

# Air Education and Training Command's **TORCH**

July/August 2011



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FLIGHT LINE FATIGUE**  
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TORCH 



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by Tech. Sgt. Samuel Bendet

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Cover photo by Tech. Sgt. Samuel Bendet

Back cover photo by Tech. Sgt. Michael R. Holzworth

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## TALK THE TALK

In the last issue of Torch, I wrote about “walking the walk” and leading by example when it comes to risk management in your daily lives. Now I want to discuss “talking the talk” as it pertains to crew resource management (CRM) and flying airplanes. Military flying is inherently dangerous, and effective CRM can mean the difference between life and death ... or destroying a multi-million dollar jet.

Case in point: In October 2003, a T-38 from Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, crashed during initial takeoff. Thankfully, the instructor and student pilots both ejected safely; but the aircraft was destroyed, resulting in \$3.9 million in damages!

So what happened?

According to the accident investigation board, the student pilot, because of inexperience, “likely over-controlled the roll of the mishap aircraft in response to an aerodynamic disturbance immediately after liftoff.” The instructor took the controls and said, “I have the aircraft.” However, the student did not hear the instructor and continued to make aileron inputs. The instructor never confirmed that the student relinquished control of the jet, leading to a situation where both pilots were on the controls and thinking they each had control of the aircraft. When the aircraft continued to roll, the instructor perceived that it was not responding to his flight control inputs, thought that the aircraft was uncontrollable, and he and the student ejected.

As mentioned before, military flying is a risky business and in the training environment, we make many of our missions “standard” or repeatable to increase learning

opportunities. This can lead to complacency as we sometimes get numb to our training “routine” and act as if there is no risk associated with our somewhat “benign missions.” That’s why good CRM is so critical. On most of the missions we fly in AETC, there are two or more people in the aircraft. A good relationship in the cockpit that promotes information sharing can save your life ... especially when the pucker factor increases.

This communication starts in the crew/flight brief, and continues on to the flight line and then to the cockpit/formation. During the brief and debrief, CRM should be addressed to ensure the areas that went well and the areas where inter-cockpit comm might have broken down are covered. By paying careful attention to key mission tasks and crew interaction during these tasks, we will improve our effectiveness and mission success.

The bottom line is proper mission prep, communication and CRM increase the probability that an aircraft emergency will be handled successfully. So “talk the talk” on crew resource management and fly safe!

**“Military flying is inherently dangerous, and effective CRM can mean the difference between life and death ... or destroying a multi-million dollar jet.”**

## TWO SIDES TO THE CYCLE

I'm surprised the Air Force — or any of the military services for that matter — allows their troops to continue to ride motorcycles (reference "Pedal to the Metal," May/June 2011 issue, cover story). If professional

sports teams can stop their athletes from doing so, I'm sure the Defense Department can do the same.  
*Allison Burks  
Via e-mail*

Wow! Talk about "getting back on that horse again." Staff Sgt. Kevin Barton in the "Pedal to the Metal" story is an inspiration. He is not letting his leg amputation hold him back. Determined Airmen like these

are why we have the best military in the world. Keep fighting, Sarge!  
*Retired Army Master Sgt. L.L. Tucker  
Philadelphia*



## RUSSIAN ROULETTE IN A PARKING GARAGE

Reference the story "Car Strikes Airman Doing Pushups" ("Tales of the Strange," May/June 2011 issue, page 6), this

is why you guys will never go out of business. There are just too many smart people who, for whatever reason, do idiotic things. I mean, come on, seriously? Doing physical training in a parking garage? They aren't well lit in the first place; but in the second place they are full of drivers desperately seeking the best parking spot or hurrying to get out of there. One thing is for certain: They are not looking for guys doing pushups on the parking ramp. Every time they went to the concrete to do pushups, it was like playing Russian roulette. They were bound



by Tech. Sgt. Samuel Bender

to find a "loaded chamber" eventually. That Airman is very lucky to be alive.

*Adam Everett  
Via e-mail*

### LETTERS TO TORCH

Have a comment or complaint? Letters to Torch may be sent via e-mail to: [torch.magazine@us.af.mil](mailto:torch.magazine@us.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.

## 'IT BREAKS MY HEART'

It breaks my heart to read letters like Dania Britt's in the May/June 2011 issue ("Torch Talk," page 3). Just think of all the things she will miss with her father just because somebody did something as stupid and selfish as drinking and driving. It's frustrating that these kinds

of tragedies continue to happen in this day and age when the catastrophic results have been printed time and time again.

*Cynthia Helmut  
Via e-mail*

The feature, "Orphaned" (May/June 2011 Torch, cover story), while so tragic, is very beautifully written! The photos are so powerful and brought tears to my eyes.

The Langley AFB, Va., public affairs shop loves Torch!  
*Christina Styer  
Via Torch Magazine on Facebook*



# NOT ANOTHER MOTORCYCLE SAFETY BRIEFING!

Reference "Pedal to the Metal" (May/June 2011 issue, page 8), it appears the vehicle driver was at fault, but all too often the motorcyclist is the one to blame — he's his own worst enemy.

Ok, I hear ya. Ugh, another motorcycle safety briefing! I know I'm preaching to the choir. Who knows more about how dangerous these things are than the people riding them? Certainly not the driver who can't quit texting or the soccer mom who needs her make-up adjusted. How about the driver who just got off work and can't wait to get home (or wherever they go). We've all seen drivers who we would like to pull out and slap silly.

As dangerous as these people are, though, the biggest danger to us motorcyclists is, well ... us. How many times have you seen someone you're riding with do something less than smart? Did you say anything to them? How many have taken that drink then climbed aboard? If you've ridden much at all, I'm sure you've seen the

racer "wannabes" cutting corners, dragging their knee, many times on the wrong side of the road. How about the 100 mph wheelies on the highway?

The bad part of that is these riders usually take someone else with them.

How about taking off for a ride wearing no shirt, cut-offs and flip-flops? And their friends wonder why they got killed? Not to mention what they do for the already stellar motorcycle image. Talk about people you want to slap silly!

Now I know, none of you reading this is guilty of doing any of these things, right? Yeah right! At some point in your riding you have done something that you know you shouldn't have. I have, and if you're honest with yourself you will admit that you have too. You can probably remember those things just like it was yesterday.

Maybe it was.

I've been riding for 45 years both on and off road. I have done so many things I shouldn't have I can't count that high.

Sometimes I wonder how I'm still alive. But I learn from those things and try not to do them again. Don't get me wrong, I really like going fast and pushing my limits, I just don't do them on the road anymore. That's what track days are for.

So you're tired of these lectures?

Here's a way we might start to get rid of them. First, identify and correct your problems. Then talk to the friends you ride with, especially newer riders, about things you've seen and what they've seen. By making them aware of hazards you encountered, your friends might not repeat them. A Motorcycle Safety Foundation course that is available on every base for no cost goes a long way in identifying these problems.

When you ride with a group, before you take off make sure everyone understands what is and isn't acceptable. With everyone on the same page the ride will be more fun and safer.

*Rick "Grumpy" Myers  
Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas*



## MOTORCYCLE SAFETY



photo by Jim Barr



by Tech. Sgt. Samuel Bendet

Matthew Bilancia, left, competes in the 1,600 meter run held at the Air Force Academy, Colo., during the Warrior Games.

# A WILD RIDE

## FORMER AIRMAN RECOVERS FROM MOTORCYCLE MISHAP TO COMPETE IN WOUNDED WARRIOR GAMES

For the past two Warrior Games, 31-year-old Matthew Bilancia has run in both the 100-meter and 1,600-meter track events only to come away empty handed. But the fact that he was running at all? Well that was nothing short of a miracle.

The Warrior Games are held annually for wounded military members to compete in sporting events at the U.S. Olympics Training Center, Air Force Academy and Peterson Air Force Base, all in Colorado Springs, Colo. The 2011 event was held May 16-21. But Bilancia's journey to these games started July 21, 2002, on the outskirts of Tucson, Ariz., when a 1988 Ford Thunderbird going 80 mph smashed into the back of his motorcycle.

"I was traveling on a two-lane road at night going about 38 in a 40 mph zone when the 'tank on wheels' hit us," said Bilancia, who was a 22-year-old senior airman at the time stationed at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., where he worked on C-130 engines and propellers.

Courtesy of Matt Bilancia



Bilancia carried a female passenger on the back of his 2001 Yamaha R1. They were traveling with another motorcycle rider — a fellow Airman from his squadron — who was slightly behind them.

"We were riding in a staggered pattern — I was staying close to the double yellows a few bike lengths in front of the other motorcyclist, and he was riding the solid white," Bilancia said. "The idea is to keep a safe distance between the motorcycles, but also to work as a unit to be seen better by motorists traveling in either direction. ... Should work in theory, but somehow the guy in the Thunderbird missed seeing either taillight."

The Thunderbird driver clipped the

**Doctors twice threatened to amputate Bilancia's right leg** — once after he shattered his knee and broke his tibia and fibula in the 2002 motorcycle mishap, and then again in 2008 when he developed sepsis in the knee. Here, an external stabilizer holds three pins through his knee and two screws in his tibia to help his leg heal after the crash.



other rider first with the edge of his vehicle's right quarter panel, severing the Airman's left leg below the knee. A split second later he slammed into Bilancia and his passenger, launching them both like human cannonballs.

"I was thrown 127 yards from the point of impact," Bilancia said. "My motorcycle continued down the road another 300 yards. My rear passenger broke her pelvis, and 35 percent of her body had road rash."

Bilancia shattered his right knee and broke the tibia and fibula in that same leg. Both of his shoulders were dislocated, and his left clavicle was fractured. He also suffered some small fractures in his hip and pelvis, a lower spinal cord injury and a head injury that caused swelling to his brain.

"We were all wearing helmets and other protective gear," the Pequanock, N.J., native said. "Heck, I even had on full race gear, which prevented me from getting any road rash. But when you're hit at that speed, some damage is going to be done. Still, I believe my safety gear saved my life."

Bilancia doesn't actually recall being struck by the vehicle.

"The first thing I remember is the driver of the Thunderbird standing over me asking if I was OK," he said. "I thought I was just waking from a dream. But he told me I'd just been hit by a car."

Bilancia tried to move, but intense pain surged through his broken body. Helplessly, he wondered how his friends were doing.

***"I knew my female passenger was hurting because she was screaming as if someone was murdering her."***

"I knew my female passenger was hurting because she was screaming as if someone was murdering her," he said. "My other friend was silent because he was unconscious and bleeding out."

The only one with a cell phone, Bilancia called 911. Nearly 45 minutes later emergency services arrived.

"The medics assessed the scene and helped the other Airman first because he was going to bleed to death from his severed limb," he said. "Then another crew arrived, and they tended to the girl because she was still screaming so badly. I was pretty much calm, cool and collected and even cracking jokes, so they got to me last."

But looks can be deceiving. When the medics began working on Bilancia, his heart stopped. They revived him, and immediately airlifted him out. In the helicopter, his heart stopped again, and he had to be revived a second time.

They flew him to University Medical Center in Tucson, where he spent the next five days in intensive care and another 12 days in the rehabilitation center.

"My right leg was so messed up that they talked about amputating it," Bilancia said. "I basically just begged and pleaded with them to save my leg."

Doctors did save his limb. However, in the years since the accident, Bilancia has endured 23 surgeries as a medical team put him back together again. His injuries were too grave to continue military service, so he was medically separated from the Air Force May 12, 2004.

Bilancia resides in Fairfax, Va., where he continues his rehabilitation and his ambition to help other wounded warriors.

"The Warrior Games have become a huge part of my recovery and rehabilitation," he said. "I'm not a big fan of running because of how much pain it causes me. But in the games you push yourself further — past what you thought your limitations were. It's very empowering."

— Tim Barela



by Tech Sgt. Samuel Bender

*At the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, Colo., Bilancia takes a break from the Warrior Games to enjoy some of the sites near the Olympic Training Center.*

## TIPS TO HELP MOTORCYCLISTS FROM BECOMING INVISIBLE

- ◆ Wear reflective gear.
- ◆ Buy a bike that has brighter colors. Black or dark bikes tend to blend with the asphalt more.
- ◆ If you don't have running lights, install them. Two lights spaced apart are easier to see than one.
- ◆ Keep plenty of distance between you and other vehicles, and avoid blind spots.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to use your horn if necessary.

— Air Education and Training Command ground safety



# SCALPED!

## BICYCLIST INJURES HEAD AFTER CRASHING THROUGH VAN WINDOW



A minivan partially scalped a 21-year-old college student when he ran his bicycle into the back of the parked vehicle and was thrown headfirst into its rear window.

Brad Sturch, a junior at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo., had been on his way to work at a local Mexican restaurant when the mishap occurred.

"I was adjusting the speedometer on my bike and kept my head down a little too long," said Sturch, who is the son of James Sturch, director of Headquarters Air Education and Training Command event planning at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. "I didn't even see it coming. I couldn't even tell you what color the van was."

Sturch, an avid bicyclist who had just finished a 40-mile bike ride the day before, said he forgot to reset his computerized speedometer before he left the house.

"So I tried to do it on the fly, which wasn't a good idea," he said.

Also, not at the top of his "good idea" list was riding without a helmet.

"I do a lot of long bike rides and usually wear a helmet," he said. "But I only live a

half mile from where I work, so I neglected to put one on ... big mistake."

When his Giant Defy Advanced Road Bike slammed into the minivan, Sturch flew off the bike, and the top of his head shattered the rear window of the vehicle. Amazingly, he bounced back onto his bicycle seat, and then fell over onto the street.

"I had a lot of blood pouring out of my head," Sturch said. "But I also had a lot

of adrenaline running through me, so I wasn't feeling any pain."

Some people across the street heard the crash and ran over to help. But they quickly turned into spectators, Sturch said, when they saw the young man drenched in blood and with a sizable part of his scalp peeled back from his head.

"I guess they panicked," he said. "Blood doesn't really make me squeamish. Don't get me wrong; I didn't like that the blood pooling on the asphalt was mine, but I didn't freak out."

Instead, he used one hand to apply direct pressure to his biggest wound in an attempt to stem the flow. He then used his free hand to dial 911. Next, he calmly called his work to tell his boss he

**Brad Sturch waits in the emergency room after being rushed to the hospital following a bicycle crash. He needed 50 stitches to sew his scalp back on; he hadn't been wearing a helmet.**

wouldn't be coming in that day. And then he phoned his sister, who also lives in Fort Collins, to let her know he was going to the emergency room.

"When the paramedics arrived, they assessed my head injuries and started putting gauze on all the cuts to stop the bleeding," Sturch said. "Then the ambulance arrived, and they put me on a backboard."

His sister, 25-year-old Megan Bower, works in an orthopedic surgeon's office, which is right next to the hospital. So she actually beat Sturch to the ER.

"When she saw me on the gurney, she took one look at my injuries and said, 'Holy cow!' She hadn't expected it to be so bad," Sturch said.

He had three major lacerations, and it took 50 stitches to sew his scalp back on and close up a cut on his forehead and cheek close to his left eye.

Doctors told him he was fortunate that he did not suffer severe neck or eye injuries, a major concussion or other more serious head trauma.

"I guess I've got a thick skull," he said with a chuckle. "But, yeah, I was lucky."

— Tim Barela



**"I usually wear a helmet, but ... I neglected to put one on ... big mistake."**

— Brad Sturch

hand to apply direct pressure to his biggest wound in an attempt to stem the flow. He then used his free hand to dial 911. Next, he calmly called his work to tell his boss he

## A SURVIVOR'S BIKING TIPS

◆ **Wear a helmet**, no matter how short of a distance you are driving — even if only in the neighborhood. A whole lot of people keep telling me I should have had a helmet on, and I keep saying, "Yeah, I know."

◆ **Focus on one thing**

— especially what's in front of you. I should have adjusted my speedometer beforehand or afterward, but not during my ride (unless I pulled over). Getting distracted is how you end up running into something as big as a parked minivan.

◆ **If you are in an accident, stay calm.** You can't always rely on others around you to take action and may have to participate in your own rescue. In my case, the people around me panicked when they saw all the blood and chunks of my head and

hair still hanging from the minivan; so I had to apply pressure to my wounds to try to stop the bleeding.

◆ **Carry a cell phone with you.** Even though I was dazed and injured, I was the one who ended up calling 911.

— Brad Sturch



# EXTRA CRISPY?

## NEW FDA REGS FOR SUNSCREEN

A young Marine has a little too much to drink and decides to lay out by the pool. He falls asleep (passes out?) and gets fried by the sun for nearly five hours. When someone finally wakes him, he's burned from head to toe — even his eyelids! He screams when he tries to stand up. Emergency medics arrive on scene, and they end up loading him into the ambulance ... chair and all! He was unfit for duty for nearly three weeks.

A girl takes her first vacation to Cancun, Mexico, and spends a day in the relentless sun. She suffers second-degree burns to her back and has to be rushed to the emergency room, where doctors perform an agonizing scrub on her wounds to prevent infection.

A young fisherman out on a boat all day forgets to protect the top of his feet. They burn so badly, giant, puss-filled blisters appear like water balloons on the entire surface of each foot. The pain is so intense he can't walk for three days and can't wear shoes for over a week.

Sunburn certainly isn't reserved for the young; however, a day

**“This new information will help consumers know which products offer the best protection from the harmful rays of the sun.”**

at the beach will reveal more “rookies” glowing than older age groups. There are a couple of good reasons for this: First, more young people hang out at the beach. Second, almost everyone has suffered some form of sunburn; so older people have learned their painful lessons and tend to take more precautions.

Whether young or old, however, the Food and Drug Administration is taking

steps to help protect consumers from skin damage caused by excessive sun exposure

These measures are necessary, says Lydia Velazquez, PharmD, in FDA's Division of Nonprescription Regulation Development, because “our scientific understanding has grown. We want consumers to understand that not all sunscreens are created equal.”

“This new information will help consumers know which products offer the best protection from the harmful rays of the sun,” Velazquez says. “It is important for consumers to read the entire label, both front and back, to choose the appropriate sunscreen for their needs.”

The final regulations, which become effective in one year, establish a standard test for over-the-counter (sold without a prescription) sunscreen products that will determine which products are allowed to be labeled as “Broad Spectrum,” FDA officials said.

Products that pass this test will provide protection against both ultraviolet B radiation and ultraviolet A radiation. Sunburn is primarily caused by UVB. Both UVB and UVA can cause sunburn, skin cancer, and premature skin aging.

Under the new regulations, sunscreen products that protect against all types of sun-induced skin damage will be labeled “Broad Spectrum” and “SPF 15” (or higher) on the front.

— Tim Barela



File photo

## REPELLING THE RAYS

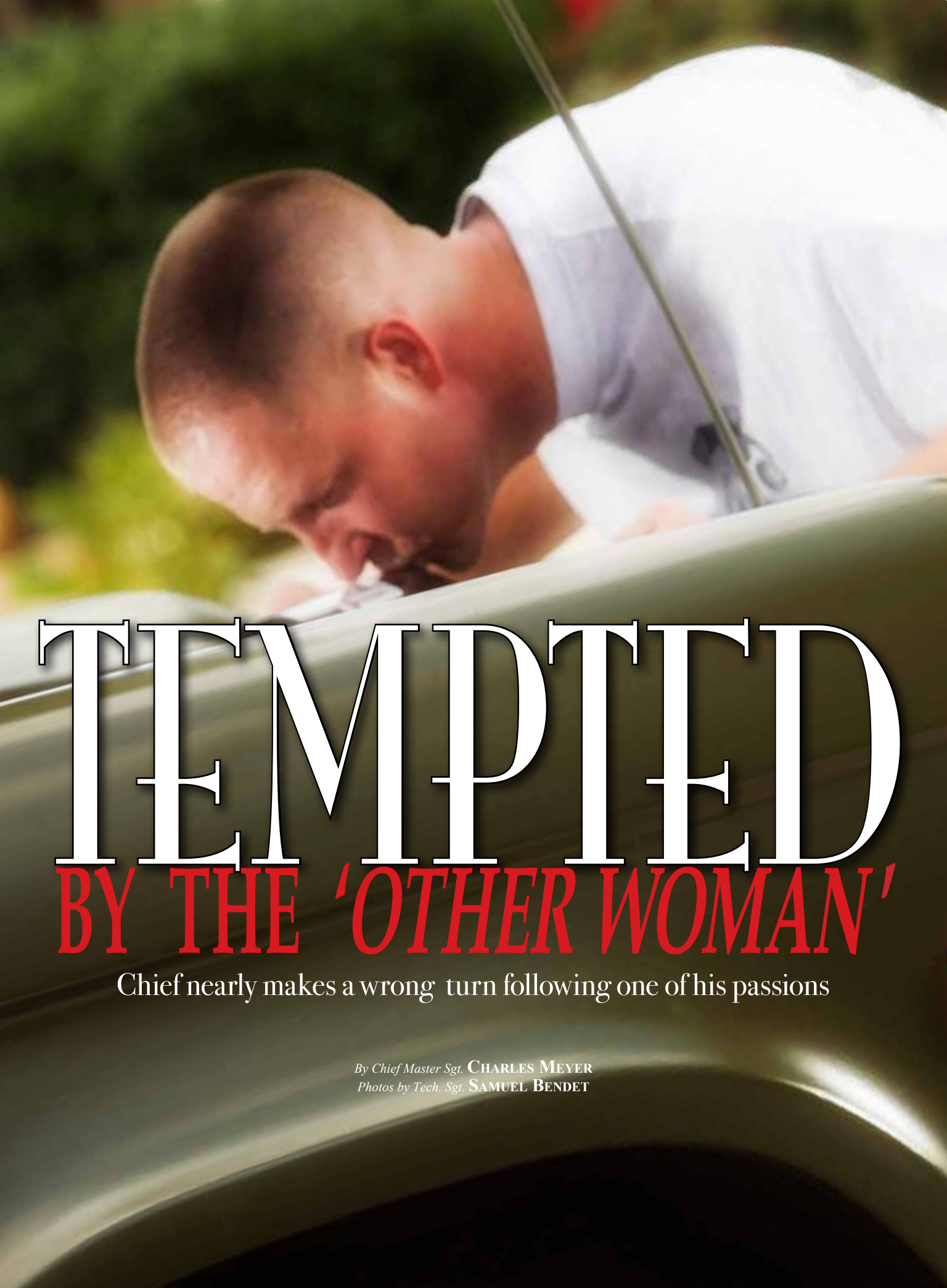
- When possible, wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, sunglasses that block 100 percent of ultraviolet rays, and a hat with at least a 3-inch brim.
- Apply and reapply sunscreen, especially during peak hours.
- Reapply every two hours ... or more often if you're sweating or jumping in and out of the water.
- Stay in the shade whenever possible and avoid the peak hours of the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Be aware of the invisible sun on a cloudy, overcast or hazy day.
- Limit exposure to reflective surfaces like water and sand.
- Don't fall asleep with the sun beating down on you, as you could wake up to a painful, crimson surprise.
- Severe sunburn covers a large portion of your body with blisters. It can be accompanied by a high fever and severe pain. In these cases, see a doctor.

— Air Force Safety Center





**Stacey Meyer has to share her husband,** Chief Master Sgt. Charles Meyer, with his second love: a 1972 Ford Bronco.



# TEMPTED

## BY THE 'OTHER WOMAN'

Chief nearly makes a wrong turn following one of his passions

*By Chief Master Sgt. CHARLES MEYER  
Photos by Tech. Sgt. SAMUEL BENDET*



**H**er classic looks quickly caught my eye. Then, the more I got to know her, my desire grew. Sometimes the “other woman” can be an irresistible temptress. My “mistress”? ...

## A 1972 Ford Bronco.

Early in my Air Force career, I developed an appreciation and passion for the Ford Bronco produced between 1966 and 1977. The look and power of these little rigs drew my attention, and I knew I had to have one. Over the past 25 years, I have owned three of them. Over the past six years, my 6-year-old son, Noah, and I worked to restore my '72 model. My wife, Stacey, often refers to it as my “other woman”; and although it does occupy a lot of my time, effort and money, she appreciates the fact I have found something to keep me out of trouble.

Well, almost ...

April 29 through May 1, I had the pleasure of attending the Lonestar Early Bronco Club 12th Annual Spring Roundup in Mason, Texas. This three-day event hosted more than 80 early Ford Broncos and nearly 200 people from across the United States. Right off the bat, I noticed there was virtually no alcohol in camp and none allowed on the trail. This impressed me and gave me immediate respect for those who ran the event and the park itself.

The roundup was held for the first time at Katemcy 2, a rock crawler's paradise, sporting some of the most challenging trails a four-wheel fanatic could imagine. We were in heaven as we walked among the fellow Bronco enthusiasts and talked about the various modifications they had done to their rigs.

I tend to think of myself as a manly man; however, my son and I have become quite fond of our Bronco and had no intentions of doing any sort of rock crawling that might dent or scrape her Army green finish. On the first day we fell in line with the other stock Broncos to hit the Level 1 and 2 trails. Our guide, Shane, an attorney from the local area, assured us these trails were designed for folks like us — those who wished to come back with our rigs in the same shape in which they left.

The ride started out as planned, with an easy run through an old creek bed. Nothing exciting, but fun nonetheless.

Then an hour into the ride, we turned onto a steep trail, and my years as a safety professional and advocate of risk management quickly came into play.

The trail leader, driving a Jeep CJ5

— decked out with 35-inch tires, a four-link suspension and skid plates throughout the undercarriage — turned up a steep embankment and crawled slowly across some large boulders.

I watched in amazement as the two Broncos in front of me followed.

I initially started to follow too, but that little voice in my head said, “No.” Not only that, my 6-year-old piped in, “Dad, if you're going up that, can I get out?”

Funny that even a small child can apply risk management and knows when potential danger exists; yet we, as adults, sometimes have a hard time with this.

Luckily, common sense prevailed, and I made the decision to bypass this obstacle. All I could picture was my prized possession tumbling down this rock face with Noah and I caught somewhere in the wreckage. I knew my Bronco was not properly equipped, and we only had three-point seat belts to keep us in place.

Bronco owners can be relentless, and they offered their fair share of banter and “encouragement.” But the well-being of my son and I was more important.

Not only that, but as I turned off the trail, several more rigs followed close behind me. I even heard one old man say, “Not in this lifetime.”

Over the next few days we did our fair share of climbing — within our vehicle's limits — and even managed to inflict some damage to our Bronco. But mostly we watched as others drove up and across rock faces you couldn't even imagine.

Wide-eyed, Noah told me he thought they were all crazy; but the reality was they came prepared for the obstacles they were attempting. I am happy to report no one was injured, and only minor damage occurred to any vehicle. Luckily we had the opportunity to ride with some of the more experienced drivers in vehicles made for this type of stuff. I have a new appreciation for five-point safety harnesses and have them on my list of must-have upgrades.

I can't say I have always applied the common sense factor in my decision making; but as I get older, I've come to realize having fun doesn't have to equate to being reckless. Although I'm sure there are many more rock crawling days in my future, I am confident I will make the right decisions when necessary.

Be safe out there, and we'll see you on the rocks! 🍷

**Like father, like son ...** Meyer and his 6-year-old son, Noah, work underneath their Bronco, which they are constantly looking for ways to improve and upgrade.



# PRACTICING SAFE SIX

## Lessons learned from extreme sporting event

**1** Arrive with a plan and stick to it. Altering the plan on the fly probably means you are not prepared to do the activity you are considering.

**2** If something seems like a bad idea, it probably is. Listen to that sixth sense and make sound decisions.

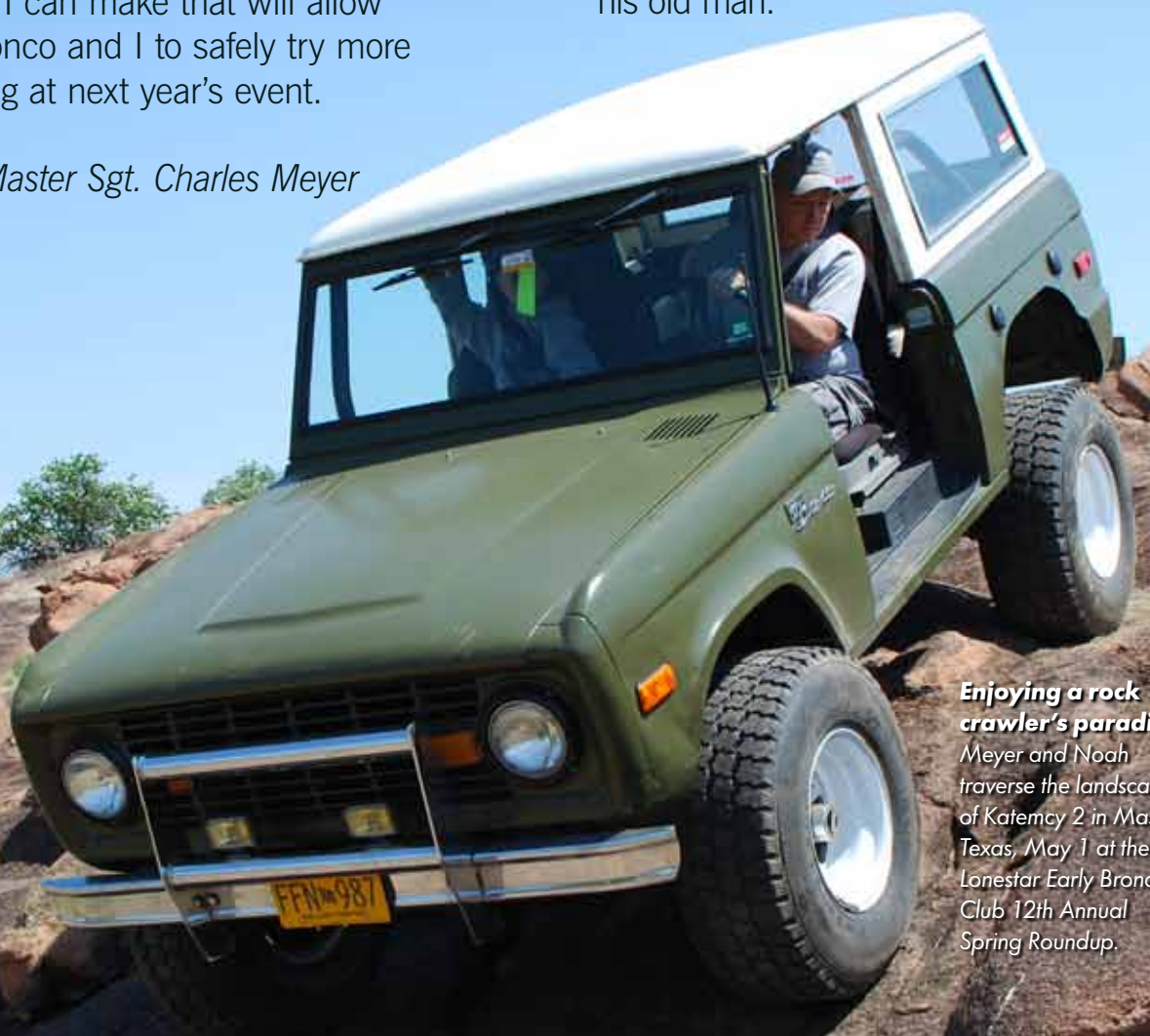
**3** Use the right tool for the job. If you're not equipped for the task at hand, stop what you're doing and walk away. I have already started my list of upgrades I can make that will allow my Bronco and I to safely try more climbing at next year's event.

**4** Peer pressure can be hard to resist, but ultimately you decide your own fate. Don't let people talk you into things beyond your ability.

**5** Seat belts only work if you wear them. And I have a new appreciation for five-point safety harnesses.

**6** Risk management doesn't have an age limit. Even a 6-year-old can apply it — like my son proved with a reality check and a raised eyebrow aimed at his old man.

▶▶▶ *Chief Master Sgt. Charles Meyer*



**Enjoying a rock crawler's paradise,** Meyer and Noah traverse the landscape of Katemcy 2 in Mason, Texas, May 1 at the Lonestar Early Bronco Club 12th Annual Spring Roundup.



# WAITING TO INHALE

## Officer blacks out 30-feet below

By 2nd Lt. **AARON Hoff**, as told to **TIM BARELA**  
Photos by Tech. Sgt. **SAMUEL BENDET**

**S**ea urchin spines pierced Naomi's hand, turning it into a painful pincushion. We stopped only seconds to pull out the unsolicited acupuncture needles. But that was long enough. Naomi and I were first-time divers, and we'd already managed to lose our group only 15 feet under water.



**A second lieutenant ripped her respirator mouthpiece**, making it inoperable, when she panicked during a dive. She blacked out 30 feet from the surface.





**When we couldn't find them in the murky bay, we made the decision to head for the surface. But as we ascended, it just kept getting darker and darker. I checked my depth gauge. Eighty feet? With sudden terror, we realized we hadn't been going up at all! We were sinking ... fast! We'd gone an extra 65 feet in the wrong direction, and the worst was yet to come. Because Naomi wasn't going to make it to the surface ... at least not breathing.**

While going through the air battle manager course at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., last year, I could hardly wait for an upcoming three-day weekend. My brain needed the break, and some of my fellow students and I decided to make the most of it by signing up to take scuba diving lessons.

Panama City, Fla. ... here we come! First, though, we followed protocol and filled out the Air Education and Training Command Form 410, High-Risk Activity Worksheet, and received a safety brief from our commander. But I don't think any of us really felt we'd be taking that big of a risk. Do 21 and 22 year olds ever think they are taking that great a risk? Heck, we were too excited to take our first dive. The "fear factor" was pretty low in our group.

On our first day, we received academic instruction, followed by some hands-on training in a pool. The instructor taught us basic safety skills, such as mask clearing and respirator replacement.

Then on to the fun stuff!

The second day of training, Oct. 2, we were scheduled to dive in the jetties at St. Andrew's Bay ... no more classroom,

by Nicolas Hebrant



**When she accidentally put her bare hand on a sea urchin,** 2nd Lt. Naomi Hume sustained painful puncture wounds that caused her and her dive partner, 2nd Lt. Aaron Hoff, to stop momentarily – just long enough for the first-time divers to become separated from their group.

no more pool. This was go time.

Little did we know, it was also the beginning of a day about to go suddenly and horribly wrong.

The jetties house three main water systems in the bay. In the center of the



**Using their depth gauge**, the diving duo realized they had gone 65 feet in the wrong direction to a depth of 80 feet in the murky waters of St. Andrew's Bay, Fla.

not make out where the group had gone. We did as we were taught and treaded water at that depth hoping to spot anyone.

No luck. We didn't realize it at the time, but because of our unfamiliarity with the jetties and the strong currents, we had been pulled downward and away from everyone. They were nowhere in sight. We looked at each other, exchanged some hand signals and took only a moment to decide to swim back to the surface.

At this point, we really weren't overly concerned with our situation. We were probably a little embarrassed for losing our group on our first dive; but we hadn't panicked, and the surface was a relatively short 15 feet away.

As Naomi and I attempted to reach daylight, we ensured we followed the rules taught during academics and did not ascend faster than 1 foot per second to avoid getting decompression illness ... "the bends."

Here again, our inexperience came back to haunt us.

While we concentrated on a slow climb, we did not factor in the weight of our gear or the current of the water. As we continued to the surface, something wasn't right. I noticed that the water was getting darker, when it should be getting lighter.

You can imagine my surprise when I checked my depth gauge and it told me that we were at 80 feet. We had gone an extra 65 feet in the wrong direction! I shook Naomi's vest to get her attention, and then showed her the gauge.

Her expression probably mirrored my own ... shock and fear. For the first time we were scared ... really scared. A bit of doubt crept into my mind whether or not we'd actually make it back to the top.

I made us neutrally buoyant by adding air to the scuba vests. Once we were not sinking anymore, I continued to check my gauge and maintain contact with Naomi.

It seemed like forever before the water began to get lighter. But once it did, I breathed a huge sigh of relief and felt like we were out of any immediate danger.

Then at 40 feet, all hell broke loose.

Naomi had not considered that the deeper we got, the harder it would be to breathe because the air in the tanks

jetty is a 100-foot deep manmade trench. These characteristics make for some strong currents; and when there are storms in the preceding days, which there were prior to the dive, the water visibility becomes poor.

We made our first dive over the wall at the jetties' dive area. The water was slightly choppy and visibility less than stellar, but that didn't bother me. My lack of experience didn't allow me to comprehend the level of visibility that would be ideal for a student diver like me. Plus, everyone in the group made it back to shore just fine, so that just boosted my confidence.

We switched out our tanks and eagerly prepared for the second dive.

This dive would take us to a depth of 20 feet. At this depth, we were scheduled to perform the basic safety skills we had learned the day before.

I had no clue of the kind of "pop quiz" that was in store for me.

We split up into pairs. My partner was my classmate and good friend, 2nd Lt. Naomi Hume, an Air National

Guardsmen from Wichita, Kan.

We entered the water.

At 15 feet we all gave our instructor, who kept checking on us, the thumbs up to continue. But as we started swimming downward again, Naomi accidentally stuck her hand on a sea urchin.

We stopped for only 20 seconds while she pulled the needles out of her hand. Of

**"FOR THE FIRST TIME,  
WE WERE SCARED ... REALLY SCARED."  
A BIT OF DOUBT CREPT INTO MY MIND  
WHETHER OR NOT WE'D ACTUALLY  
MAKE IT BACK TO THE TOP."**

course, had we been wearing dive gloves, the needles would not have stuck into her hand in the first place.

We soon realized that stopping to tend to her hurting hand had been a bad idea.

The rest of the class had continued on, and we needed to catch up with them. But because of the dull visibility, we could



**Using hand signals to communicate under water**, the divers first attempted to spot their group, and then decided to surface. But their inexperience caused them to not account for the weight of their equipment and the water currents, which were pulling them deeper and deeper into the bay.

becomes denser. The more effort she put into breathing, the more she thought her respirator was clogged or possibly malfunctioning.

She started to panic.

As she took the respirator out of her mouth to clear it, she ripped the mouthpiece making it unusable. She made sure to get my attention and pointed at her mouth. I quickly gave her my secondary respirator as practiced the day before.

We continued our ascent, and I started my routine again. Check the gauge, glance toward the surface, then check my partner. Gauge, surface, partner.

**“HASTILY, I STOLE A DESPERATE LOOK TOWARD THE SURFACE TO SEE HOW CLOSE WE WERE, WHEN I LOOKED BACK AT NAOMI, SHE WAS UNCONSCIOUS.”**

At 30 feet, my eyes swung to Naomi, and I saw she had now spit out the emergency respirator. Terror twisted her face as she flailed frantically. She resisted my multiple attempts to give the respirator back to her. Finally, I tried to force it into her mouth, but in a panic she slapped my hand away.

I didn't know what was wrong with her. What was going through her mind? Why wouldn't she use the respirator?

Hastily, I stole a desperate glance toward the surface to see how close we were.

When I looked back at Naomi, she was unconscious.

I was flat out terrified now.

I knew I had to remain calm and get Naomi to the surface as quickly and safely as possible.



A minute later we broke out of the water. Naomi slumped lifelessly.

Thirty feet from shore, I began mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and intermittently yelled for help. Naomi suddenly spit up water and gasped for air. As I drug her toward shore, her lips turned blue, and I continued mouth-to-mouth.

Finally, some bystanders helped me pull her onto the rocks and put her on her side. To my amazement, she almost immediately regained consciousness.

We moved Naomi to a bystander's boat and rushed her to the nearest hospital. From there she was airlifted to Tallahassee, where doctors closely monitored her.

When I arrived at the hospital, Naomi

was asleep. I was at her bedside when she woke up.

It's funny how something as seemingly simple as seeing a close friend open her eyes takes on a whole new meaning when you were faced with the possibility of that not ever happening again. It's almost as if I was holding my breath until I was sure she was OK.

When she was able to inhale, I was finally able to exhale. ✨

Lieutenant Hoff is now an air battle manager for the 726th Air Control Squadron at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho. Lieutenant Hume spent only a couple of days in the hospital and was released in good health. She is currently deployed to Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. Hoff and Hume remain close friends.



Courtesy of 2nd Lt. Aaron Hoff

**After nearly drowning,** 2nd Lt. Naomi Hume shares a lighter moment with her rescuer and dive partner, 2nd Lt. Aaron Hoff, at a critical care unit in Tallahassee, Fla.

## LESSONS FROM THE DEEP

- Wear ALL your personal protective gear. If we had worn diving gloves, the sea urchin spines would not have been an issue, and the whole incident probably would have been averted.
- Pay close attention to training. We lacked experience and made mistakes; but in the end, our training saved us.
- Stay with your group. We hesitated and lost our way. But at

least we still had each other. Never dive alone. Keep your wingman close.

- Know the basics of your equipment and its limitations. Our equipment ultimately saved us, but our lack of knowledge of it also put us in some situations from which we nearly didn't recover.
- Take high-risk activities seriously. Nobody is bulletproof.

— 2nd Lt. Aaron Hoff



# GO OR NO GO?

Electing to continue flight can be flirting with disaster

By **NED LINCH**

Photo by Staff Sgt. **JACOB N. BAILEY**





**When an F-16 pilot** elected to continue his flight after smelling oil, he almost didn't make it back to base.





So there I was over the Yellow Sea off the coast of Kunsan, Korea, beginning an engagement called basic fighter maneuvers ... better known as “dogfights.” This should be an easy kill because I’m a new F-16 instructor pilot, and I am invincible. There’s nothing I can’t handle. I’ve been slapped around so much lately by old instructor pilots in the squadron that I know everything there is to flying this jet.

Yeah right!

One’s ready; Two’s ready ... fights on!

I push the throttle up to full afterburner and slightly unload to accelerate toward the bandit’s turn circle and get set for a 9G turn. The focus is totally on flying the jet, conserving energy and controlling your lift vector to eventually enter the control zone for guns. It’s all man and machine against an opponent ... nothing more, nothing less. It’s a three-dimensional skill that’s in flux at all times, and there is no definitive answer to any questions on the subject — just lots of opinions and techniques. In the end, all that really matters is if the piper is on the bandit or not; otherwise you’ve failed in your mission as a fighter pilot.

As I’m accelerating toward the bandit’s turn circle, the faint smell of burning oil started coming through the environmental control system. I’ve smelled this smell before so it should be OK since it’s probably because of a water separator problem (the oily smell you get in humid environments). So, I elected to continue in full afterburner to properly enter the turn circle so I could put 9Gs on the jet and ultimately gun the bandit.

As I carved through the skies at 9Gs, the smell intensified to a point that it distracted me from focusing on fighting and properly executing the anti-G straining maneuver — a maneuver if not done correctly can cause you to lose consciousness.

I finally couldn’t stand it any longer because of the intensity of the smell continuing to increase. So, I knocked it off and started climbing and pointing my nose toward home. It’s a built-in flight discipline reaction from many years of emergency procedure simulators.

“I think I have an oil system problem,” I transmitted over the radio as calmly as possible.

All was quiet on the radio. Every F-16 pilot knows that either the word “engine” or “oil” transmitted over the radio is serious and requires the utmost in concentration to properly analyze and quickly develop a plan of action to recover the jet safely.

My eyes have always been trained to look at the small, peanut-size oil pressure gauge anytime I suspected a problem with the engine. Today, my eyes about popped out because the oil was reading below 10 psi ... not good. About all I could do now was point toward home, climb, use minimal throttle movements and pray.

My first thought besides the frigid waters below me was “Hey, this is just like the sim; I even got the ‘caution, caution’ from Betty and then the dreaded ENG 016 MFL (Maintenance Fault List) and the ENG LUBE LOW PFL (Pilot Fault List) to go along with it. Wow, this is just great.”

I pushed us over to the supervisor of flying’s frequency and explained my game plan. Since we were 60 miles out over the cold Yellow Sea wearing “poopy suits,” I went to my training. Whenever I can reach a one-to-one ratio between altitude and distance, I’m going to pull the throttle to idle, glide and hope for the best.

It seemed like an eternity, but I soon reached a 1:1 with Kunsan. Finally, I could relax just enough to allow the seat cushion to reform in the seat.

After circling down from high key and landing the jet, maintenance said I had about one minute left on the engine before it would have seized. That’s about the amount of time it would have taken me to finish our dogfight, which would have meant the bandit would have won the fight as I ejected into the drink!

It was another lucky day for me, and the Lord was keenly watching over me.

Electing to continue is just one of those crap-shoot games we tend to face in our aviation careers and can only get you in trouble. Why do we let these human factors build up and control our every move?

The best way I’ve found to combat situations like this is to keep it conservative and simple. That allows me to prioritize and concentrate on what’s important versus channelizing my attention and making a bad decision. If something doesn’t look, smell or sound right, then it’s time to knock-it-off and analyze the systems to see what’s wrong.

Electing to continue would have been the wrong decision on this winter’s day. However, I continue to see mishap after mishap in databases because pilots or other aircrew members continue to press and make bad judgment calls when they should have knocked it off and gone home.

I challenge you to avoid flirting with mishaps by staying in the books, knowing your systems like the back of your hand, staying as proficient as possible in the basics of flying, maintaining flight discipline, and not pressing beyond your personal or aircraft limits by electing to continue.

I’m totally in favor of completing the mission and making an impact for the war; however, pressing beyond the limit in an attempt to be a hero only means we are going to have less jets and people to fight the war. ✈

**“Every F-16 pilot knows that either the word ‘engine’ or ‘oil’ transmitted over the radio is serious and requires the utmost in concentration.”**

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Retired Lt. Col. Ned Linch finished his Air Force career as the chief of flight safety for 12th Air Force and Air Forces Southern Command at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz. A command pilot, he accumulated more than 3,000 flying hours in the F-16 and F-111, including over 150 combat hours.

# THE HALL OF SHAME

Listed below are findings from actual mishaps in which aircrew members were pressing the limit and caused a serious accident for no reason. In these cases, electing to continue, despite the warning signs, led to worse situations. The mission was not accomplished, and we only put people and equipment in harm's way.

- ✪ All warning systems were screaming at the pilot to pull up, but he elected to continue the attack into the ground.
- ✪ The supervisor of flying notified the crew that sparks were coming from the right side of the aircraft, and tire remnants were found on the runway. However, all indications were good in the cockpit so they elected to continue. Significant damage was found on one of the engines after landing.
- ✪ The master caution light and multiple caution lights were illuminated; but the pilot didn't perceive them to be an issue, so he elected to continue to another engine mishap.
- ✪ The crew didn't think the thunderstorm activity was that bad and elected to continue. Significant damage to the aircraft was the end result.
- ✪ The pilot was fatigued beyond his physical limits, but he elected to continue and experienced Type III spatial disorientation that took his life.
- ✪ The crew felt a rumble, heard a pop and noticed a bang; however, all looked fine on the instruments. So they elected to continue until the engine came apart.
- ✪ After a firm landing, the crew noticed a vibration as they taxied, so they continued taxiing the jet versus stopping. This caused significantly more damage to the aircraft.
- ✪ The ground crew noticed a fireball coming from one of the engines. The crew was notified by the supervisor of flying; however, all indications were normal in the cockpit. So they elected to continue until the engine completely failed, and they were further away from the base.
- ✪ The crew failed to get a weather update, ran their fuel below divert fuel and had to enter a thunderstorm to land, causing lightning and hail damage to the aircraft.
- ✪ The crew elected to continue with excessive fatigue and lost focus when it was time to land. They forgot the gear despite all the warning systems screaming at them.
- ✪ The crew and maintenance decided a bad tire could make it through a couple of more landings. The flight safety NCO recommended changing the tire; however, the crew elected to continue without swapping it out. The tire disintegrated on takeoff causing engine foreign object damage and other damages.

— Ned Lynch



HANGAR  
FLYING



# FIGHTING FLIGHT LINE FATIGUE

## RANDOLPH AFB TACKLES PROBLEM HEAD-ON

By **BRIAN MCGLOIN** and **TIM BARELA**  
Photo by **LANCE CHEUNG**

On Aug. 18, 1993, a DC-8 commercial aircraft from the United States crashed in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The impact and ensuing fire destroyed the plane, and the three crewmembers suffered serious injuries. The probable cause? Crew fatigue, according to mishap investigators.

Fatigue is a killer, said experts from the 359th Aerospace Medicine Squadron at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. To help base members stay sharp and safe, the 359th AMDS is offering classes to illustrate fatigue countermeasures, which are especially helpful to shift and overnight workers, along with aircrew members.

"The class is where we talk to base personnel about different issues with their sleep," said 1st Lt. Amanda Burnette, 359th AMDS logistics element chief, aerospace and operational physiology. "Fatigue continues to be a huge issue with many occupations, including our flyers."

In the case cited above, the National Transportation Safety Board report said, "The airplane collided with terrain approximately one-fourth mile from the approach end of the runway after the captain lost control of the aircraft. The flight crew had experienced a disruption of circadian rhythms and sleep loss; had been on duty about 18 hours; and had flown approximately nine hours.

"The captain did not recognize the deteriorating flight path and airspeed conditions due to preoccupation with locating a strobe light on the ground. ... Repeated callouts by the flight engineer stating slow airspeed conditions went unheeded by the captain. ... Probable cause (of the crash was) the impaired judgment, decision-making and flying abilities of the captain and flight crew due to the effects of fatigue; the captain's failure to properly assess the conditions for landing and

*Shift and flight line workers like Master Sgt. Mark Eger, chained to a C-5 Galaxy in this photo illustration, can feel like they are tugging the weight of an aircraft if accumulative sleep loss has reached dangerous levels. Higher-level reasoning is one of the first things affected by fatigue.*

maintaining vigilant situational awareness of the airplane while maneuvering onto final approach; his failure to prevent the loss of airspeed and avoid a stall while in the steep bank turn; and his failure to execute immediate action to recover from a stall. Also contributing was inadequate crew resource management training."

These are the kinds of disasters that can occur when sleep patterns are interrupted and crews suffer from cumulative sleep loss, according to Air Education and Training Command flight safety experts. That's why fatigue countermeasures education, like the class at Randolph, is so crucial.

"The class will teach about sleep and fatigue in general, specific sleep disorders that people may or may not have, and techniques the average person can employ to aid in sleep," Burnette said. "Humans are meant to be asleep when it's dark and awake when it's light. When something changes that natural schedule, problems can arise."

**"The airplane collided with terrain approximately one-fourth mile from the approach end of the runway after the captain lost control of the aircraft. The flight crew had experienced a disruption of circadian rhythms and sleep loss; had been on duty about 18 hours; and had flown approximately nine hours."**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said shift and night workers often are tired and sleepy because of how their work schedules force them to deviate from natural biological rhythms, also known as circadian rhythm. Being unnecessarily tired makes it difficult to concentrate, which increase the possibility of mistakes. The stress of shiftwork also can exasperate health conditions, such as heart disease or digestive disorders, the CDC added.

To help Randolph Airmen — active duty and civilians — the base countermeasures class teaches simple techniques they can use to prevent fatigue, such as having a routine before going to bed and a proper sleep environment. The classes also exam-

ine things like exercise, which helps keep the mind and body in balance.

"People don't always realize how important exercise is for sleep," Burnette said. "There are simple things you can do to sleep better and fall asleep faster."

She said humans are bad at judging levels of fatigue, partially because higher-level reasoning is affected first when one is fatigued.

"Cognitive ability is the first to suffer," she said. "Shiftwork at night may set you up for problems, but even a hectic home life could cause you to lose out on sleep."

Burnette added, sleep loss can accumulate over time and reach dangerous levels.

"Sleep can't be banked," she said.

The lieutenant acknowledges, however, that it's not likely someone who works a shift that goes against their circadian rhythm can simply make a schedule change. But all hope isn't lost for those in less than ideal work schedules. She said the amount and quality of sleep is

more important than the time one is asleep.

"Determining individual sleep requirements is not easy since there is wide variability in sleep needs. Individual requirements range from about four to 10 hours."

say authors John and Lynn Caldwell in their book *A Guide to Staying Awake at the Stick*, about fatigue prevention in military and civilian aviation. "Unless

you know for a fact that eight hours is more than you need, the safe approach is to make sure you get a minimum of eight full hours each day, even if work demands mean you have to split this requirement into more than one consolidated period."

The classes at Randolph, which are held on the second Thursday of every month at 1 p.m. in Bldg. 747, are a good start to figuring out each individual's needs.

"As of right now, people can just show up," Burnette said about class enrollment. "They don't need anything, other than their bright, shining faces."

Mr. McGloin was a contract writer with the 502nd Air Base Wing OL-B public affairs office at Randolph AFB, Texas.



# AIR FORCE HONORS STRIKE EAGLE PILOT WHO LANDED CRIPPLED JET



*For the skill he showed in landing his crippled F-15E Strike Eagle, Capt. Hans Buckwalter earned the 2010 Koren Kolligian Jr. Trophy, which was presented June 29 during a ceremony in the Pentagon.*



U.S. Air Force photo

by Airman 1st Class James Richardson

WASHINGTON (AFNS) — A pilot who landed a crippled F-15E Strike Eagle after taking off from Kunsan Air Base, Korea, received the Air Force's most prestigious flight safety award here June 29.

Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley presented Capt. Hans Buckwalter, of the 366th Fighter Wing at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, with the 2010 Koren Kolligian Jr. Trophy for outstanding achievement in airmanship and flying proficiency.

On April 8, 2010, Buckwalter successfully landed his jet using only the nose and right main landing gear.

Shortly after takeoff, his aircraft experienced a mechanical failure that wedged the left main landing gear in the fuselage. The captain also experienced a similar failure in the right wing landing gear, which he was able to correct.

After nearly two hours of unsuccessful attempts to correct the left landing gear problem, Buckwalter, who has logged more than 1,200 flying hours, calmly touched down on the right main landing gear, lowered the nose, and held the left wing tip off the ground until his aircraft engaged the arresting cable.

He then lowered the left wing and maintained directional control for nearly 1,000 feet until his F-15E came to a stop and egress procedures were performed.

"There is no way I could have done this without the support of my wingman in the air, who constantly updated me on the status of my aircraft, and the assistance of my team on the ground that did everything possible to help me," said Buckwalter, who is now the chief

of standardization and evaluations for the 391st Fighter Squadron at Mountain Home.

Had his wingman not noticed the issue with his aircraft, he added, he would not have known there was a problem with his landing gear until he attempted to land, and the outcome could have been very different.

"A huge part of the outstanding airmanship Captain Buckwalter demonstrated was his effective use of all available resources to minimize the seriousness of the landing gear malfunction," said George Chappel, Air Education and Training Command flight safety manager. "He used his wingman to provide updates on the status of his landing gear while at the same time troubleshooting the malfunction with experts on the ground. His exemplary CRM (crew resource management) enabled him to get his aircraft into the best possible landing configuration; and from there, Captain Buckwalter's exceptional piloting skills took over, and he was able to land his crippled F-15."

The Kolligian Trophy, established in 1958, recognizes outstanding feats of airmanship by an aircrew member who, by extraordinary skill, exceptional alertness, ingenuity or proficiency, averts or minimizes the seriousness of an aircraft accident in terms of injury, loss of life, aircraft or property damage, Secretary Donley said.

"His (Buckwalter's) actions truly reflect how Airmen rise to the occasion no matter how difficult the circumstances," the secretary added.

— Staff Sgt. Richard A. Williams Jr.  
Air Force Public Affairs Agency

# AIRMEN HELP RECOVER CRASHED AFGHAN MI-17

**AFGHANISTAN (AFNS)** — Thirteen members of the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing responded to the crash site of an Afghan air force Mi-17 at Forward Operating Base Fiaz in Asadabad, Kunar province, June 29.

Six members were on board the aircraft and suffered minor injuries when the helicopter went down during a routine mission in the capital. Safety experts are examining the wreckage to determine the cause of the crash.

“It was reassuring to us that none of the injuries sustained in the crash were life threatening, nor did we suffer any fatalities during the mission,” said Lt. Col. Christopher Tacheny, from the 438th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group. “The goal of our recovery mission was to secure the mishap site and then attempt to recover the Mi-17.”

Working with the Afghan Ministry of Interior, a coalition team of American, Czech, Croatian and Afghan forces responded to the crash using two Mi-17s. Afghan National Army medical personnel were first on the scene followed shortly thereafter by U.S. Soldiers.

“The recovery team worked 10 to 11 hours a day in temperatures exceeding 110 degrees Fahrenheit for over a week, while under constant threat of indirect fire from insurgents operating in the area,” Tacheny said.

Within the first one to two hours of the crash, coalition forces secured the mishap site, drained fuel tanks, shut off battery power, secured potentially hazardous aircraft components, assessed pressurized hydraulic lines and assessed any security concerns. Team members also documented the site for further evaluation by the

safety investigation team. Most importantly, responding forces assessed and determined courses of action for the injured.

“Once on scene, Master Sergeant Chris Banks and I coordinated with the forward operating base medical teams at two locations and accessed injuries,” said Col. Brandon Clint, the 438th AEW surgeon general. “We transported some injured (crew members) to Kabul by Mi-17, and the more severely injured were medically evacuated to Bagram. Our Army brothers did an excellent job supporting us medically.”

Once the site was secure and patients were evaluated, first responders remained at Fiaz for more than a week. Security force adviser teams from Task Force Bronco 4 provided over watch for the scene and also coordinated delivery and use of cranes, forklifts and Afghan fire department personnel.

Officials said the Mi-17 was largely intact following the crash, but more than 8,000 pounds of equipment including engines, main rotor gear box, auxiliary power unit, armor, rotor head and tail boom were removed for ease of transport.

“Given the extreme temperatures and altitudes at the mishap location, we needed to reduce the total weight of the mishap aircraft in order for the CH-47 Chinook to safely carry out the Mi-17 fuselage,” Tacheny said. “Our maintenance team

was phenomenal in their efforts to ensure all proper precautions were followed. This was truly a “Shohna ba Shohna” (shoulder-to-shoulder) moment as the combined efforts of the recovery team were a shining success.”

— Capt. Jamie Humphries  
438th Air Expeditionary Wing public affairs

**“We transported some injured (crew members) to Kabul by Mi-17, and the more severely injured were medically evacuated to Bagram.”**



U.S. Air Force photo

**With support from Task Force Bronco 4, teams removed portions of a Mi-17 helicopter after a crash in Kunar province. Thirteen members of the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing responded to the incident scene. There were six people on board the aircraft when it crashed, and officials indicate there were no life-threatening injuries. Airmen were on the scene of the crash for more than a week.**