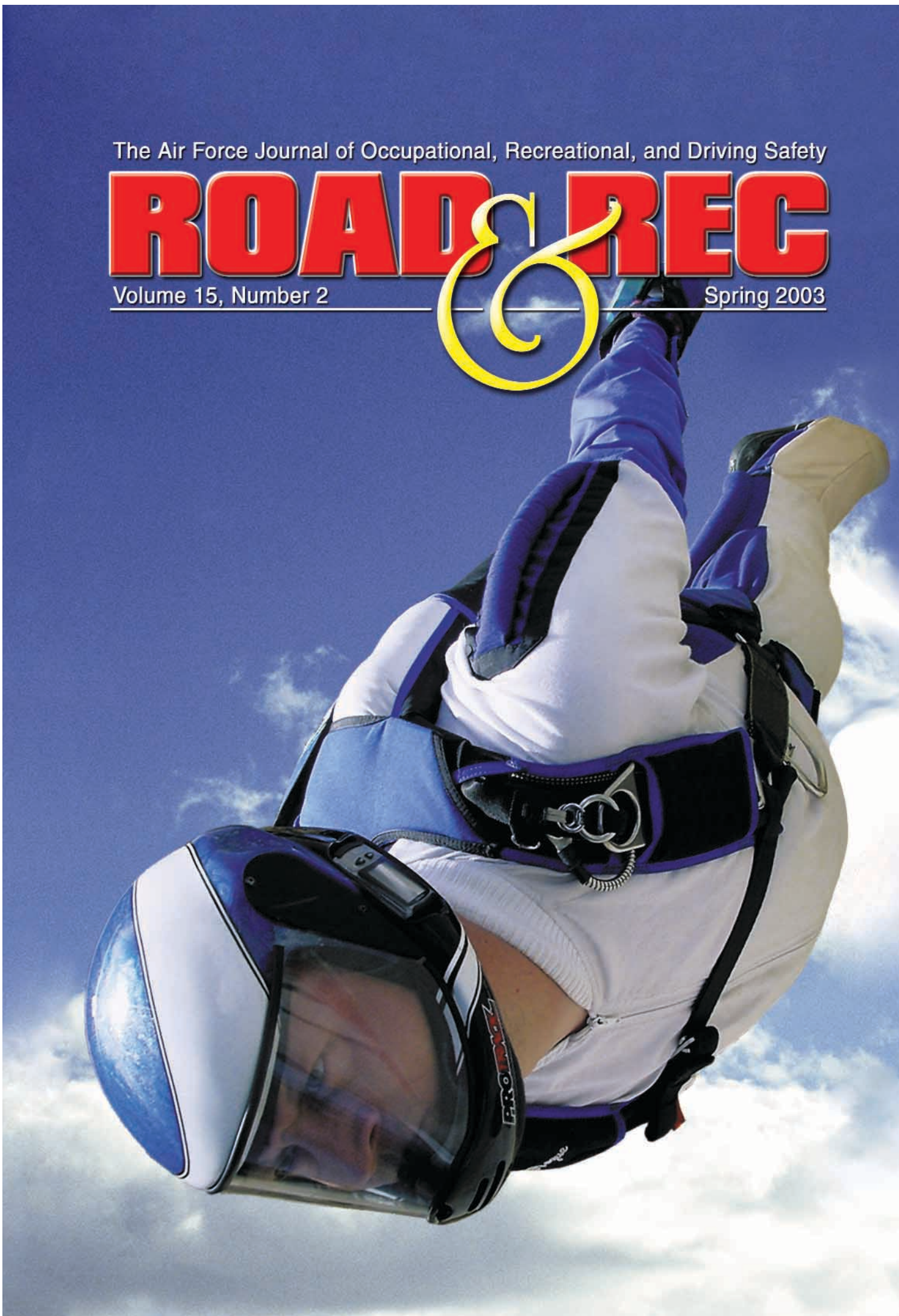
The Air Force Journal of Occupational, Recreational, and Driving Safety

ROAD & REC

Volume 15, Number 2 Spring 2003



The Air Force Journal of Occupational, Recreational, and Driving Safety

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Volume 15, Number 2 SPRING 2003

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Front cover photo by Adam Buckner

Letter from the Editor

Parting Thoughts

BOB VAN ELSBERG
Managing Editor

Some things stay in your memory forever. I remember the first time I really understood how important people in uniform are. I was a brand-new E-2 just out of basic serving in the Coast Guard during Vietnam. My ship, a 255-foot-long cutter, was plowing through the "Potato Patch" — an area of rough seas off the coast of California — headed for Japan. Out of the entire crew, maybe a dozen were fit for duty. The rest were too seasick to stand.

It was my turn to stand lookout watch. I climbed the ladder from the bridge to the exposed platform above. As I climbed onto the deck, I saw the guy I was about to relieve. He was soaked by the cold seawater that had splashed up in plumes from the ship's bow. And although he was one of the "lucky dozen," he hadn't completely escaped being seasick.

I looked at him. He was cold, he was miserable and he was somewhere he didn't want to be. He was doing his duty for the princely sum of $98 a month, the going pay for an E-2 back then. As I looked at him it occurred to me that he was doing more for his country than all the stars in Hollywood put together. They might make millions, but he — and a bunch more like him — were making a difference.

That's when I knew America's real heroes aren't the "heroes" of the silver screen. America's real heroes are turning missions on flightlines, standing duty aboard warships, watching across a hostile no-man's land from the turret of a tank. They aren't, as one of my friends recently said of Hollywood celebrities, simply "known for being known." Real heroes are known for their service and sacrifice when it costs, when it isn't easy, and when it really matters.

The experience I described was 32 years ago during the Vietnam War. By the time you read this in the spring issue of ***Road & Rec***, you may be serving in another war — one with Iraq. Just as during Vietnam, America will be sending its most precious resource — people like you — to confront an enemy. At the end of the day it will be your courage and commitment that will make the difference.

That's why it is so important for you to choose to be safe in the things you do on- and off-duty. You aren't easily replaceable to your families or to this country. If you drink and drive, ride a motorcycle beyond your skills or the law, or needlessly put your life in danger, your loss won't end when the last rifle shot has echoed over your grave. Your families, friends and coworkers will feel that loss for a very long time. And your country will be diminished because you are not here.

I am writing this because after seven years of being the editor of your ground safety magazine, I am moving along. I hope when you look in the mirror you will see yourselves as I see you — the best of America's men and women. Wherever you are and whatever you do, take care of yourselves. This country and this Air Force can't do without you. ■

ROAD & REC
Vol. 15, Number 2 SPRING 2003

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But It "Looked Easy!"

BOB VAN ELSBERG
Managing Editor

Did you ever try something because it "looked easy" only to find out that you'd bitten off more than you could chew? Did you ever watch a skilled athlete do something difficult so smoothly that it left you thinking, "I can do that"? If you have, you're not so different from SrA Alan Campbell of the 314th Maintenance Squadron, Little Rock AFB, Ark. Invited to Arkansas' Lake Ouachita for a day of fun on the water, he found out that learning a new sport isn't always as easy as it looks. But he couldn't have known he was in for a rough time when the day began.

Saturday, August 4, 2001, was, according to Alan, "A gorgeous weekend. Actually, it wasn't as hot as it usually is. It was perfect — the sky was clear. We were going to camp out that night.

Alan, along with two of his roommates, had been invited by a girl he went to church with to join her and her family at the lake. The family had two boats — a pontoon party boat and a ski boat. Both were on the water that day.

"I think we got there about 10 minutes to 11 a.m.," he said. "Then we all got on the pontoon boat and had lunch and just hung-out. We listened to music, and then we went off with her father for awhile because the girls weren't into the whole water sport thing. We hung out with him and went tubing."

One of his friends had brought a wakeboard. As it got later into the evening most of the other boats had cleared out of the lake and Alan and his roommates decided to go wakeboarding. As Alan watched, he thought it wasn't so different from snowboarding, something he had done often in the past. His curiosity about wakeboarding prompted him to give it a try.

"Well, I've always seen it back at home and I had a bunch of friends that did it," he said. "It's on ESPN all of the time and you see them doing all of the tricks … I saw my friend doing it and it looked pretty easy … He talked it up a little bit. He's really good at it, so I got a little anxious to go out there and see what I could do."

Alan's friend gave him an impromptu introduction to how to wakeboard.

"He pretty-much demonstrated," he said. "I've snowboarded before and I'm pretty good at that.

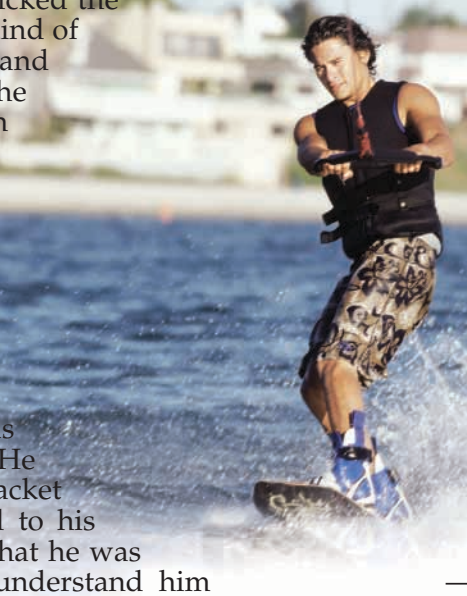
He said it was pretty-much the same except for the hardest part, which is getting up on the water."

The girl's father was driving the boat. Alan went into the water with the wakeboard as his two friends watched from the back of the boat. The first couple of times the boat started to pull him forward and he fell face-first into the water. It was an inauspicious start.

"I was discouraged because my other roommate, (who was also inexperienced at wakeboarding) got up on his first try. I was the first guy to 'biff it' a couple of times before I could actually pull myself up," he said.

But finally, he managed it. The boat was doing about 25 mph as Alan hung onto the towrope and skimmed on top of the water on the wakeboard. However, the fun didn't last too long.

"I was only up for a couple of seconds when it felt like something kicked the board out, or I caught some kind of wave," he said. "It threw me and it felt like the board hit the front of my leg — although that's pretty much impossible. I was in the water and had no idea what had happened. Then I looked down at my right leg. It was pitiful the way it looked — pretty gross."



He had a spiral fracture in his right femur (upper leg bone) and could feel the ends of the bone rubbing together. He couldn't swim, but his life jacket kept him afloat. Alan waved to his friends in the boat to signal that he was in trouble, but they didn't understand him and made a rather leisurely turn-around to pick him up. For Alan, "It felt like forever."

When they pulled up to him he looked and said, "I think my leg is broken. My friend was like, 'Oh no — just shake it off.' He thought I was just faking it and I said, 'No, I'm serious.' Then I leaned back and pulled my leg out of the water. My friend's face got white and he just dove into the water."

The fact Alan had been wearing his life jacket likely saved him from a bizarre situation, one that might have proved fatal. His feet were still strapped to the wakeboard, which was very buoyant. Without the ***life jacket*** to keep his upper body floating, he might have hung upside down in the water and drowned.

With a broken leg, he couldn't get out of the water on his own. His roommate who had jumped into the water helped him get onto the boat's swim platform, which jutted out from the back of the boat just above the water level.

"That was pretty painful because it was hard to isolate the leg," he said. "He was holding whatever he could and I had ahold of my leg with both hands."

Once he was on the swim platform, his friend removed the wakeboard and the girl's father lifted him into the boat. They then cruised slowly across the lake to the family's pontoon boat. Once they got there, one of the people used a cell phone to call for help. The operator told them which dock to take Alan to so that the ambulance could get to him. Almost 90 minutes passed from the time Alan was injured to the time the ambulance picked him up at the lake. Getting him into the ambulance wasn't fun.

"They put me on a board. I had my leg curled-up against my body so that I could hold it steady," he said. However, to get him into the ambulance, the EMTs had to straighten his leg, a process that was very painful. He explained the EMTs immobilized his leg by putting it in a traction device. "That was the most painful part of the whole thing."

The ambulance took him to St. Joseph's Hospital in Hot Springs, Ark.

"They wheeled me into the ER and somebody came in and looked at me and made sure nothing else was broken," he said. The X-rays confirmed the obvious — that his leg was broken. What was surprising to the medical personnel — and very fortunate for Alan — was that the jagged break had not punctured his skin and become a compound fracture.

After the doctors realized that Alan would need very specialized surgery to repair his leg, he was taken later that evening to St. Vincent's Hospital in North Little Rock. During his surgery the following afternoon, the doctor inserted an 18-inch-long titanium rod inside the broken bone in Alan's upper leg, effectively reinforcing the bone from the knee to the hip.

Alan spent four days in the hospital, followed by 30 days on quarters. Each day he did exercises to strengthen his leg and to help him regain its use. For the first couple of weeks he needed crutches to walk. However, he recovered quickly and, when the last X-rays were taken almost two months later, his surgery had largely healed. Because of his injury, when he went back to work he could not immediately return to his aircraft maintenance job and worked in the training office. He was supposed to be on at least two months of restricted

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duty but, he said, "I got way too 'antsy' and September 11 happened. Everything was getting all in a flurry and they were talking about deploying. I didn't want to be stuck in an office when everyone else deployed, so I went to the doctor and showed him I could walk just fine. He took me off it (restricted duty) pretty early."

Although a bit wary after his accident, Alan is not discouraged from wakeboarding. However, neither is he going to jump in just because someone else can make it "look easy."

"I'm going to do some more water-skiing and get used to water sports," he said. His experience has left him with some definite ideas on how newcomers to wakeboarding can be smarter and safer because it's not as easy as it might look.

He explained, "I'd say get as much advice as possible and make sure you know how everything works and exactly how to stand up. Know what you can do in the case of an emergency — *I didn't know* I could take the feet off the board. Luckily, my friend was there to know how everything worked and the safety aspects of the wakeboard."

Equally important, Alan feels, is being able to communicate effectively with the boat driver if something goes wrong.

"That's probably the biggest thing — work out some kind of safety hand signals where you can say, 'I'm hurt — get over here as quickly as possible,'" he said. ■

Saved by the Belt

EMILY RUTH ROMERO
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Editor's Note: It's not often I get a story submitted by an 8-year-old child, in this case the daughter of a Coast Guardsman stationed in Puerto Rico (the Coast Guard also subscribes to "Road & Rec"). However, sometimes "out of the mouth of babes" comes some truth that we, as adults, occasionally overlook.

My dad and I got into a car accident. We were going down the road and my dad and I were laughing. Then I got yanked, closed my eyes, and screamed. I was in the backseat and when I opened my eyes, there was smoke everywhere. The windshield looked like it had broken into a million pieces. The whole front of the car was wrecked. The other car had one tire wrecked. The strange thing is that no one had a bruise.

Then I started to cry and nothing could stop me. I wanted my mom to come, but I had to stop crying while they were checking me for injuries. They didn't know very much English and I didn't know very much Spanish, which is why I had to pay attention and not cry.

After that, my mom came to pick us up. I was still very scared and felt like nothing could calm me down. When we got home, my dad and I each took a shower to wash off any pieces of glass that might be hidden in our hair. I started to feel a little better. After I got into my pajamas and started to snuggle with my favorite stuffed animal, I felt a lot better than I did after the accident. My mom set up a movie and we watched it until we picked up my brother from one of my friend's houses. Even then, each time I heard a loud noise, I was startled and had a flashback and remembered the scary part of the car accident.

I don't think I will ever forget about the crash and I think I will always be a little scared of it happening again. I am just glad we were wearing our seatbelts and I will always be careful to do that. I just want anyone who reads this to always remember to wear their seatbelts. ■

Digital illustration by Felicia Moreland

Life in the Fast Lane

Courtesy ***National Highway Traffic Safety Administration***

Are you tired of slow drivers blocking the fast lane? Do you believe it is the slow driver in the fast lane, not the aggressive driver, who is the real menace to society?

Perhaps no other aspect of road travel is so laden with myth as the "fast lane." The truth is, life in the fast lane can be deadly unless everyone knows the rules. So, here's the scoop:

The posted speed limit is a law that applies to all lanes. Technically speaking, there is no fast lane or slow lane. Slower traffic is generally expected to keep right. Only emergency vehicles are permitted to exceed the posted speed limit and ONLY when their lights and sirens are operating.

Speed surveys indicate that the majority of drivers are exceeding the posted speed limit. The "slow driver" in your way may, in fact, be obeying the speed limit. Check your speedometer.

Your speed, even when passing, should not exceed the posted speed limit. If you are driving the speed limit and the vehicle in front of you is driving the speed limit, there is no need to pass.

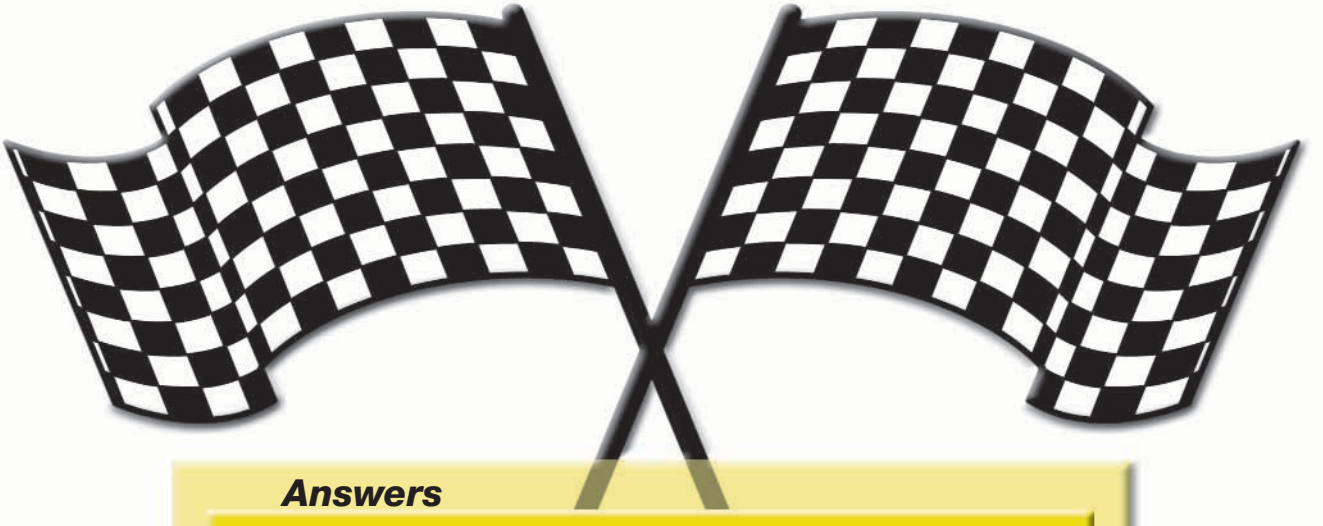
Generally speaking, it is safest to stay out of the left lane except when passing. Twenty states have laws that reserve the left lane for passing, although states vary as to the types of roads and vehicles for which the restriction applies. Thirty states and the District of Columbia have no such law. Do you know the law in your state? ■

Test Your Knowledge

True or False

1. **The speed limit applies to all lanes, including the far left lane on a multi-lane highway.**
2. **The left lane on divided highways is only for passing.**
3. **The left lane on divided highways is for left-handed drivers.**
4. **Motorists who drive the speed limit in the left lane are breaking the law.**
5. **Your speed, even when passing, should not exceed the posted speed limit.**
6. **The left lane is reserved for motorists who wish to drive faster than the posted speed limit.**
7. **Drivers should pass on the left because it is safer than passing on the right.**

Digital illustration by Felicia Moreland



Answers

1. *True.*
2. *The following states reserve the left lane for passing: Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia and Washington. However, restrictions may vary from state to state. Check with your motor vehicle department.*
3. *False.*
4. *In states that reserve the left lane for passing and apply that restriction to all vehicles, no one is permitted to cruise in the left lane regardless of speed. In states that allow motorists to cruise in the left lane, no one is permitted to exceed the speed limit.*
5. *True.*
6. *False. The speed limit applies to all lanes.*
7. *True. Passing on the right is more risky because it places you in the blind spot of the vehicle you are passing.*

Handling Shoulder Drop-Offs

BOB VAN ELSBERG
Managing Editor

I was really enjoying the afternoon, threading the winding curves on Honey Springs Road, east of San Diego, on my motorcycle. Cheryl, my new girlfriend, was riding with me and seemed to be relaxing and enjoying the ride.

I crested a low rise with a fairly easy right-hand curve. However, the road was not banked and that caught me off guard. I was going too fast to stay in my lane on the crowned road surface and began drifting across the oncoming lane toward the left-hand shoulder. I both heard and felt a "Thump" — "thump" — as my front and back tires ran off the drop-off on the left side of the road. Now I was "threading the needle," trying to avoid going into a ditch a couple of feet to my left while trying not to angle back toward the road on my right. There was a difference of perhaps two or three inches in height between the shoulder and the road surface. If I tried to climb that without slowing down, chances were good I would dump the bike and Cheryl and I would both be hurt. That's not the way I wanted the ride to end.

Fortunately, I got the bike stopped safely. And while I did not repeat that mistake on a motorcycle, there have been times where, perhaps because of inattention, I have allowed the passenger side tires of my car to drift off the road. When that involved a shoulder drop-off of more than a couple inches, getting back onto the road has been a sometimes-hairy experience. That is nowhere more common than when driving through a construction area where a newly-paved road may provide a drop-off of four or more inches. That can be a real attention-getter, regardless of the type of vehicle you may be driving.

If you find yourself in that situation, the following tips may help keep you from being another accident statistic:

- Let the car slow down gradually. Brake gently — if at all — so that you maintain control of your vehicle.
- Look at the traffic situation. If you see oncoming traffic or if there is traffic alongside you, try to wait until those vehicles have passed before attempting to return to the road. Look for a spot ahead where the pavement edge and shoulder height are as close to the same as possible. The less the difference in height, the easier and safer it will be to maneuver back onto the road surface. If, however, the drop-off is more than four inches, you may not be able to return to the road safely at all.
- Before trying to drive back onto the road, move your vehicle 12 to 18 inches to the right so that your car is straddling the edge of the pavement. You need to give your tires room to turn left and get a running start before climbing over the pavement edge.
- Steer gently to the left — about one-eighth to one-quarter turn of the wheel — so that your tires climb the edge at an angle. Avoid panicking and trying to quickly steer back onto the roadway.
- As soon as your right front tire climbs back onto the road surface, steer gently about one-eighth to one-quarter turn to the right to center your vehicle in your lane. Only after all four wheels are safely on the road should you attempt to accelerate to the speed limit.

Warning: If the drop-off is straight down and is four inches or more in depth, or if you didn't properly straddle the pavement edge, your right rear tire can rub against the drop-off and cause you to swerve uncontrollably to the left. This can send you veering across your lanes and into oncoming traffic no matter how hard you steer to the right. ■

Information provided courtesy of ***Safetyline*** magazine

Riding a Motorcycle Under the Weather

LT RAY LEUNG
Reprinted Courtesy ***Ashore***

It was a gloomy night in Southern California. I was at the end of my sea tour, and my roommates were moving out of our Thousand Oaks bachelor pad. The last one had gotten orders to England to work with our trusty British friends, and he needed help because he couldn't wait for the movers to pick up his motorcycle at home for shipping.

My friend had sold his Harley-Davidson Night Train (motorcycle) to a police officer in Texas, but planned to ship his newest Harley, which he had acquired during our most recent WestPac deployment. I volunteered to ride his bike to the base at Pt. Mugu in the morning so that the movers could pick it up there.

When I left the house at 5 a.m., it seemed like another great day in the suburban Los Angeles area — a perfect morning for riding. Once I headed toward Pt. Mugu, though, I realized that the weather was cool and there was a lot of moisture in the air.

I leaned into a turn atop the western edge of Santa Monica Mountain and started down the hill. From this point, I usually could see what the weather was like down in the valley. Because it was mid-April and 5 a.m., I couldn't see below the mountain toward the coastline.

Down the hill I went, with the moisture getting thicker as I descended toward Pt. Mugu. I knew I was in trouble when, halfway down the hill, the fog hit me in the face like a blanket. My helmet visor started picking up so much moisture that I couldn't see anything. My breathing also was picking up under this stressful environment. I had to use my leather gloves to wipe off excess water droplets from my visor — a process I had to repeat several times during the next five minutes, which was how long it took to reach the bottom of the hill.

The fog wasn't getting any thinner. In fact, it was so thick that I couldn't see more than 25 feet in front of me. I finally had to raise my visor and ride bare-face into the wind. Many thoughts crossed my mind: What if a rock hits me in the face? What if a driver behind me doesn't see my brake light? I'll have to lay the bike down on the side of the road and may suffer massive bodily damage from serving as a speed bump. I crawled my way to Pt. Mugu at about 10 mph and got to the hangar in 50 minutes instead of the usual 25.

The fog lifted at noon, and the movers arrived soon afterward. Only a few water spots remained as they packed the bike.

From this incident, I learned that it doesn't pay to be cheap when it comes to motorcycle safety gear. If you can afford $1,500 for leathers and boots, go the extra mile and spend $20 for anti-fog-film inserts that mount to the inside of your helmet visor. They are a permanent fix for misting visors. I also should have called the assistant squadron duty officer before I left the house and asked for the current weather observation. In other words, I should have used risk management.

It's dangerous to ride a motorcycle "under the weather." Always expect the worst, and be prepared for whatever Mother Nature throws at you. Stop if you feel the need — so that you can live to ride another day. ■

Digital illustration by Felicia Moreland

Short Circuits

Car Joins Aircraft at Crash Lab

The twisted remains of a 2002 Cadillac DeVille — the horrific reminder of one of New Mexico's most horrible DWI crashes in recent history — joined the remains of aircraft displayed at the Air Force Crash Lab in a special ceremony held 24 November. The car was donated by Mothers Against Drunk Driving New Mexico. The car will be used along with the state patrol officer's dash video to train ground safety investigators attending the Mishap Investigation Non-Aviation (MINA) course.

The crash occurred on January 25, 2002, when Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) employee Lloyd Larsen got onto Interstate 40 in a BIA pickup going the wrong direction. Larson struck the Cadillac head-on, instantly killing Edward and Alice Ramaeker and their friends, Larry and Rita Beller. The two families had been traveling through New Mexico on vacation. Larson, who survived the accident, had been drinking on-duty and had nine prior DUI arrests. When he was arrested after the crash he had a BAC of .205. Larson was sentenced to 20 years for the deaths of the four motorists.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, the Ramaeker family donated the car to MADD New Mexico so that the loss of their family and the Beller's would not be forgotten. After a five-month-long cooperative effort between MADD New Mexico's State Executive Director, Ms. Terry Huertaz, and Maj. Cindi Feldwisch of the Safety Center, the car became the first vehicle ever permanently displayed at the Air Force Crash Lab.

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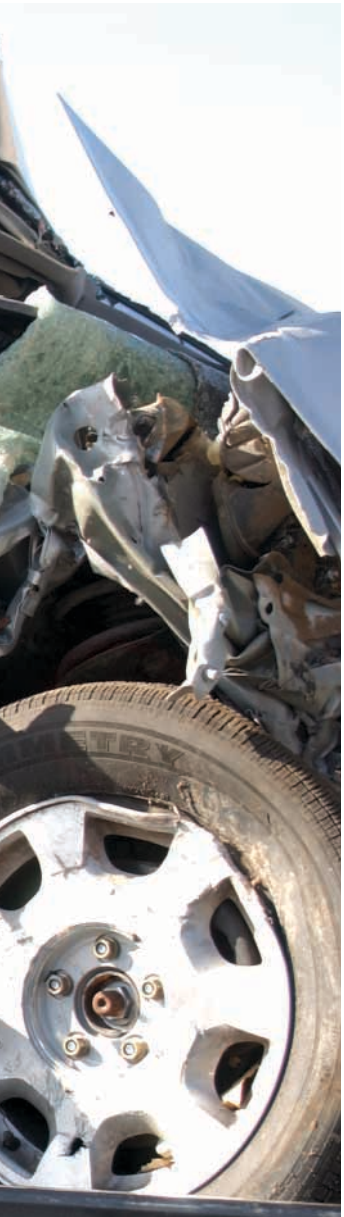

USAF photos courtesy Maj. Cindi Feldwisch

Short Circuits...continued from page 13

Recalled Autos/Tires

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has announced the following recalls:

2002 Honda Accord, Odyssey; 2003 Honda Pilot, Acura TL, Acura CL, Acura MDX. Number involved — 17,551. Defect: On certain minivans, sedans, coupes and sport utility vehicles equipped with V6 engines, a timing belt tensioner pulley on the water pump is misaligned and could cause the timing belt to contact a bolt on the cylinder head. Eventually, this could damage the belt and cause it to fail. If the timing belt were to break, the engine would stall, increasing the risk of a crash. **(NHTSA Recall No. 02V226)**

1999 BMW 323i, 328i. Number involved — 20,500. Defect: On certain passenger vehicles, the side air bag system could deploy in non-crash impacts — such as when hitting large potholes or curbs at high speeds. This could cause the side air bag and head protection system to deploy without an actual side crash or impact severe enough to cause significant visible damage to the vehicle. Unexpected deployment of the side air bag could cause serious injury if the occupant's head is resting near the side air bag. **(NHTSA Recall No. 02V223)**

2001 DaimlerChrysler Corporation PT Cruiser. Number involved — 97,779. Defect: On certain vehicles the fuel supply line can contact the air conditioning tube service port. This could cause chafing of the line, resulting in fuel leakage. Fuel in the presence of an ignition source could result in a fire. **(NHTSA Recall No. 02V214, DaimlerChrysler Recall No. B16)**

2002 DaimlerChrysler Corporation PT Cruiser. Number involved — 345,436. Defect: On certain passenger vehicles, the fuel pump mounting flange could leak if the vehicle is involved in a rollover crash. Fuel leakage in the presence of an ignition source could result in a fire. (**NHTSA Recall No. 02V215, DaimlerChrysler Recall No. B23)**

2002 Chevrolet Trailblazer, GMC Envoy, Oldsmobile Bravada. Number involved — 76,467. Defect: This is an expansion of an earlier recall (02V-121). On certain sport utility vehicles, a fuel filter fitting can become disconnected. If this were to occur while attempting to start the engine, a no-start condition would result and fuel would be pumped out of the fuel filter onto the ground. If the fitting were to become disconnected while the vehicle was in motion, the engine would stop, causing the loss of the power steering. If an ignition source were present, fuel leaking from a disconnected fuel filter could result in a fire. **(NHTSA Recall No. 02V121, GM Recall No. 02016A)**

2002-2003 Buick LeSabre, Rendezvous; Cadillac DeVille; Chevrolet Trailblazer, Impala, Monte Carlo, Ventura; GMC Envoy; Oldsmobile Bravada, Aurora, Silhouette; Pontiac Bonneville, Montana. Number involved — 133,221. Defect: Certain passenger cars, minivans and sport utility vehicles have an air bag inflator on the driver's side that could fracture a weld during deployment. Pieces of the inflator could strike and injure vehicle occupants and the air bag would not fully inflate, reducing the bag's ability to protect the driver. **(NHTSA Recall No. 02V222, GM Recall No. 02032)**

Owners who do not receive a free remedy for these recall defects within a reasonable amount of time should call the following numbers: Honda, 1-800-999-1099; Acura, 1-800-382-2238; BMW, 1-800-831-1117; DaimlerChrysler, 1-800-853-1403; Chevrolet, 1-800-222-1020; GMC, 1-800-462-8782, Oldsmobile, 1-800-442-6537; Buick, 1-800-521-7300; Cadillac, 1-800-458-8006; and Pontiac, 1-800-762-2737.

Tire Recall

Continental ContiTrac AW, Grabber AW. Number potentially involved — 596,610. Defect: Certain ContiTrac AW and Grabber AW tires size P275/60R17, used as original equipment and sold as replacement tires on certain 2000-2001 2-wheel-drive Ford Expedition and 2-wheel-drive Lincoln Navigator sport utility vehicles have lower than specified rubber gauge between the belts. This condition can potentially lead to tread detachment or separation. Should the tread separate from the tire carcass, the driver could lose control of the vehicle and crash. Owners who do not receive a free remedy within a reasonable time should contact Continental at 1-704-583-8782. **(NHTSA Recall No. 02T012).** ■

Oh, My Aching Back!

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MAJ MICHELLE KASTLER
CAPT JOSEPH WILLIAMS
375th Surgical Operations Squadron
Physical Medicine Flight
Scott AFB, Il.

Editor's Note: *If you have ever had a back injury, you know how much it can hurt trying to make even the simplest movements. Sitting up, walking, even trying to roll over in bed can hurt so much that you'll think twice. And you don't have to single-handedly try to pick up a 500-pound bomb to hurt your back. I knew one Air Force Reserve lieutenant colonel who bent over to tie his shoes and wound up in the hospital. It can happen that unexpectedly.*

Picture this: You're sitting at your computer desk at home reading a magazine. You bend over to pick up a loose insert card that fell out and feel something "go" in your lower back. Immediately, you feel intense local pain and your muscles begin to spasm. You struggle to stand up and decide taking a nice warm shower and going to bed might help relieve the pain and spasms. After a restless night, you arise in the morning, still in pain and debate whether to stay in bed or go to work and spend 8 hours at your computer. You wonder if sitting will be enough rest in and of itself. You arrive at work, struggle to get comfortable but

continued on next page

end up going home early. This scenario is a classic example of ***mechanical low back pain.***

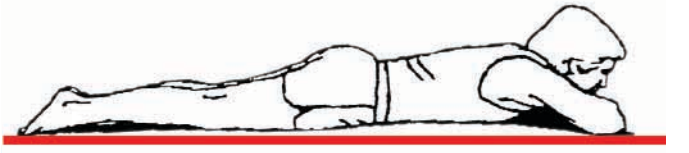
The most common cause of this pain is strained or sprained muscles, tendons, or ligaments in the lower back, spine or hip. While the pain may vary, the signs and symptoms often include muscle spasms, cramping, tenderness, and/or stiffness in the middle or on one side of the back. Most of the pain will subside within 24 to 48 hours and 70 percent of patients get better within two weeks.

Lower back pain may also be caused by pressure on the nerve root, which can be caused by things such as a herniated (slipped or bulging) disc, osteoarthritis (degenerative disc disease), spinal stenosis, and compression fractures. The symptoms include pain and numbness or a tingling that may start in the lower back or buttocks and travel past the knee to the back of the ankle and foot. This type of lower back pain is often termed ***sciatica*** because one or more nerve roots forming the sciatic nerve are being compressed.

It is important to emphasize that sciatica is a symptom, not a disease or condition. Sciatic pain is classically described as a sharp, burning, or **"shooting"** pain that may be constant or intermittent. Sneezing, coughing, prolonged sitting or bending forward often increases pain. Walking or bending backward can help relieve the pain, which is normally felt on one side of your body and may cause your legs to feel weak. If you feel weak in the knees or have trouble controlling your bowel or bladder, you need to get immediate medical attention.

There are several things you can do to speed your recovery if you are suffering from mechanical low back pain. The following advice is not meant to replace that of a medical professional who has examined you. These are simply suggestions to help you until you see your doctor or a physical therapist. If moving increases your pain, stop and rest your back and seek medical attention.

Initially, putting an ice pack on the injured area and resting can relieve some of your pain. You might think heat would be comforting and help reduce the pain, but it may actually increase the inflammation and discomfort. A simple ice pack can be made using common household items, such as a 4-1 mixture of water to rubbing alcohol frozen in a double zip lock bag. A bag of frozen vegetables also works well and conforms easily to the shape of the back. Use this for 10-15 minutes with a dry or damp towel between your skin and the ice pack. Your doctor may prescribe muscle relaxants or an anti-inflammatory medication. It is important to follow the prescription so that the medication is effective.



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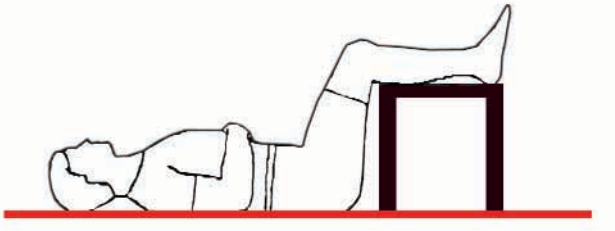

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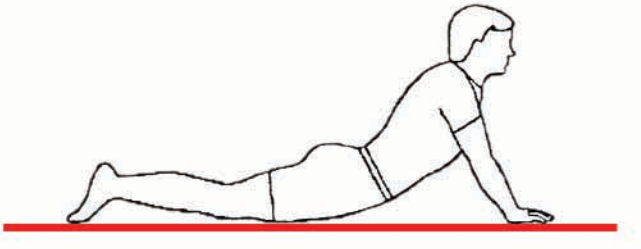

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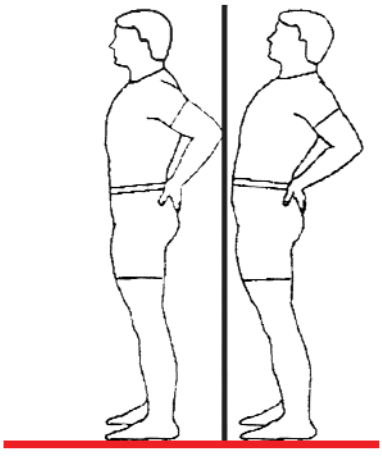

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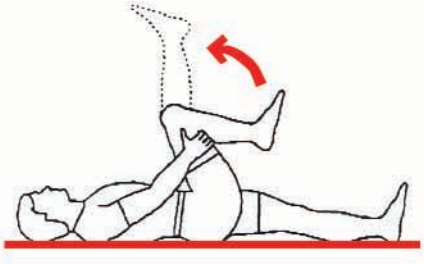

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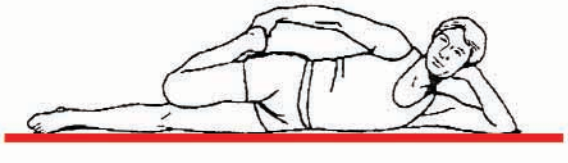


Figure 6.

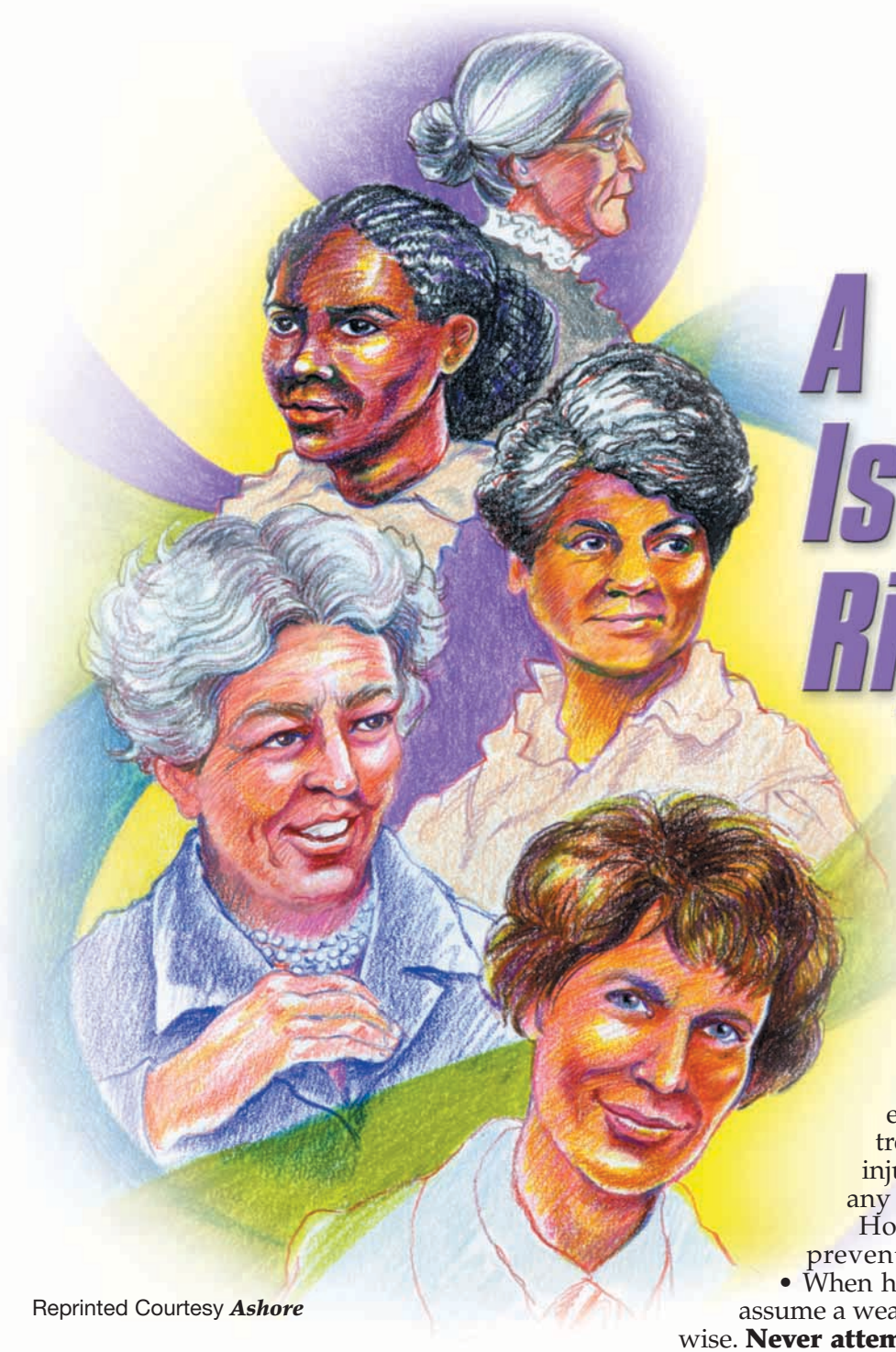
When the pain begins, lying on your stomach and resting with a pillow under your stomach can help **(fig. 1)**, as can lying on your back with your hips and knees bent 90 degrees **(fig. 2)**. Since low back pain often results from sitting or sleeping in a bent position, exercises that stretch the spine can help prevent or alleviate pain. Start off slowly with just a small amount of movement, and then over the next few days increase your movement to extend your elbows fully **(fig. 3)**. It is important to always keep in mind that ***spinal extension*** is key in keeping your back healthy. Every hour or two take a break from sitting and do some standing spinal extensions **(fig. 4)**. This is especially important after you've been sitting at a desk or riding in a car.

Gentle exercise rather than total rest can speed your recovery from mechanical low back pain. Once the initial sharp, acute pain has subsided you can begin a gentle exercise routine. A daily 20-minute walk followed by stretching, then an ice pack on the injured area can help you recover. Stretches should target the hamstring **(fig. 5)** and quadricep **(fig. 6)** muscles to keep the front and back of the pelvis flexible. Pelvic stabilization exercises will help to reduce the chance of re-injury, and should be done on the recommendation of a physical therapist that can assess your specific needs.

Flashback to the scenario you read at the beginning of this article. You feel a twinge in your lower back, so you get up and do some back extension exercises, and then grab a towel to make a lumbar roll for support. Instead of the warm shower, you grab an ice pack and put it on your back while lying on your stomach. Being the avid reader that you are, you read for another 20 minutes. Then you do another set of back extensions, take a walk around the block and go to bed. Amazingly enough, you awake refreshed and pain free.

So what lessons have you learned? You've learned to not stay too long in a bent posture. You've learned to do back extensions frequently during the day, to get regular exercise, and when needed, to use ice to alleviate pain. Armed with this knowledge, you're ready to face the challenges of the day and see them through with a lot less discomfort. ■

Editor's Note: *For information on proper lifting techniques, go to the Air Force Safety Center web page at* ***www.safety.kirtland.af.mil****, select "****Crossfeed****," then "****Ground****," then "****Newsletters and Articles****," then scroll down to 22nd Airlift Wing, "****Manual Lifting Basics****."*



A Wife Is Always Right

Reprinted Courtesy ***Ashore***

"Hey, what are you doing?" the leery wife hollered at her husband as she glanced at him with a nervous twitch in her eye.

"I'm going to clean my gun," exclaimed the husband.

"Is it loaded? Do you know how to clean it?" she asked. "You're going to end up hurting yourself, and then I'll really get upset," she added.

"No, it's not loaded," the husband answered, "and I'd like to remind you that I have done this hundreds of times."

The man was thoroughly dissatisfied with his wife's lack of faith. "How can I possibly hurt anyone in my own home?" he thought.

Suddenly his train of thought was interrupted by a sharp crack from the gun. The smell of gunpowder filled the small house, but he didn't notice. His only concern was the pain shooting up his leg like a hot knife. He was rushed to an emergency room where doctors treated his gunshot wound. The injury was minor, so he didn't miss any work.

How could this mishap have been prevented?

- When handling weapons, a person must assume a weapon is loaded until proven otherwise. **Never attempt to clean a loaded weapon.**
- When handling a loaded weapon, the operator needs to ensure the safeties are engaged. Remember the saying, "If you see red, you're dead?" This refers to the red color on most safety mechanisms. If you can see a red dot or red on the safety button, that usually indicates the safety is off.
- Always keep the weapon pointed in a safe direction. **Never point it at anyone.**
- Stay alert while cleaning a weapon. Fatigue can play a big role in an accident.
- Read the instructions and mentally review the

safety precautions. If available, take a class on safe weapons handling. These classes may be available at local shooting ranges.

• **Never treat a gun as a toy**.

A Few Recent AF Examples

• A master sergeant was helping his girlfriend move from her old apartment to a new one. During the day she put her loaded 9mm Glock semiautomatic pistol, which she kept for protection, on top of the covers at the foot of the bed and later stacked some boxes on the bed. When the master sergeant decided to get some rest that evening, he forgot the gun was on the bed. Putting his feet under the covers, he felt the various items stacked on the foot of the bed and reached down to move them so he could stretch out. As he was doing so, he accidentally discharged the pistol, sending a bullet through his right calf into his thigh. He spent five days in the hospital and 17 days on quarters.

(Lessons learned — (1) Always store weapons in a safe location. If they are stored loaded for self-defense, understand that you are responsible if someone handles the gun and accidentally discharges it. (2) Some modern semiautomatic pistols (Glock and KelTec) do not have a separate manual safety that must be released before the trigger can be pulled. Simply pulling the triggers on these weapons disengages the safeties. Take time to thoroughly understand how a firearm and its safety systems operate before you handle a weapon.

• An A1C took his Walther .40 caliber semiautomatic handgun from its box in order to clean it. He racked the slide back to ensure the chamber was empty, then let the slide go forward. He also removed two loaded magazines from the box. He carried the gun and magazines into the front room and placed them on a kitchen countertop. He then went outside onto his balcony to smoke a cigarette. While he was outside, another airman sharing the apartment with him handled the gun, in the process pulling the slide back and placing a loaded magazine in the gun. When the gun's owner walked back into the room he took the loaded gun from his friend, not realizing a magazine had been placed in the gun. Noticing the slide was pulled back, he released it and unknowingly chambered a round in the now-cocked handgun. He then squeezed the trigger, discharging the gun and hitting his friend in the left thigh. His friend was hospitalized for four days and spent 23 days on quarters.

(Lesson learned — Never assume a firearm is unloaded, especially if others have had access to the gun since you last checked it).

• An A1C, thinking someone was breaking into his residence, borrowed his roommate's .44 Magnum revolver and went outside to investigate the noise he heard. Thinking the intruder was inside the residence, he went back inside and entered a hallway. Hearing what he thought was someone heading towards him, he cocked the revolver. As he began to raise the gun, he accidentally discharged it. The bullet ricocheted off the floor, hitting him in the lower part of his right thigh and exiting the top of his thigh. He spent two days in the hospital and three days on quarters.

(Lessons learned — (1) Cocking the hammer on a revolver places the weapon in the single-action trigger mode where the trigger can be released with a very slight pressure. This drastically increases the likelihood of an accidental discharge. (2) Deadly force is normally justified only when you believe your life or that of others — such as your family —- are in imminent danger and there is no way to escape the threat. In the case of this individual, he had safely exited the residence and no one else remained inside. By returning inside the home when there was no imminent threat, the airman — had he shot an intruder — would have had a difficult time justifying his actions as self-defense. ■

Mountain Weather: Are You Prepared?

Reprinted Courtesy ***Ashore***
AT1 Jon Warren

One January day a few years ago, two men began a four-day trek across a mountain range. The weather forecast when they left was nasty and, by midnight of the first day, the temperature had dropped to minus 10 degrees Fahrenheit. By the next morning, it had fallen another 13 degrees.

On the second day, one man's physical condition began to fail. Instead of retreating to shelter below the timberline, the two men pushed on until the sick partner collapsed from hypothermia and exhaustion. The other man left him wrapped up in a sleeping bag and bivvy sack and went for help.

By the time he found help at 9 o'clock that night, he was, himself, suffering from severe frostbite. However, his efforts were in vain. Rescuers pulled his partner's frozen body off the mountain in a sled the following day.

Granted, most people wouldn't head for the back country in such weather conditions. However, it's important to understand that weather in the back country can change quickly during any time of the year. I was once hiking near Mount Baker, Wash., when I decided to take a break. At the time, it was 85 degrees. Before I could get my stove started for lunch, the sky clouded over and it started to snow — all in only 15 minutes.

Mountains make their own weather by forcing incoming air masses upward as they strike the windward side of the mountains. As the air rises, it cools at an average rate of 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit per 1,000 feet, forming clouds and increasing precipitation. On the leeward (downwind) side of the mountains, the air descends, warms, and increases the amount of water it can hold. As a result, the leeward side of the mountain receives less precipitation being in what is called a "rain shadow."

Because of the changeable weather conditions in the mountains, there are 10 essential things you need to take when you when you go hiking, camping, fishing or hunting in the back country. Those include: extra clothing (wools or synthetics — not cottons), extra food, matches and a fire starter, map, compass, whistle, first-aid kit, sleeping bag, something to purify water, and a tarp.

You might be wondering, "Why do I need all of this gear?" The truth is, most of it will stay in your pack. You never know, though, when you'll need some of this equipment (and it's a lot better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it). For example, I was glad I had the extra clothing I usually take for snowboarding when I was hiking near

Mount Baker.

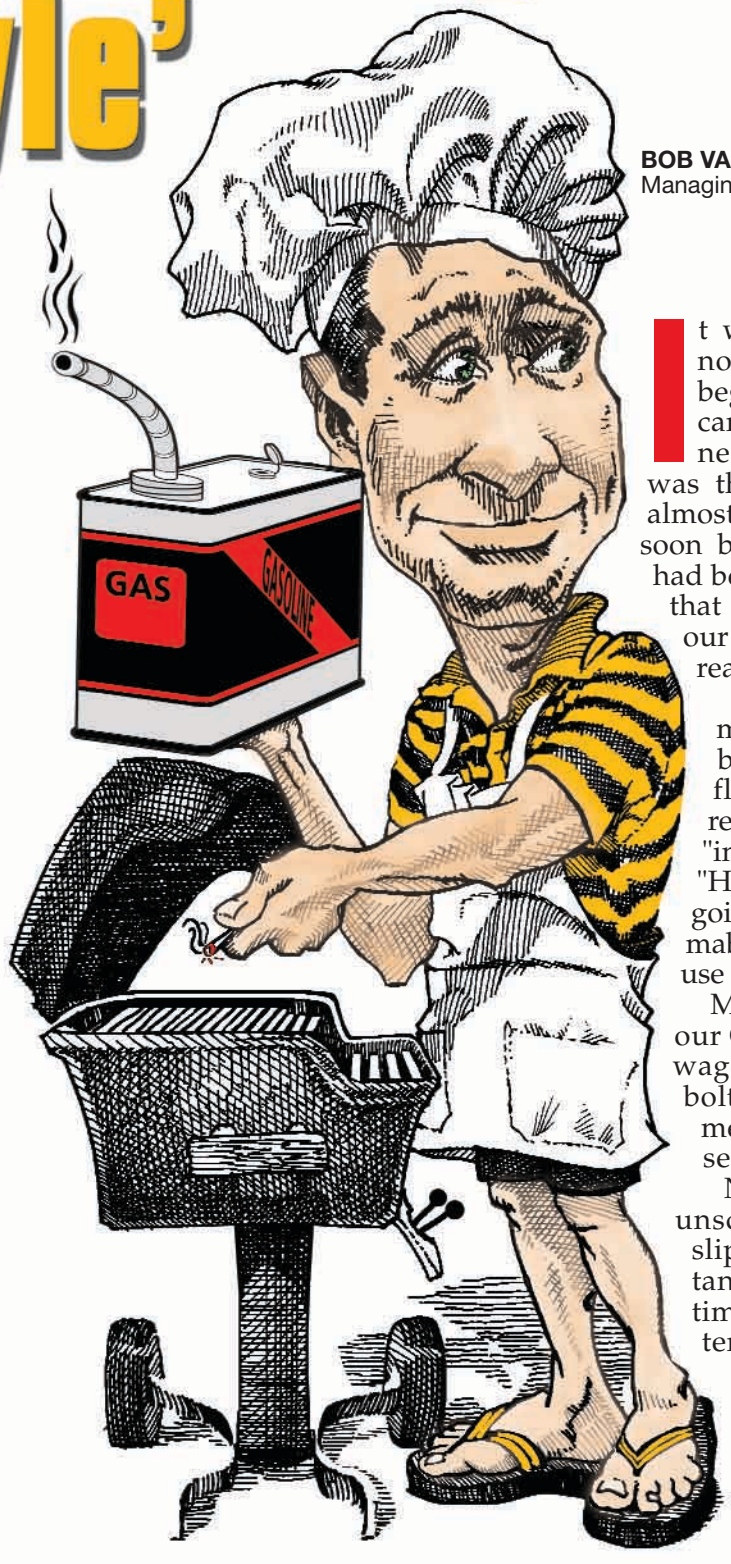
Most of the essential items are self-explanatory. However, you might question why you need a "fire starter," especially if you already have matches. That fire starter is to give you something that will burn long enough to light some wood. It could be something as simple as a candle or some dry moss you found on your last trip in the back country or dryer lint you put in a zip lock bag before you headed out. When it comes to signaling for help, your kid's annoying whistle can be heard much farther than your voice. Also, the sleeping bag and tarp can serve many purposes. If you have to spend the night out-of-doors, you can use the tarp to make a shelter and use the sleeping bag to stay warm. In addition, the tarp and sleeping bag can be used to help keep an injured fellow hiker warm and dry.

While I referred to the"10 essentials," I really suggest an eleventh — a buddy. It's wise never to go hiking in the back country alone. Always tell someone back home what your itinerary is.

Once you have all of these items, remember to stop by the ranger station and pick up a pass before heading into the back country. These passes are required for most of the trailheads in the National Forest and in many other hiking areas. And while you're at the ranger station, ask about the weather conditions in the area where you are going. Things can change. ■

Barbecuing With 'Style'

BOB VAN ELSBERG
Managing Editor



It was getting toward late afternoon and the shadows were beginning to lengthen as we car-camped alongside a logging road near Lichtenstein, Germany. I was the chef for dinner and could almost taste the spare ribs that would soon be cooking on the barbecue. I had bought a small fold-up barbecue that we could easily pack along on our camping weekends and I was ready to get started.

I had the barbecue — I had the matches — I had the briquetes — but I didn't have any lighter fluid! No problem. Being a resourceful Army troop, I could "improvise." So I asked myself, "How can I get these briquetes going? What other kind of flammable liquid do I have that I could use instead of lighter fluid?"

My eyes fell on the gas cap of our German-made Taunus station-wagon and the answer came like a bolt out of the blue. And lucky me, I just happened to have a section of rubber hose.

Not one to waste time, I unscrewed the gas cap and slipped the siphon tube into the tank. This would require delicate timing, as the taste of gasoline tends to ruin the palate before dinner. However, in no time flat, I had filled a small glass bottle my wife had given me. I walked triumphantly to the barbecue, proud that my resourcefulness had once again saved the day.

I liberally dribbled the gas on the pile of briquetes. I say "liberally" because the delay in starting the barbecue to get my gasoline "lighter fluid" had put me behind on my cooking schedule. Being cautious, I waited a minute or two before striking a wooden match and tossing it onto the briquetes.

"VA — WOOMPF!" — the explosion was breathtaking. The column of flames erupting from my barbecue reminded me of an F-15 taking off from Bitburg in full afterburner. When the conflagration subsided enough for me to get near the barbecue, I noticed the red paint had bubbled and was peeling off the barbecue grill. I guess I had exceeded the manufacturer's specifications a bit for cooking temperatures.

Needless to say, that was the last time I used gasoline to start a barbecue. Fortunately, the flames missed the tree limbs around us and I didn't burn down half of Germany. I had learned, albeit the hard way, an important lesson for a beginning barbecuer. I'll bet, however, I'm neither the first nor the last to "improvise" while barbecuing — with nearly disastrous consequences!

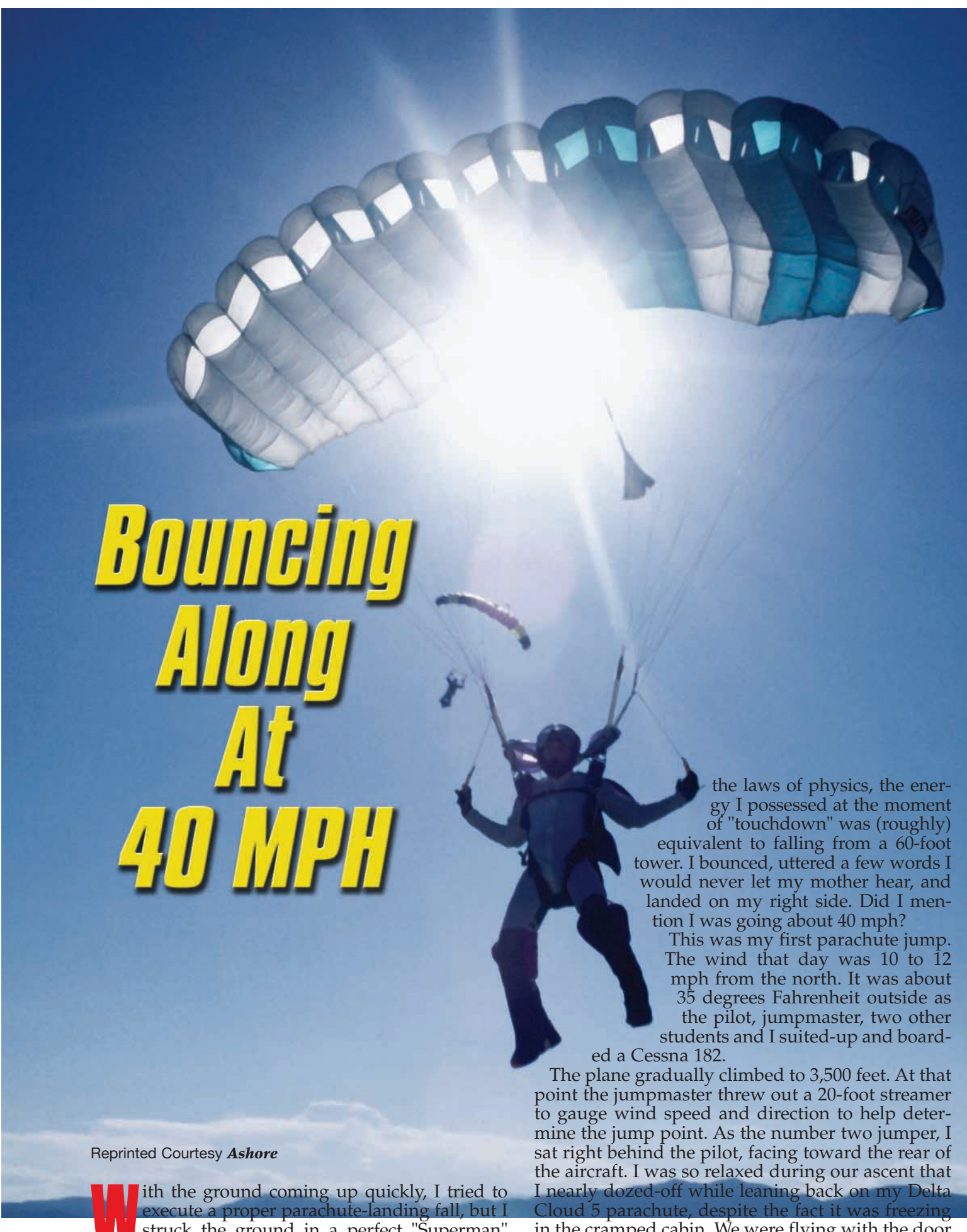
Here are some tips to help you keep from barbecuing more than your dinner.

Briquette Grills

- Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for your grill.
- Place the grill in an open area out-of-doors. Keep it away from buildings, shrubbery, and dry vegetation — 10 feet is a good measure. Also, make sure it's not in the way of pedestrian traffic.
- Do not use a grill on top of, or underneath, any surface that will burn, such as a porch or carport. The wooden deck attached to your house is NOT a good place to barbecue.
- Never move a lighted grill indoors, regardless of the weather or your appetite for thick, juicy hamburgers. Opening a window or garage door or using a fan may not reduce carbon monoxide to safe levels.
- Do not build a charcoal fire in an indoor fireplace. The briquettes do not produce a hot enough fire to draw the combustion products up through the chimney and poisonous carbon monoxide may remain in the room.
- Use starter fluids designed for your grill. Place the can and matches away from the grill. Never use gasoline.
- Never leave a lighted grill unattended.
- Keep children and pets away from a hot grill.
- If the coals start to flag or are slow to catch, fan them or use dry kindling or rolled-up newspaper to give them a boost. Adding liquid fuel could result in a flash fire.

Gas Grills

- Have your igniter ready when you turn on the gas to prevent a flash burn or explosion.
- If the burner doesn't ignite quickly, shut off the valves, leave the lid open and allow the grill to air out for several minutes before you try to light it again. This will avoid a buildup of explosive gasses.
- Store the gas cylinder outside and be sure the gas is turned off at the tank to prevent an accidental ignition. Check the connections frequently for leaks using a soap-and-water mixture. If there is escaping gas, it will appear as bubbles. If you see any bubbles, tighten the connections or call a professional to repair the grill.
- Clean the metal venturi tubes annually.
- Have the tank filled by a qualified dealer. Over-filling can be dangerous. ■



Bouncing Along At 40 MPH

Reprinted Courtesy ***Ashore***

With the ground coming up quickly, I tried to execute a proper parachute-landing fall, but I struck the ground in a perfect "Superman" impression. How hard did I hit? According to the laws of physics, the energy I possessed at the moment of "touchdown" was (roughly) equivalent to falling from a 60-foot tower. I bounced, uttered a few words I would never let my mother hear, and landed on my right side. Did I mention I was going about 40 mph?

This was my first parachute jump. The wind that day was 10 to 12 mph from the north. It was about 35 degrees Fahrenheit outside as the pilot, jumpmaster, two other students and I suited-up and boarded a Cessna 182.

The plane gradually climbed to 3,500 feet. At that point the jumpmaster threw out a 20-foot streamer to gauge wind speed and direction to help determine the jump point. As the number two jumper, I sat right behind the pilot, facing toward the rear of the aircraft. I was so relaxed during our ascent that I nearly dozed-off while leaning back on my Delta Cloud 5 parachute, despite the fact it was freezing in the cramped cabin. We were flying with the door open the entire time.

Photo by Adam Buckner

When the jumpmaster was satisfied with a jump point, the pilot circled around for his approach and the first student jumper got the order, "Feet in the door!" This meant he was to grab the wing strut with his left hand, place his feet on the platform on top of the right wheel, and then brace his right hand against the back part of the doorframe. Then the jumpmaster yelled, "Cut!" and the first jumper climbed out onto the platform and looked inward. He got the signal to go and launched himself backward off the wing strut in a spread-out, back-arched position. After a second or two, I felt the plane jerk and the jumper's ripcord went taut, indicating his parachute had deployed.

The pilot went to full power and circled while I climbed into the number one position next to the door. With the wind rushing by, I leaned my head out to get a visual on the first jumper. I spotted the purple rectangle below, with a person hanging underneath.

The order came, "Feet in the door!"

"Better pay attention," I thought. I put my feet and hands in their proper places. This was the first time I could honestly say that I was scared out of my mind. I imagined myself slipping and having the wind suck me out the door.

The jumpmaster ordered, "Cut!"

"Oh, well," I thought, "I don't have to like it, I just have to do it."

I carefully edged my way out the door and along the platform to the outward-most position with one foot dangling over the abyss. When I looked back, the jumpmaster pointed at me and yelled, "Go!"

With a "Hooyah!" I pushed off with my back arched. For an awful second, I thought my rip-cord wasn't going to pull my chute. Then an invisible hand grabbed my harness and tried to yank my groin into my chest. My head snapped down and my feet whipped up above my head. The ripcord went over my left shoulder and both risers came out. Now that both risers were to the left of my head, the right riser moved into its normal position. Unfortunately, my "melon" was in the way and that didn't feel too good. However, I was still good to go.

"Check canopy," my training reminded me. "OK, good chute, no collapsed cells, and the lines looked

continued on next page

Digital illustration by Felicia Moreland

good." Then, however, I spotted a SNAFU — my risers had twisted two or three times. "That's cool," I thought. "No problem," I pushed outward on them, kicked my feet, and soon spun around to face the right way.

I got hold of the steering lines and gave a good jerk, which brought them down to my legs then back up even with my head. Now I had steering. Next, I had to find out where I was. I looked down for the position references we had discussed earlier in the hangar.

"Turnpike … ugly building … oil wells … gotcha!" I thought. There was a little red "X" in the middle of a football-sized (from this altitude) piece of land. Now that I knew my position, it was time to have some fun. I made a couple of small left and right banks to get a feel for my chute. Then I put my left line in my boot and the right one all of the way to the top, exactly opposite of the jumpmaster's explicit instructions. I went into a very tight left spin for a couple of revolutions. I decided to pull out before everything flew apart. I straightened out and did the same spin to my right. Now I felt confident that I could maneuver myself anywhere — and all this with less than 90 seconds of experience. I got a visual on the landing zone and went into another set of spins. "What a rush!" I thought.

By this time I was nearing 2,000 feet, so I verified that I could still see the little red "X." I could, so I turned away from the landing zone and extended. I thought I would head out, turn back in and make a long, smooth approach and set down like a leaf. When I was far enough out, I turned back toward the landing zone but was still too high.

"What the heck!" I thought. I made another couple of spins just for fun and to shed height. I counter-steered and lined-up on the landing zone again. My altimeter read 1,200 feet. Thinking I must have read it incorrectly, I looked again — but it still showed 1,200 feet. "I should be at the edge of the landing zone," I thought. "Instead, I'm about a third of a mile off — way too low and feeling stupid. Still, no reason to panic." I knew I was in trouble, but I'd just have to make it anyway. So, I went to full throttle.

As I looked at the drop zone now, I saw trees and a stream to the left, which meant I couldn't land there. To the right were high-tension power lines — another bad landing zone. In the distance, I could see a couple of oil wells, which I knew I couldn't make. Nearer, there was a farmer's house, some cows and a barbed-wire fence.

If I had done this right, I would be at 1,000 feet with half brakes at the edge of the landing field. I would then fly parallel to a fence until I was at 500 feet, at which point I would make a 90-degree turn. Then at 250 feet, I would make another right turn and come into the wind for a fully braked, soft landing on the red "X." Unfortunately, I was only at 550 to 600 feet and going full speed when I hit the edge of the landing field. I knew this was going to hurt.

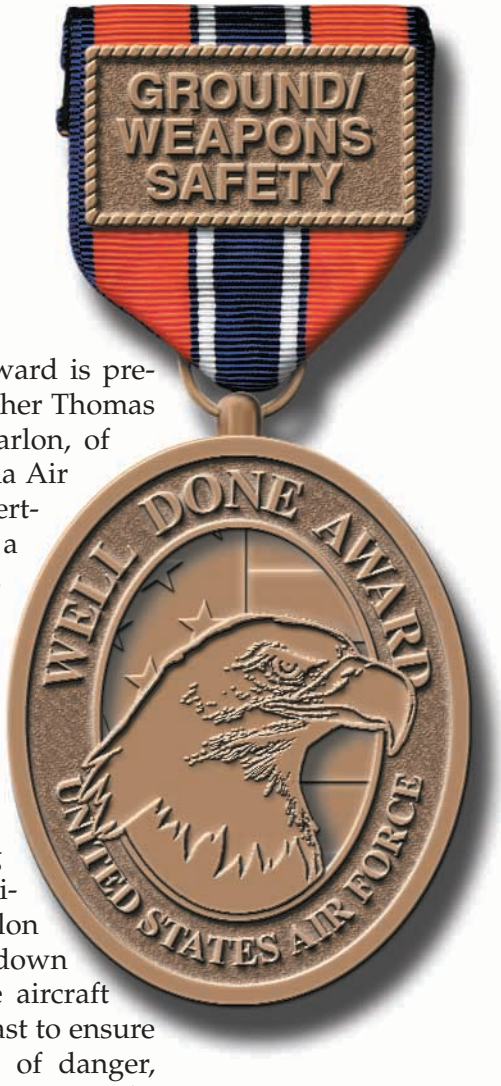
I hit face-first about 40 yards short of the "X." I broke my right hand, tore cartilage in my right wrist, smashed everything on my right side and suffered a compression fracture of one vertebra. I can't describe the pain I felt as I was being dragged along on my back, my broken hand still caught in the right steering line. I bounced along for about 20 yards before I was able to grab the left line and collapse the chute. All through this the only thing I could think of was how ridiculous my landing must have looked. Despite the pain, I laughed about the dirt I was throwing into the air as I bounced along.

Dead men feel no pain, so I knew I was alive. Grateful for that, I stood up and started gathering the lines and the parachute. I watched in disgust as the rookie behind me landed like a feather 5 yards from the "X." The jumpmaster landed about 10 yards away and we all walked to the hangar, dropped our stuff, and quickly got out of there. I drove straight home and called a friend, who took me to an emergency room.

What did I learn from this accident? An aggressive attitude mixed with inexperience will get you into serious trouble. Two things saved me from worse injuries — my physical condition and having stayed calm in a crisis. Despite what happened to me, I still recommend skydiving to others. Just land like you are supposed to. ■

Photo by Adam Buckner

The Well Done Awards



SSgt Christopher Thomas
A1C Elias Carlon

Kadena Air Base, Japan

The Ground Safety Well Done Award is presented to Staff Sergeant Christopher Thomas and Airman First Class Elias Carlon, of the 390th Intelligence Squadron, Kadena Air Base, Japan, for their participation in averting a potentially catastrophic mishap to a high-value reconnaissance aircraft. While performing back-end system ground maintenance on an RC-135V/W Rivet Joint aircraft, a burning smell was noticed. Airman Carlon immediately turned off all back-end equipment in an attempt to locate the origin of the smoke. Smoke and fire were coming from the air conditioning ground equipment cart that was positioned next to the aircraft. Airman Carlon egressed the aircraft and ran to shut down the external ground power cart at the aircraft nose. Sergeant Thomas, who egressed last to ensure that all personnel were safe and out of danger, brought the aircraft's ground Halon fire extinguisher and ran toward the burning cart. Airman Carlon assisted Sergeant Thomas in extinguishing a fire in the clutch section of the cart. Airman Carlon's and Sergeant Thomas' situational awareness, quick thinking and instant actions prevented a potentially disasterous mishap to a valuable reconnaissance asset. Airman Carlon's and Sergeant Thomas' actions reflect great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force. ■

Steppin' Out

Last April, a senior airman was walking across a street at an air base in Florida when she was nearly run down by a motorist. She was in the crosswalk and had right-of-way and the driver appeared to be slowing. Yet, instead of stopping before the crosswalk, the driver rolled on through, forcing the airman to run to get out of the way. In her haste, she pulled a hamstring in her right leg — which put her on quarters for two days. However, that was better than being hit by a car! Despite nearly causing a serious accident, the motorist just kept on driving.

A couple of years ago a Scott AFB airman was walking along a road after dark to where his car was parked at a lot near the fair he was attending. Walking along the right side of the road, he did not see the vehicle approaching from behind that struck and severely injured him. The driver also claimed not to have seen the airman.

It's not always the driver's fault. Airmen who are stationed in countries like Japan or England where cars drive on the left have to re-learn how to safely cross the street. In those countries pedestrians first look right, then left when stepping off the curb — the opposite of how it's done in America. Wherever you may live, if you're walking down the street more interested in reading a paper or listening to a headset, you could end up becoming a hood ornament. Whether you are walking to prolong your life, or just to get from here to there, there are some

Digital illustration by Felicia Moreland

precautions you should take.

Defensive Walking

• Let's be real. As good as it sounds on paper, you do not have automatic right-of-way in a showdown with a vehicle.

• Never assume a driver will stop for you. Yes, it's his responsibility to stop, but he may not even see you until it's too late.

• Before crossing a road, always stop at the curb, look left, then right, and then left again before crossing (remember the exception for countries where people drive on the left. In those countries, LOOK RIGHT, then left, then right again). Keep looking until you're across.

• At intersections, look over your shoulder for turning vehicles.

• When crossing between parked cars, walk to the edge of the parked cars and look carefully both ways before crossing.

• Leave the headset at home. How can you be alert to the dangers and sounds around you when you are focusing your attention on a baseball game or your favorite music? Keep your mind and ears on your walking. Tune in to the surroundings.

• According to the National Safety Council, nearly half of all adult pedestrian accidents involve the use of alcohol. Drinking and walking don't mix.

• Be alert for cars backing out of parking spaces.

• Where there are no sidewalks, always walk or run facing traffic and stay as far to the left as possible.

Staying Visible

• Pedestrians are seven times more likely to be killed after dark than during the day.

— Carry a flashlight or a light stick.

— Wear clothes trimmed with retro-reflective material or light colors.

Tips for Children

Children up to age 14 are most often struck at nonintersection locations when they run into the street or appear suddenly (such as from between parked cars).

• Teach small children to cross a street only with an older person who knows how to cross safely.

• Teach young children to stop at the curb and follow the left-right-left rule. Practice it with them until you are sure they understand it.

• Some parents and experts feel children should be at least 7 years old before they are allowed to cross the street alone. It is believed that their vision is not fully developed, which makes it difficult for them to judge how fast a car is approaching. Of course, the decision depends on the maturity level of the child.

• Never allow children to play in the driveway. A driver who is backing up in a vehicle can easily overlook children.

• Designate safe play areas away from streets and roadways.

• Also teach them to:

— Walk only with the signal light or at the directions of the crossing guard.

— Always stand on the curb while waiting to cross the street.

— Walk directly across the street — do not loiter midway.

— Walk quickly to the other side, but do not run. Running can cause a fall and can also break your concentration.

Older Pedestrians

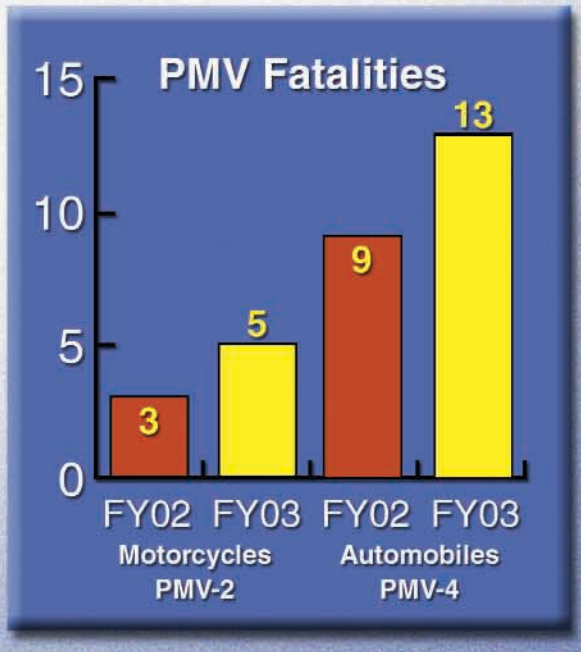
• If you are concerned about not having enough time to cross the street, wait until the light has just turned green. The first few steps into a street are the most dangerous. Once you are close to the other side, drivers will have probably noticed you.

• Compensate for diminished vision, hearing, and mobility by concentrating on your surroundings. Watch for cars that are backing up and make eye contact with the driver of any stopped car before walking in front of that vehicle.

• Wear bright colors during the day.

Editor's Note: *Information provided courtesy of the* ***National Safety Council.*** ■

Snapshot on Safety



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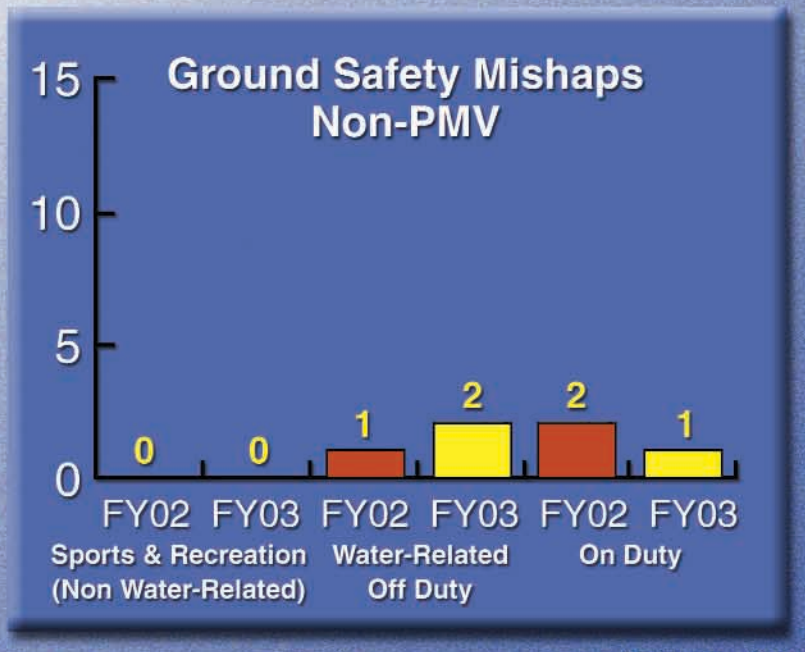


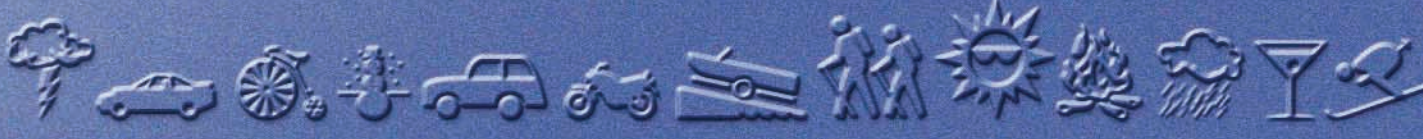
as of February '03

BOB VAN ELSBERG
Managing Editor

The Air Force's fatality trends for October through December 2002 seem to be running in the same direction charted during the previous 12 months. Motorcycle fatalities — which had nearly tripled during FY 2002 — continue to climb, with five airmen already losing their lives. Another trend that seems to be continuing is that of passengers being killed in POV accidents. Of the 13 airmen killed in automobile accidents, one of every four was a passenger.

Automobile Fatalities

- A driver was killed when her POV was hit from behind by a tractor-trailer, then slid sideways in the median and struck a 4-foot-diameter concrete post.
- A driver and his passenger were killed when



the driver, who had been drinking and was speeding, lost control of his car and hit a guardrail. The driver's BAC was .016 and the passenger had also been drinking. The passenger died at the scene, the driver died two days later at the hospital.

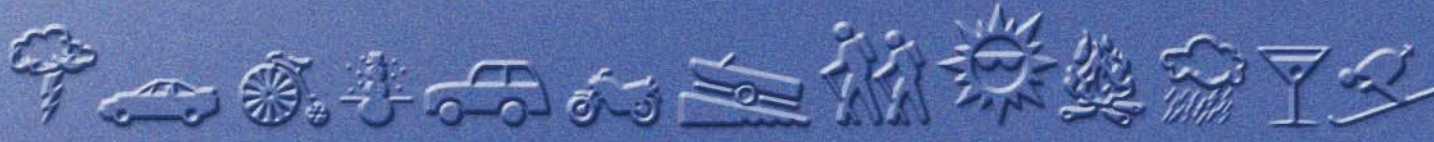
- A driver with a BAC of .16 lost control of his pickup and went onto the right shoulder of an interstate. While steering left in the gravel on the shoulder to attempt to return to the road, the truck's right front steering ball joint failed and the pickup rolled. The driver had the shoulder strap of his seatbelt tucked behind his back. This allowed him to be thrown about as the vehicle rolled and contributed to his fatal head injuries.
- A driver was forced off the right lane of an interstate by a reckless driver and then lost control while on the right shoulder. The vehicle spun counterclockwise and struck a tree on the passenger side. A 19-year-old female airman passenger, sitting in the right rear seat of the automobile, was killed.
- A driver was injured and his passenger killed while drag racing on a four-lane city street. Their vehicle went out of control, went into a median and spun counterclockwise, and struck a tree with the passenger-side door. The tree was pushed four feet into the passenger compartment. Although the driver was sober, the passenger had been drinking.
- The driver of a leased Dodge Neon crossed the median of an interstate and struck a Ford F-350 pickup head-on. Because of the difference in the size and weight of the vehicles, the Neon was immediately slammed backwards. Despite wearing her seatbelts and the deployment of the Neon's air bags, the driver suffered fatal injuries. The driver was attempting to drive an 880-mile round-trip during a 3-day period and may have been fatigued or distracted when the accident occurred.
- A driver was killed when she turned left at an intersection and was struck on the driver's side by another vehicle. Although the approaching vehicle had its lights on, fog may have limited the airman's vision and contributed to the accident.
- A driver was doing 85 mph on a section of road that had a 35 mph speed limit. The road was also wet from an earlier rain shower. The driver went across the oncoming lane, and onto the shoulder and struck a tree.
- A driver lost control of her SUV on a snow and ice-covered section of four-lane interstate and crossed the median. She was killed when her vehicle was hit by a tractor-trailer in the oncoming lanes.
- A driver was killed when his SUV left the roadway and struck a tree.
- A driver was following a carload of friends to a ski resort when he lost control on a snow-covered, slippery road and slid across the centerline of the highway. The driver suffered fatal injuries when his car was struck broadside on the passenger-side door by an ambulance.

Motorcycle Fatalities

- A motorcyclist rounded a corner going too fast and struck an on-coming automobile head-on. The motorcyclist, who was wearing his helmet, died at the scene of the accident.
- A motorcyclist lost control of his motorcycle while in a turn, went off the road and struck a tree. The rider had only 2 months experience riding — all on his 2002 Suzuki Katana GSX 600 cc motorcycle — and had not attended Motorcycle Safety Foundation training. Although the police report indicates he was traveling only 5 mph above the speed limit in the curve, he was not able to maintain control. At the time of the crash, the motorcycle's odometer showed only 628 miles.
- A rider was killed and his female passenger injured when he lost control of his motorcycle, slid into a curve and was thrown into a telephone pole support wire. The rider's BAC was .21, he was speeding, and neither he nor his passenger were wearing their helmets.
- A rider was killed when he lost control of his motorcycle in a residential area, struck a curb, and was thrown from his motorcycle.
- A rider struck a utility pole and died from head injuries.

Sports and Recreation Fatalities

- A female airman drowned while attempting to snorkel in rough seas and despite an adverse weather warning. Although a fellow diver had been able to remove her from the water and give her CPR, a wave swept her back into the ocean. She was still unconscious and drowned before she could be rescued again.
- A swimmer was doing laps at an off-base indoor pool when lifeguards discovered him motionless and unconscious underwater. Despite CPR by the lifeguards and emergency personnel, the swimmer could not be revived. ■



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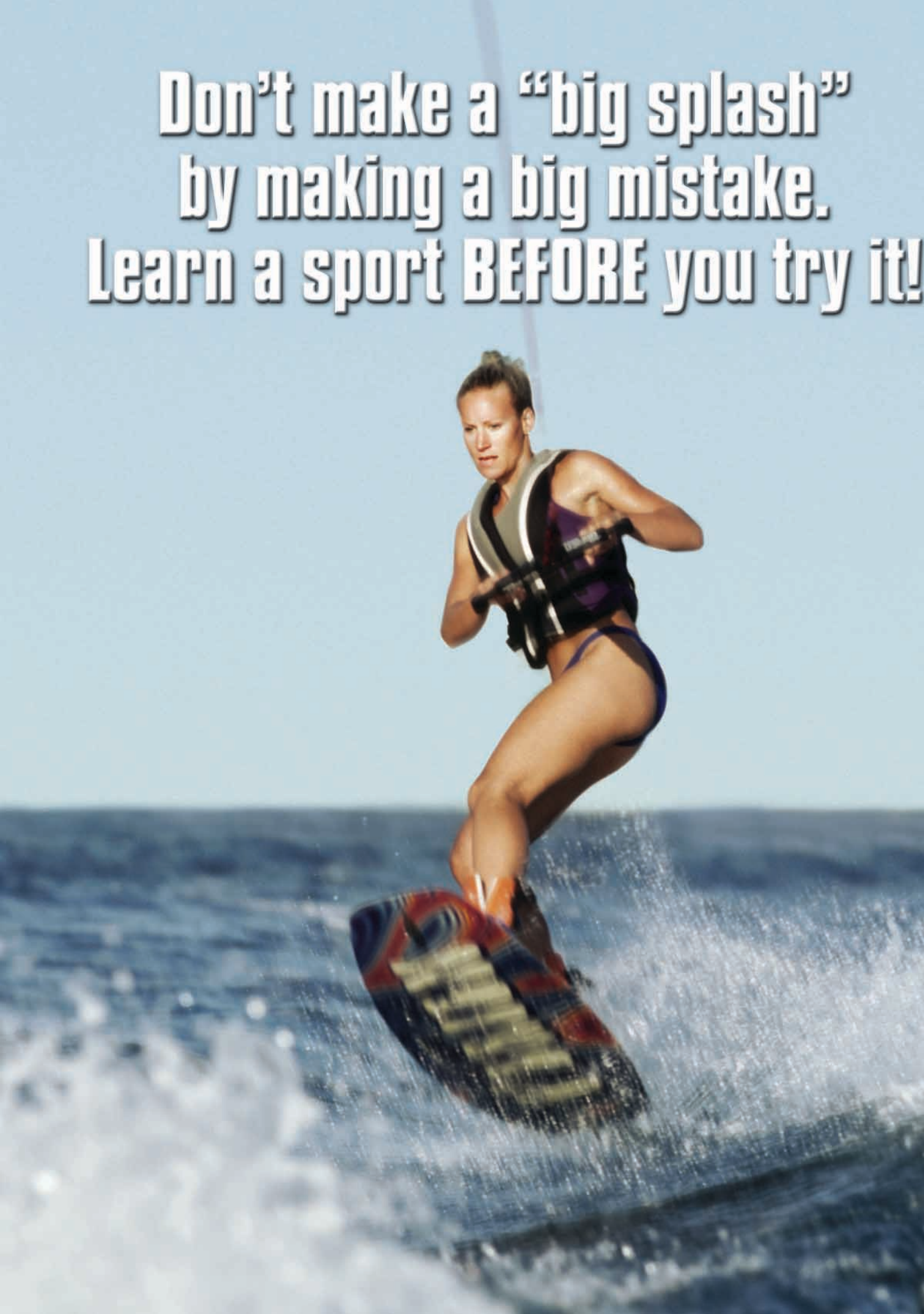
Don't make a "big splash"
by making a big mistake.
Learn a sport BEFORE you try it!