly, though, none of them bothered him so much as getting his wisdom teeth pulled.

“That was by far the most painful,” he said, wincing at the thought.

Counsell's medical records are now thicker than a New York City phone book.

Looking at the severity of his injuries, Air Force officials wanted to medically retire the captain. But they didn't know him very well. He wasn't about to give up his commission without a fight. With some help from friends in high places, Counsell managed to get a temporary job at Fairchild AFB, Wash., as a tanker refueling planner. He worked there from January 1995 to January 1997 while he continued to struggle through physical therapy, and his body continued its miraculous recovery.

“The facts were against me ever getting into a cockpit again,” Counsell said. “No one very smart would have bet on me to get back in the Eagle.”

But he believed he could do it.

So he surrounded himself by aggressive doctors and other people who felt he had a chance. His reconstructed

knees and shoulder, though, didn't prove to be the biggest obstacles to him getting back in a fighter jet.

“Actually, the fact that I suffered amnesia for five days was my worst enemy,” he said. “I'd had a head injury, and that concerns medical boards more than anything.”

When the results came back, the docs determined that Counsell would eventually be fit to fly, news that had him soaring without an airplane.

On Jan. 22, 1997, two and a half years after the accident that nearly snatched his arms and legs from his body, Counsell flew a T-38 at Randolph AFB, Texas. After passing muster at Randolph, Counsell traveled to Sheppard, where he went back through the intro to fighter fundamentals. There he flew the AT-38. Then in June 1997, he returned to Tyndall.

On June 9, 1997, Counsell settled into the cockpit of an F-15, as giddy as a kid at Christmas.

“It took me three years, one month, four days and six hours to return to the Eagle,” said Counsell, who could also probably break it down in minutes and seconds, such was his anticipation.

“I wanted to fly well,” he added. “I wanted to prove to everyone and to myself that I could do this.”

He did that and more. He had to take

a physical training test, a new standard for all incoming high-performance aircraft fighter pilots that includes sit-ups, pushups and weight room tests.

“I was the only one in my class to max the test,” he said with satisfaction. “After all my physical therapy, I was in the best shape of my life.”

After graduating from the F-15 school, Counsell received his first operational fighter pilot job at the 3rd Wing, Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. With a newfound interest in flying safe and seeing others do the same, he volunteered to be the wing's flight safety officer.

“That's why I don't mind sharing my story if it helps someone else avoid the same fate or worse,” he said.

At Elmendorf, Counsell thrived as both a pilot and a safety officer, not to mention as a husband to his wife Marianne, and father to their two young daughters, Kailey and Kodie.

To his great relief, he also returned to a full physical lifestyle that included kayaking, skiing, fishing, hiking, biking, rollerblading and other sweat-inducing activities that sway a lot of people with two healthier legs to opt for the La-Z-Boy recliner and TV remote.

But as much as Counsell enjoyed the Alaskan wilderness, he has to admit: As a pilot, he's glad to be “out of the woods.”



Counsell showed true grit as he beat all odds, recovering from his injuries enough to get back into the cockpit of an F-15.

The 13th Student

Conquering 'Cool School'

By Tech. Sgt. **MATTHEW HANNEN**

Photo by Senior Airman **RACHEL WALTERS**

"The Cool School" sure is a catchy moniker for the Arctic Survival School at Eileson Air Force Base, Alaska. But after spending a week with the instructors and 12 students (they affectionately called me the 13th student), I respectfully request a more fitting nickname ... "Freezing My Butt Off U."

With temperatures that dipped as low as -10 degrees Fahrenheit, well below freezing, it was weather more suitable for penguins and polar bears, not photojournalists from cozy San Antonio. Even my camera gear didn't like the cold temps. It froze up under the stress of the extreme climate.

And when the warmth of my breath combined with the icy air to cruelly freeze the metal part of my camera to my face, I knew I was in trouble. Luckily I peeled the camera off before it did any real damage (not that it would make much difference to my mug).

While going to the North Pole less than a month away from Christmas might have made my 4-year-old daughter jealous, it didn't take me long to figure out why even Santa Claus doesn't hang around there during the holidays. Heck, if I was that cold all the time, I'd be looking for any excuse to fly my reindeer to such locations as Miami or Honolulu to deliver presents, too. Not to mention my daughter probably wouldn't have been quite so envious if she'd been forced to eat the "Easter Bunny," like I had to do.

Then, don't even get me started on the mini-avalanche that fell from a treetop right on the crown of my noggin while I was shooting a photo. The icy fingers of the snow sent a chill down my spine. As I stood there like a not-so-cheerful Frosty the Snowman, at least for a moment I made the students forget how cold they were as they laughed uncontrollably at my plight.

When I wasn't fending off an avalanche, I did my best to keep the frost off of my glasses. It was already tough enough to see, as the sun barely pokes at this northern country in December.

Handling my camera in the elements also made my fingers numb. As they thawed, it felt as though a thousand tiny needles pierced them repeatedly.



At temperatures below zero, Tech. Sgt. Matt Hannen might have gotten his wires crossed. This isn't the same "Cool School" the Fonz attended.

All I really wanted to do was cling to the fire so I could stay warm.

I'd actually been to Arctic Survival School back in 2004. That experience served me well on this photo shoot. I drank plenty of water to stay hydrated. I layered clothes and monitored my activity so I wouldn't sweat, because sweat freezes and I had no intention of turning into a human Popsicle. I also

wore a pair of wool gloves to ensure my fingers didn't stick to the metal camera, and took care of all my extremities to prevent frostbite.

As all of my Cool School training started coming back to me and I put it to good use, I had to smile even as I shivered. ...

I'd never been so happy to have been an alumnus of "Freeze My Butt Off U." ❄️



“Your crew is looking at you and can detect immediately if you are losing confidence in yourself or are getting frightened. Getting scared is not the solution — fixing whatever is concerning you is.”

— Col. John W. Blumentritt
AETC Director of Safety



RESCUE FROM THE SKY

By Staff Sgt. MADELYN ALVAREZ / Photo by Tech. Sgt. JUSTIN PYLE

Inside the cockpit of an Air Force HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter, an instructor pilot prepares to teach air refueling and formation techniques to a new rescue helicopter pilot at the 56th Rescue Squadron, Keflavik Naval Air Station, on the west coast of Iceland.

Using the flight crew checklist, the young captain checks the flight controls, programs the navigation system and ensures all the hydraulic systems work. However, before he gets a chance to tune the radio, a mechanic runs up to the helicopter and asks him to immediately contact the command and control agency.

Capt. John Blumentritt's heart rate quickens. He knows something is wrong.

Blumentritt, now a colonel and the director of safety for Air Education and Training Command at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, was about to embark on one of the most memorable and harrowing rescue operations of his career. Two helicopter crews rescued six men stranded on a tugboat off the east coast of Iceland during a winter storm Jan. 10, 1994.

On the day of the rescue, the temperature was about 34 degrees, and a ferocious storm with winds up to 60 mph was roaring in from Scotland.

"On the way to the site, we watched as an Icelandic coast guard helicopter gave up and turned back," Blumentritt said. "I knew our HH-60G Pave Hawks had better anti-icing equipment than their helicopter, and I also knew the capabilities of my crew. I told them frankly, honestly and confidently that I felt we could do this, but I wanted their input. No one on my crew had any reservations."

Blumentritt's helicopter reached the tugboat Godinn, or "The God," first. As the Pave Hawk swooped over the wreck, four desperate faces looked up while another two men remained limp. The son-in-law of the boat's captain had been killed after being thrown overboard by breaking waves.

Knowing a life had already been taken, and fearing the 20-hour arctic night and smashing waves would soon claim the others, made the situation even more serious for the Air Force crew. The remaining survivors clung to the top of the smashed vessel, where they had lashed themselves to the mast. Blumentritt plucked four of them off and flew to a nearby beach while the last two survivors were picked up by the second helicopter.

Blumentritt and his team tried to fly home, but snow, ice and darkness forced them to land on a tiny parking lot in a coastal village where they called an ambulance. Two critically ill men were whisked away to a hospital where they recovered.

During the rescue mission, Blumentritt said he was so busy he didn't have time to be scared. "Your crew is looking at you and can detect immediately if you are losing confidence in yourself or are getting frightened," he said. "Getting scared is not the solution — fixing whatever is concerning you is."

The entire operation took eight hours. After it was over, Blumentritt said he was very proud of his crewmembers.

"I knew I had pushed myself, my aircraft and my crew to the limit," he said. "I also knew I could not have done this alone, and I felt very glad they all worked together as a team to make this rescue mission happen."

For their heroic efforts, Blumentritt and the other rescuers earned major awards from the Air Force and the Icelandic government for bravery and airmanship, to include the MacKay Trophy for the most meritorious Air Force flight of the year. They also were featured in the February 1999 issue of *Reader's Digest*, and author Ottar Sveinsson captured the dramatic story in a book titled *Impossible Rescues*.

"I am very proud of John," said his wife Darlene, who met the survivors and their families two weeks after the ordeal at an appreciation dinner hosted by the Icelandic foreign minister. "Throughout his career, he has been involved in many rescues, and each one has been very important. I think the big rescue mission in Iceland was the most significant because so many lives were at stake with so many hazards involved."

Another young lady also was appreciative of Blumentritt's career choice. Marla, the 11-year-old daughter of Sigmar Bjorgvinsson, one of the men Blumentritt rescued, wrote a card thanking the helicopter pilot for saving her daddy's life.

This story was reprinted from the April 1999 issue of *Leader Magazine* Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.

HUDSON RIVER HERO

'SULLY' SAVES 155 LIVES IN WATERY CRASH LANDING

By LEWIS CARLYLE

On a cold Jan. 15 in New York City, Air Force Academy graduate Chesley B. Sullenberger's aviation skills were put to the ultimate test when the US Airways passenger jet he was piloting intercepted a flock of Canadian geese. The aircraft ingested a number of birds into its engines, causing it to lose power. With a jet full of passengers over the densely populated Manhattan, Sullenberger — better known as "Sully" — was forced to glide the Airbus down for a water landing in the Hudson River.

As the nation will recall for years to come, this decision became one of the most remarkable feats in aviation history. In an unthinkable miracle, after plunging into the freezing waters of the Hudson, Sullenberger managed to save the lives of all 155 people on board.

The indelible images of the crash are not likely to ever be forgotten — passengers standing on the intact wings of the floating airliner as tugs, police cruisers and ferries rushed in for the rescue.

In a recent interview with CBS 60 Minutes, Sullenberger emerged from his long-standing veil of solitude to recount the events that would lead Flight 1549 into the history books. In the cool demeanor that one would imagine him handling the crisis of Jan. 15, Sully relived the story with somber humility.

"It was a normal climb-out in every regard," Sullenberger began. "Then, about 90 seconds after takeoff, I noticed there were birds

filling the entire windscreen — from top to bottom, left to right — large birds, too close to avoid. It felt like the airplane was being pelted by heavy rain or hail. It sounded like the worst thunderstorm I'd ever heard growing up in Texas."

While bird-strikes are common in aviation, this flock of geese impacted Flight 1549 like a meteor shower. Several were ingested into the engines, causing a fatal blow to the flight-sustaining power needed to stay aloft. Soon the smell charred fowl filled the cabin.

"It was obvious to me from the very moment we lost thrust that this was a critical situation," Sullenberger said calmly. "(We lost) both engines at a low speed and low altitude over one of the most densely populated areas on the planet. The airplane stopped climbing and going forward and began to rapidly slow down. That's when I knew I had to take control. I put my hand on the side stick, and I said, 'My aircraft.'"

Sully considered turning back to LaGuardia or limping on to Teterboro Airport in New Jersey, but those options quickly became impossible as Flight

1549 continued to lose speed and altitude.

"The only viable alternative — the only level, smooth place sufficiently large to land an airliner — was the river," he said.

The prospect of ditching an airliner in the water is not a challenge that any pilot hopes to encounter in his or her career. The few water landings attempted in the history of commercial air travel have resulted in destroyed airframes and heavy casualties.



Starting out as a 1973 graduate of the Air Force Academy (left), Chesley B. Sullenberger III went on to become a national hero after piloting an airliner during a difficult water crash landing that saved all on board.

US AIRWAYS FLIGHT 1549 DOING THE RIGHT THING

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AETCNS) — In January, our nation was inspired by the actions of a brave pilot — an everyday American who reminded us of who we are and who we can be.

It just so happens that Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger III, the pilot who safely landed the crippled US Airways Flight 1549 passenger jet in the Hudson River in New York City Jan. 15, is a classmate of mine. We both graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1973. When I saw his picture on the news, I immediately looked him up in our 1973 yearbook, and there he was, looking sharp in his cadet uniform.

Sullenberger learned how to fly in our Air Force, and he served out his seven-year

commitment as an officer and pilot. He then began a 29-year career as an airline pilot and safety expert. When you throw in his time as a cadet, he had more than 40 years of training, education and experience to call on for the challenge he faced.

He prepared himself well. Like all Air Force pilots, Sullenberger spent hundreds of hours studying emergency procedures and practicing them in simulators. He obviously continued this practice as he transitioned to the airlines.

One definition of integrity is doing the right thing when no one else is looking, and Sullenberger made himself a better pilot by studying and practicing when no one else was paying a lot of attention. His

foundation of knowledge and skill was strong because he put in the time and effort required to build it.

But preparation wasn't enough. When faced with a crisis, Sullenberger had to execute. He didn't panic. Instead he focused on what he had to do to save his plane and his passengers. Ditching a large aircraft is an incredibly difficult thing to do, and Sullenberger was able to do it safely. He executed his responsibilities with excellence.

Once the aircraft stopped in the cold waters of the Hudson, Sullenberger continued to care for his passengers and crew. New York Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg described how Sullenberger walked the aisle of the airplane twice to ensure



Passengers await rescue boats while taking refuge on the wings of US Airways Flight 1549, which crash landed on New York City's Hudson River.

However, with more than 40 years of aviation experience, the airline captain seemed to be the perfect pilot to handle the crisis.

Sullenberger described his plan of attack as the Hudson River loomed beneath the crippled passenger jet: "I needed to touch down with the wings exactly level ... with the nose slightly up ... at a descent rate that was survivable ... just above our minimum flying speed but not below it. And I needed to make all these things happen simultaneously."

Miraculously, he did. Flight 1549 splashed down into the Hudson River and came calmly to a floating rest as though water crash landings were a routine operating procedure. Passengers exited the plane, congregating on the wings as though walking on water.

Sullenberger walked up and down the passenger cabin twice to ensure everyone else had safely evacuated before exiting himself.

Bewildered first responders to the crash were everyday New Yorkers, tourists and ferry passengers, all clamoring to pull passengers from the freezing water. Moments later, a barrage of EMTs, police and fire fighters arrived to assist.

"It was amazing," Sullenberger recalled of the river rescuers. "It was lifesaving, literally. 'Thank you' seems totally inadequate. I have a debt of gratitude I fear I may never be able to repay."

After the crash, amidst the confusion and secrecy, official word came down that all passengers on board had survived.

"I remember feeling the most intense feeling of relief that I ever felt in my life," he later recalled. "I felt like the weight of the universe had been lifted off my heart."

Being praised by passengers and peers alike, the quiet pilot from Danville, Calif., quickly rose to the status of national hero. In the weeks after the incident, Sullenberger returned to his hometown of Danville to a hero's welcome. His brief and humble speech before a crowd of thousands of admirers summed up a modest recount of what had happened.

"I know I can speak for the entire crew when I tell you we were simply doing the job we were trained to do," he said.

When confronted with the passengers of Flight 1549 in the weeks after the crash, the crew was quickly adopted into the newly created family which had formed on that cold day in January.

Sullenberger said, "More than one woman came up to me and said, 'Thank you for not making me a widow. Thank you for allowing my 3-year-old son to have a father.'"

Call him what you will — Hudson River Hero, Air Force Academy grad or just plain Sully — the pilot who successfully carried out a zero-fatality crash landing in freezing waters in New York has given the world a much needed dose of good news. And in the midst of the glory being heaped upon him by a nation of admirers, the former F-4 fighter pilot has chosen to remain quiet and humble.

For Sully, actions truly speak louder than words.

Mr. Carlyle is an editor/photographer with *Checkpoints Magazine*, which is published by the Association of Graduates, U.S. Air Force Academy. This article is reprinted with permission from *Checkpoints*.

everyone was out. In doing so, he put service to others before his own personal safety. In the middle of incredible stress and strain, Sully chose to do the right thing.

In media parlance, the story of Flight 1549 had "legs." Even as the historic inauguration approached, people remained fascinated with the incident, hanging on every detail as recounted by passengers, ferrymen and rescue specialists. Perhaps this can be explained by the sheer drama of the crash, which took place in our largest city.

I think there is something deeper here, however. I believe that, in the face of all the negative news we have endured in recent months, we are looking for a hero — or in this case, a "Sully" — who will do the right thing in the face of adversity. Americans



"Sullenberger had to execute. He didn't panic. ... On a very cold day in New York, Sully made a difference."

— **Gen. Stephen R. Lorenz**
AETC commander and Sully's
Air Force Academy classmate

love heroes, especially "ordinary" people who do extraordinary things, because one of our core ideals is that everyday people can make a difference.

On a very cold day in New York, Sully made a difference. He did it by living according to our core values of integrity, service and excellence.

We didn't invent the core values in the Air Force. They came from the American

people that we serve. Although the headlines may be filled with stories of fraud, greed and waste, it is important to remember that there are millions of Americans who choose to live by these values. Whether it is the teacher who opts to stay after class to help a troubled student or the policeman who chases a thief into a dark alley, many Americans choose to live according to integrity, service and excellence.

The story of "Sully" Sullenberger reminds us of this. In these challenging times, it's good to remember what makes our country great.

To Sully, my old classmate: Thanks for landing Flight 1549, walking down the aisle twice and setting an example for us all.

— **Gen. Stephen R. Lorenz**
AETC commander