

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



Fall 2014

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C-130J SUPER HERCULES



OCTOBER
IS FIRE PREVENTION MONTH

“Man is the only creature that dares to light a fire and live with it. The reason? Because he alone has learned to put it out.”

— Henry Jackson Van Dyke, Jr.
American author



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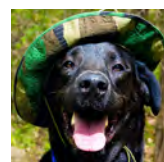


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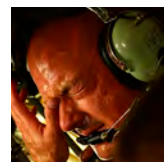


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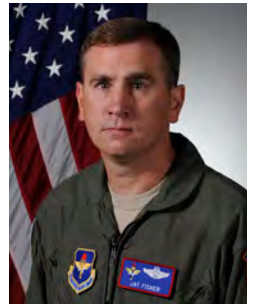
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FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Col. **JAMES L. FISHER**
AETC director of safety



DON'T 'FALL' SHORT

We just wrapped up the Critical Days of Summer in early September and now enter the fall season, that serene, scenic time of year when the leaves change color and cooler weather gives us a welcome respite from the heat. But don't be lulled into a false sense of security. While fall might not carry the notoriety summer does as a high-risk season, it still comes with its own set of hazards to face.

But before we move forward, let's "fall back" and take a peek at how we fared this summer.

Unfortunately, the Air Force lost 17 Airmen during that critical time period between Memorial Day Weekend and Labor Day. Three Airmen died in on-duty mishaps; 14 in off-duty. Air Education and Training Command members accounted for two of those fatalities. Most of these deaths were preventable, such as the Airman who was free-rock climbing without safety gear and fell, or the one who lost control of a trailer he was pulling and crashed.

We always hope Airmen take risk-management principles we learn at our Air Force work centers and try to translate them into their personal lives outside the gate. Tragically, however, several missteps we took this summer were the result of personal risk-management failures.

That means we still have a lot of work to do now that the calendar has turned to autumn.

We'd be remiss if we began the fall season without talking about fall protection. Slips and falls

have historically been one of our most common hazards — both on- and off-duty. In the last issue of Torch, we covered a serious ladder mishap. In this issue, our cover story features a lieutenant who tumbled nearly 40 feet from a tree! And we already mentioned the Airman who fell to his death while rock climbing. If you are operating at an elevated position, use a tether or safety harness. If on a ladder, ensure you have a spotter. Common sense usually prevails here.

This is also the time of year we start to stoke the fireplace again and use decorative lights and candles as the holidays approach. These activities take our fire prevention efforts in other directions we need to consider.

Additionally, cold-weather sports, such as snow skiing and hunting, are just around the corner. Improper preparation for these types of activities could quickly develop into life-threatening situations. If you are up in a deer stand, like I will be this fall, be sure to wear a safety harness, along with your cold-weather gear. If you've penciled in a ski trip or other snow-bound activity, ensure you plan ahead, pack your safety equipment and do a risk assessment.

In AETC, we continue to emphasize the idea that "Life Doesn't Rewind." We don't get the opportunity to go back after a tragic event and change our poor decisions. At best, if we're lucky, we live long enough to learn from our mistakes and pass those lessons on to others. So embrace the pleasures of the fall season, but please do so with a safety mind-set.

“Several missteps we took this summer were the result of personal risk-management failures. That means we still have a lot of work to do now that the calendar has turned to autumn.”

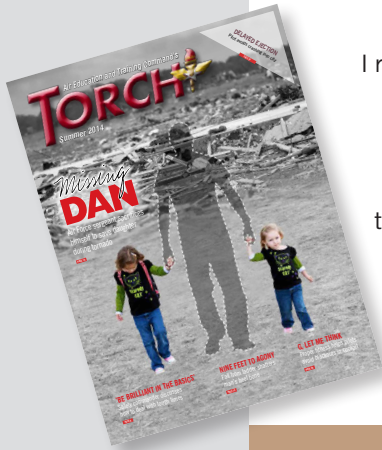
AWESOME WASSOM

I read with great sadness your cover story titled “Missing Dan” (Summer 2014 issue, page 10). But my heart was also filled with pride. Master Sgt. Dan Wassom II epitomizes the type of people I’ve come to know over my 30-plus-year affiliation with the Air Force. The fact that he used his body as a human shield to protect a loved one already says a lot, but the fact that he did it with a peaceful calm, with no worries for his own safety, tells the rest of the story.

He is truly a hero.

Our service is filled with people who are willing to lay down their lives, be it in combat or in everyday life. They will do it for their country, for their spouses, for their sons, for their daughters and even for total strangers without a moment’s hesitation. I know Pam and Dan Sr. are very proud of their son ... and so is his Air Force Family. The “Awesome Wassom 5K Run” was appropriately named.

*Emmitt Engleton
Via e-mail*



I read your story about Dan Wassom today at lunch. How sad. Great job with the article.

*Thomas Gates
Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas*

Master Sgt. Dan Wassom is an inspiration. It is ironic that he survived combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, but ended up sacrificing his life in the “safety” of his own home. This just goes to show how most service members are ready to lay down their lives in the blink of an eye

— without hesitation, without regret. I can’t stop the tears from flowing when I think about his daughters growing up without him in their lives. I am saddened for his wife and parents as well. But he will have a very special place in heaven.

*Myra Bonner
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. Or mail to Torch Editor, HQ AETC/SEM, 244 F Street East, Suite 1, JBSA-Randolph, 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.

STORY ‘RUNG’ TRUE

I enjoyed the story “Nine Feet to Agony” in the Summer 2014 issue of Torch (page 16). I too fell off a ladder — no spotter, no solid surface to steady the ladder, flip-flops instead of proper shoes, yada, yada, yada. I didn’t shatter my heel, but I did break my leg, which got caught in the rungs of the ladder, and suffered a pretty bad concussion where my head hit the ground.

Working on ladders seems simple enough and probably something most of us take for granted. But since it’s only something most of us use occasionally, we are not as proficient at it as we think we are and do a poor job of assessing the risks associated with it. Well, at least until it is too late and we find ourselves in the emergency room wondering what went wrong.

Thank you for the story. I hope your readers are paying attention, because, trust me, this is a topic that can save them months or even years of agony.

*Robbie Lunt
Retired Army Reserve*



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY TECH SGT. SY PINHTHONG AND DAVE STACK



BY TECH. SGT. SAMUEL BENDET

MANY HAPPY RETURNS

Very happy to see Torch magazine back in hard copy circulation!

*Tammie Weathers
Via e-mail*

I was surprised and delighted to see Torch being delivered again. Thanks!

*Nancy Garnett
Via e-mail*

You've made my day. Just saw the latest issue of Torch cross my desk. We missed it!

*J.T. Lomack
Via e-mail*

NO JUSTICE, PART II

In reference to the "Torch Talk" letters under the title "No Justice" (Summer 2014 issue, page 2): I agree that Senior Airman Anjelika Faul being sentenced to only 30 months for killing Mike Brown is a punishment that definitely does not fit the crime. However, she did not intentionally set out to do what she did.

She was driving drunk.

There is a difference between killing someone due to impaired judgment from being drunk and someone intentionally killing another person. Those who kill for no reason deserve to pay back with their life.

There will be those who agree the punishment was not just. Realize, though, she may get out in 30 months, but she will have what she did on her conscious for the rest of her life. ... That is something I could never live with!

*Ed Love
Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla.*

In reference to the letter titled "No Justice," I agree that a 30-month sentence for senselessly taking a man's life seems a bit light. But Senior Airman Anjelika Faul didn't necessarily get off easy. She has lost her freedom, lost her career and lost any peace she had in her conscience. Who knows in what other ways she is paying for this crime? It's tragic no matter how you look at it. There is no punishment that you could have given to Faul that would have filled the hole in the hearts of Mike Brown's family and friends. But a young girl's life — admittedly by her own hand — was changed forever that day, as well ... not to mention those of her loved ones. Make no mistake; she will continue to pay for this crime long after those 30 months expire.

*Pearl Santos
Via e-mail*

I have to agree with the letters "No Justice." Senior Airman Anjelika Faul got off easy. I'm left wondering what the sentence would have been if it was the other way around. What if a 53-year-old man had killed a 22-year-old woman after a night of drinking and driving, instead of the other way around? Do you think the sentence would have been the same? I doubt it.

*Pete Wright
Los Angeles*

'SMELLS FISHY'

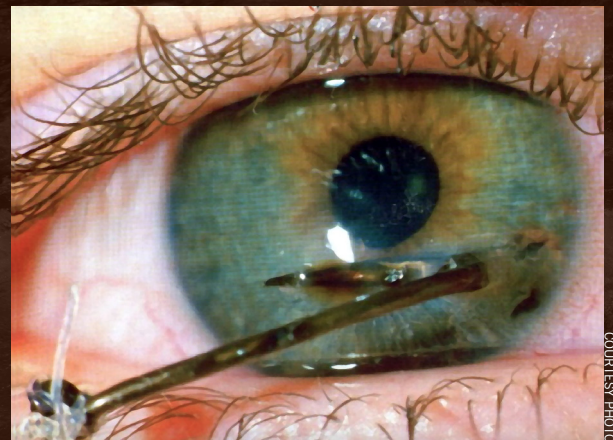
Something smells fishy. Was that a real shot of a fishhook in someone's eye or was that Photoshopped ("Catch of the Day," Summer 2014 Torch, page 7)? Either way it's really gross ... but eye-catching (pun intended...LOL!).

I thought I had it bad when I got my right ear involuntarily pierced with a fishhook courtesy of my older brother's errant cast when we were both teens. But if that picture is real, someone has a worse story than my fish tale.

Anyway, good job on the story. Fishing always seems so serene, so not many people think about the dangers lurking. But I can tell you firsthand ... they exist!

*Eric Fuchs
Former Air National Guardsman*

Unfortunately for the victim, that photo is very real. And there are many more like it — or even worse — in medical journals across the internet. Thank you for sharing your story and for your interest in Torch.



COURTESY PHOTO

AIRMEN SAVE COUPLE FROM

FLASH FLOOD

LAS VEGAS (AFNS) — Seven Airmen from Nellis and Creech Air Force Bases in Nevada saved an elderly couple during a flash flood Aug. 4.

Three Airmen from the 820th RED HORSE, three members of the 799th Air Base Squadron and one Airman from the 432nd Maintenance Group teamed up during the harrowing rescue, which was caught on tape.

All of the Airmen were headed home from worksites at Creech that afternoon. Tech. Sgt. Adam Dixon, the first 820th RED HORSE responder, saw the elderly couple's Toyota Prius stuck in the median after they had attempted to evade the rapidly rising water by crossing over U.S. Route 95, north of Las Vegas.

"The water was flowing over the shoulder and cutting across the road; so people were backing up and crossing the median, which was actually lower than the interstate," Dixon said. "At that point we started seeing cars get stuck in the mud."

Dixon and Airmen 1st Class Joshua Parnell and Christopher Jones, both from the 799th ABS, first tried to push the car out of the mud, but it wasn't budging.

"Within seconds the water went from being at boot level to waist level, so I knew we just needed to get them out of there," Dixon said.

As the water level picked up, the current's force grew as well. Fighting the treacherous floodwaters to pull the car door open proved tough enough, but keeping it open long enough for the couple to escape seemed to be nearly an impossible task.

"I saw Sergeant Dixon on the driver's side yelling for them to get out, so I ran to that side to help him hold the door open," said Staff Sgt. James Maxwell, the second RED HORSE responder. "It was pretty intense because we could see another car floating toward us, and we didn't want to get pinned by it."

That, along with the frantic screams of bystanders to get out of the water, provided just the adrenaline rush they needed to pry the door open. The elderly man quickly exited the vehicle, but his wife needed additional assistance.

"Sergeant Dixon got her close to me, and I grabbed her and carried her up to higher ground," said Airman 1st Class Christopher Fitzgerald, the third RED HORSE responder. "It all happened so fast that I didn't really think; it was just all reaction."

Meanwhile Parnell and Staff Sgt. Tye Warner, another member of the 799th ABS, repositioned cars on the highway to prevent other motorists from being caught and swept into the melee.

After the couple was safe on the embankment of the median, Airman 1st Class Tyler Webb, a 432nd MQ-9 Reaper avionics specialist who also had been assisting in the rescue, tried to exit the floodwaters but was swept away by the raging current.

Jones, a fitness technician, reacted instinctively and without hesitation. He grabbed Webb and yanked him from the water, which was now strong enough to carry away multiple 3,000-plus-pound vehicles, including Webb's Mercury Grand Marquis.

"I just saw an arm and a head flying down the water and was like, 'I'm going to pull him out and hope I don't fall in,'" Jones said. "It was the right thing to do."

As for the elderly couple, they were shaken up but uninjured and appreciative of their heroes. Had the rescue taken even a few more seconds, Dixon said the results could have been gravely different.

"Right after the couple got out, their car floated down the median," he said. "Seconds after that we saw it upside down. ... I'm just happy they were both OK."

— Staff Sgt. Siuta B. Ika
99th Air Base Wing Public Affairs



VIDEO FOOTAGE COURTESY OF DOUG BENNETT

In video footage that went viral within days after the flood near Creech AFB, Nev., Aug. 4, Airmen can be seen rescuing an elderly couple, who's Prius became stranded in the floodwaters. In another scene (frames two and three), Airman 1st Class Tyler Webb, who had assisted in the rescue of the couple, had to be saved after he was swept away by the raging waters.

WATER WARNINGS

Flash floods caused 82 deaths in the United States in 2013, according to the National Weather Service. More than half of the victims were driving at the time of the floods.

The weather service offers the following tips during flash floods.

- If you hear flood warnings get off or stay off the roads.

- Do not drive through flooded areas. If floodwaters are crossing the road, turn around and find an alternate route.

- If there is no alternate route, get to higher ground and wait for the waters to subside.

- Even if the water appears shallow enough to cross, don't try it. One foot of water can sweep away many vehicles. Two feet of water is enough to carry away SUVs and trucks.

- If your car stalls in floodwaters, abandon it immediately and get to higher ground as soon as possible.

'MOMMY ISN'T COMING HOME' AN AIRMAN'S TRAGIC LOSS TO DRUNK DRIVING

GRAND FORKS AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. (AFNS) — As a young child, you don't think much if someone doesn't show up when they're supposed to because you have better, more important things to worry about ... like bugs and dolls.

But occasionally, a child will stop and ask a question about the sky, their toys ... or where their mother is.

I stopped playing long enough one night in 1998 to ask, "Daddy, when is Mommy coming home?"

My father cleared his throat and blinked a few times. Obviously shaken, he seemed unprepared to answer his little 3-year-old daughter's innocent question.

"Mommy isn't coming home, Sweetie," he replied softly when he'd finally gathered himself. "She's living with the angels now."

My mother was killed in a head-on collision March 24, 1997, as a result of drinking and driving.

Her decision to drive home after drinking was not her first time doing so.

Consumption of alcohol, or rather the inability to stop consuming it, had ruined my parents' relationship. Already in the process of divorce, they had been fighting that particular day over my mother breaking into my grandparents' liquor cabinet.

She first attempted to lie about it. When that didn't work, she stormed off. She tried to take me with her, but my father was able to wrestle me away.

My dad thought she would take a walk down the street to calm down. He had the car keys, so he didn't worry about her driving. Little did he know, she had a spare set made.

She almost ran him over as she angrily sped off.

Mom never returned.

My father eventually remarried. I was 5 years old before I really, fully understood my mom was never coming home.

Not wanting to hurt feelings of the wonderful woman I now called Mom, I waited until I had my father alone to ask again, "Daddy, what really happened to Mommy?"

Judging from the look on his face, he had thought he had some time before any real explanations had to be given. Seeing his distressed look, I quickly apologized and got up to rush to another room. But he stopped me and said, "No, it's OK. I just didn't think I would have to do this so soon. ... Your mother had a problem."

A problem.

That's what we hear today when someone invites alcohol into their lives for too long.

I grew older with conflicting images of her.

"She was a wonderful mother, she loved you, she was so full of life and laughter," collided with "Your mother was a liar, a cheater and a drunk."

I grieved over it for years.

Did I do something so wrong she needed to drink?

I eventually learned to deal with my own hurt and turned it into understanding and proactivity. My mother was certainly not the only person to ever deal with alcoholism, nor the only one to lose her life to drunk driving.

Unfortunately, I will not be the last

person to lose a loved one like this.

The one thing I took away from my own loss was that I never wanted anyone else to go through the same experience. My family brushed her addiction under the rug because addictions are ugly; they're taboo. They wanted to believe she was OK.

She definitely was not.

I urge you to help your wingmen. If you suspect they're having hard times, say something. Even better than that, do something.

Don't let them get in that car after they've been drinking. Help them. Love them.

— Airman 1st Class Madison Sylvester
319th Air Base Wing Public Affairs



BY SENIOR AIRMAN XAVIER NAVARRO

Airman 1st Class Madison Sylvester, holding a photo of herself with her mom, shares the story of how her mother died in a head-on collision after drinking and driving. Sylvester is a public affairs broadcaster with the 319th Air Base Wing at Grand Forks AFB, N.D.

'ELMER FUDDER'

MAN 'GOOSED' BY HIS DOG AND OTHER CRAZY HUNTING STORIES

A 3-year-old Labrador retriever shot his 23-year-old owner in the butt with a 12-gauge shotgun during a goose-hunting trip. Of course you can't blame the dog for "goosing" his best friend with buckshot. The man had set his rifle down and left it unattended when the excited canine accidentally jumped on the safety release and trigger simultaneously. Dogs are all thumbs — er, paws — when it comes to handling dangerous weapons.

Yes, it's that time of year again. ... Hunting season.

Can sportsmen and women make it one season without some wayward hunter taking on the role of the prey? Without becoming the Elmer Fudd to their quarry's Bugs Bunny?

Survey says ... not a chance. Vegas would probably lay million to one odds against it, and "the house" would still make enough money to fill a bank vault.

The scary reality is the account above might be one of the wildest "strange but true" stories told, but it certainly won't be the last. Nearly 1,000 people are accidentally shot in hunting misadventures each year in the United States and Canada, according to the International Hunter Education Association.

Bullets, arrows, buckshot, oh my!

Investigations show all this errant ammunition finding its way into flesh and bone overwhelmingly points in one direction: human error.

Some of us are making Elmer's antics seem tame by comparison.

Take, for instance, the 57-year-old man who, while in a tree stand, lost his grip on his rifle. It tumbled from his perch and discharged, shooting him in the toe, leg, abdomen and testicle. ... *Ouch!*

Then there's the 32-year-old bow hunter who fell 15 feet out of a tree stand and impaled himself on five broad-head arrows in his bow quiver. Seven surgeries later, he will never be the same.

Even Capitol Hill can't escape the annual hunting shenanigans. Who can forget the 2006 incident when then Vice President Dick

Chaney accidentally peppered a campaign contributor with birdshot to the face and chest during a quail hunt in Texas? Probably not the best way to collect funds, but it has worked in hold-ups.

And in Colorado, a man hunting coyotes at night was using an optical device known as an illuminator, which highlights animals' eyes in darkness. His 28-year-old friend became separated from the group. When the hunter saw his buddy's eyes through the illuminator, he mistook them for those of a coyote and shot his friend in the head.

But that's not the only case of mistaken identity.

How about the son-in-law who plugged his father-in-law after mistaking him for a duck, or the husband who wounded his wife while targeting a rabbit? ... Allegedly.

Which was worse? ... Well, it's all "relative."

Speaking of relatives, earlier this year a 57-year-old man shot his cousin, who had been his hunting partner for the past 40 years. He had mistaken him for a turkey. You have to wonder which hurt the victim worse ... the shotgun blast or the fact that his cousin whom he has known his whole life thinks he looks like a gangly gobbler?

Certainly our Airmen, who are trained to handle weapons in combat environments, couldn't possibly succumb to such hunting blunders.

In the past decade or so while hunting, blue suiters have shot each other in the arm, leg and head, to name a few unfortunate body parts. A handful have even managed to shoot themselves ... all in the feet and toes. "This little piggy went wee, wee, wee ... all the way to the hospital."

Several more nearly cut off their fingers and thumbs with

hunting knives while dressing their kills. And two Airmen fractured a nose and a collarbone after letting a rifle's recoil get the best of them.

So this hunting season, "be vevy vevy quiet" while stalking "wascally wabbits" and other prey, but not while discussing the risks associated with hunting.

In other words, don't get "Elmer Fuddled."

—Tim Barela



BY TECH. SGT. SY PINTHONG

A Labrador retriever stepped on a shotgun, accidentally shooting his owner in the rear end and sending him to the emergency room to ask, "What's up, Doc?"

'BE VEWY VEWY CAREFUL'

- Be sure of your target and what is beyond it.
- Unload firearms when not in use.
- Never point a firearm at anything you do not intend to shoot.
- Never climb a fence or tree, or jump a ditch or log, with a loaded firearm.
- Never shoot a bullet at a flat, hard surface or water.
- Only release the safety on your weapon when ready to shoot.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages or other mood-altering drugs before or while shooting.

— U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

PUBLIC WANTS STIFFER PENALTIES FOR TEXTING WHILE DRIVING

ITASCA, III. — New findings from a National Safety Council opinion poll indicate 73 percent of respondents think there should be more enforcement of texting laws, while only 22 percent said the current level of enforcement is fine.

When asked what type of penalties they'd like to see, 52 percent of poll participants chose penalties including a point system that could lead to the loss of a driver's license or increased insurance costs, 51 percent were in favor of different levels of penalties for first vs. repeat offenses, and half thought large monetary fines should be used as a deterrent.

"For years, there has been widespread opposition to texting behind the wheel," said National Safety Council president Deborah Hersman. "Today, the polls show the public is behind stronger penalties ... to stop this dangerous behavior."

Currently, no state has passed a law banning all cell phone use while driving. Forty-four states plus the District of Columbia ban texting for all drivers, and 13 states and the District of Columbia have laws banning handheld driver cell phone use.

Contrary to popular belief, the brain does not truly multi-task. More than 30 studies show hands-free devices are no safer than handheld as the brain remains distracted by the cell phone conversation. NSC estimates 26 percent of all crashes involve cell phone use while driving. Talking on a cell phone, either hands-free or handheld, is estimated to be involved in 21 percent of crashes — with an additional 5 percent for texting.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Make a personal commitment to drive cell free.
- Turn your phone off or put it on silent while driving so you are not tempted to answer it.
- Speak up when you are in the car with someone who uses a cell phone while driving. Ask if you can do it for them or if it can wait.
- Change your voicemail message to reflect that you are either away from your phone or driving, and that you'll call back when you can do so safely.
- If you are talking to someone who you know is driving, tell him/her to hang up and call you later.

— National Safety Council





BARKING *up the* WRONG TREE

Officer climbs tree while drunk;
falls 40 feet; breaks 25 bones

By TIM BARELA
Photos by Tech. Sgt. SY PINTHONG

Stephen Hunter opened his hazel eyes and blinked at the stars in the night sky. He struggled to breathe, almost as if someone held a pillow over his mouth and nose. As the fog cleared from his brain, he glimpsed worried faces hovering over him. Anxious voices asked confusing questions: “Are you OK?! Can you move your arms and legs?!”

He could, but it hurt like hell.

His right leg felt as though someone had trapped it in a vice, cranking it tighter and tighter. And each time he attempted to move another body part, a brand new misery gripped him.

But his greatest source of agony was still to come. Not what hurt. . . . But why?



Second Lt. Stephen Hunter is no longer a "social" climber. He learned his lesson after getting drunk, falling from a tree and breaking 25 bones, including 20 in his back.

Hunter had just finished his junior year at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., when he went “barking up the wrong tree.” On May 27, 2012, at a lake house near Johnson Lake, Neb., the cadet climbed nearly 40 feet up a 110-foot cottonwood and fell.

It was 2 a.m., and he was plastered.

“Yeah, I was drunk,” said Hunter, now a second lieutenant assigned to the 17th Civil Engineer Squadron at Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas. “And I thought it would be the best idea in the world to climb that tree.”

He had started drinking rum and Coke the previous day at around 12 p.m., giving “high” noon a whole new meaning. He also threw back a few beers and even sampled some moonshine, a corn whiskey brew, because they were, after all, in the Cornhusker State.

He didn’t stop drinking until his 6-foot, 170-pound body crumpled in the dirt at the base of that tree.

Hunter’s friends said they saw his head and shoulders hit the ground first. Then his legs bent over his back like a scorpion’s tail, which is how he ended up facing the Big Dipper.

“I’m not exactly sure why I fell, but the theory is I passed out in the tree,” Hunter said, as he let out a sigh of disgust and rolled his eyes. “I was so drunk, and that, combined with the exertion of the climb, probably caused me to black out.”

The sudden impact with earth busted his skeleton in 25 places, not enough to challenge Evel Knievel’s Guinness World Record of 433 fractures of 35 different bones, but more than enough to convince Hunter he didn’t want to take a stab at the title.

He broke 20 transverse processes, those small wing-like back bones attached to the vertebrae. Or, for folks who didn’t pay attention in anatomy class, those little disks discarded from a plate of baby back ribs. Additionally, he fractured both wrists, a rib and his left pinky finger. And he snapped his right femur in half.

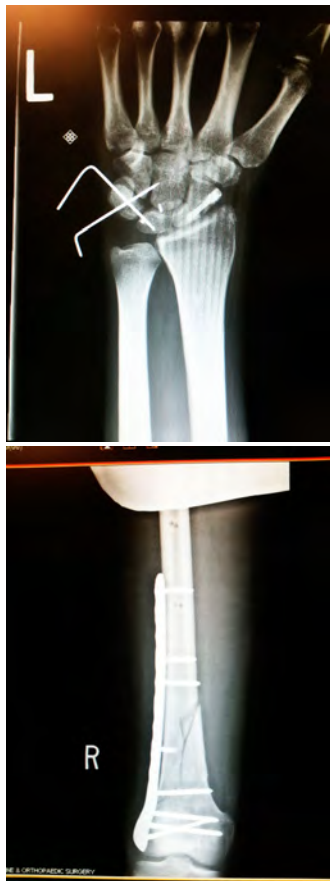
“That femur *reeeaally* stings,” he said with a cringe, revealing perfectly straight front teeth, which hid the bottom left molar he also sheered that night.

Hunter punctured a lung, as well, which accounted for his trouble sucking air.

“Walking the dog backward,” the lieutenant said his wild night started with an ill-conceived mind-set.

“I had just finished my third year at the academy with all its rules and restrictions, and I thought I was entitled to cut loose, go a bit crazy,” he said. “I was a ticking time bomb.”

So he and six buddies left the disciplined environs of the prestigious Air Force school tucked away at the base of the Rocky Mountains and headed into the heart of Tornado Alley for a long four-day weekend. They jet skied, swam, barbecued and even shot guns.



X-rays help tell the tale.

Hunter fractured his left wrist, driving the broken bone into his carpal tunnel. His right femur snapped in half, and a metal plate still holds the bone together.

And they drank. A lot.

They were about to wrap up their night of fun, when Hunter snuck off to scale the tree.

“I didn’t tell anyone, because I knew they’d stop me,” he said. “They would have said, ‘Don’t do that, idiot’; so I deliberately set out on my own.”

Not long after the then 21-year-old was fighting for his life following his headfirst plunge from roughly the height of a three-story building.

“I knew I was in serious trouble when I got an unpleasant surprise every time I tried to move a different body part,” he said. “It was like someone was pounding me with a sledge hammer.”

At some point while lying there in agony, dismay overtook him. Not because he thought he was dying, but because he’d connected the dots that led to the trunk of that old cottonwood.

“I had been selfish and stupid, and I felt overwhelmed with guilt,” he said. “I ruined our weekend and made everyone worry. So even though I was hurting, I remember trying to gut it out and be pleasant, because I was embarrassed.”

“He couldn’t even do the basics, like feed or clean himself. His mother assisted him with things she hadn’t had to help him with since he was a toddler in diapers.”

An ambulance rushed him to the hospital, and he passed out four times along the way, overcome with pain.

He didn’t get any relief until a morphine drip took him to his happy place. Even that proved short lived as the powerful medication caused him to have

vivid dreams in which he played tennis and soccer. Ever try swinging a racket or kicking a ball with freshly busted limbs? It was a rude awakening followed by tortured screams.

The hardest thing he had to do, though, was break the news to his mom and dad, both of whom live in Texas, in suburbs just north of Dallas.

“I have awesome parents,” he said with quiet affection. He then swallowed hard and took a moment to compose himself. “They didn’t get angry or disappointed. They were just worried for my health . . . and for my career.”

He said his mom, an emergency room nurse by trade, grasped immediately that her oldest son had miraculously escaped death.



His leg, still swollen and stitched after surgery, will continue to give him problems as he ages. Doctors have said arthritis will undoubtedly be in his future.

He could hear the fear in her voice, as he detailed his injuries one-by-one. His little brother later told him his mom turned white as a ghost and threw up immediately after she'd hung up the phone.

His dad, who had been in church when Hunter called him, couldn't seem to grasp what his son was trying to tell him.

"When it finally sunk in how hurt I was, he took it hard," the Airman said. "You could almost hear his heartbreak."

"Those were the two toughest conversations of my life."

Hunter underwent five surgeries to put him back together again and occupied a hospital bed for two weeks. After that he spent his entire summer break — three months — recovering at his mom's home in Plano, Texas.

Sporting a back brace similar to a turtle's shell, casts on both arms and brackets drilled into his right leg, he found himself confined to a wheelchair. He couldn't even do the basics, like feed or clean himself. His mother assisted him with things she hadn't had to help him with since he was a toddler in diapers.

"Moms are the best," Hunter, now 23, said with a sheepish grin.

When time came to return to the academy to start his senior year, Hunter remained "chained" to the electric wheelchair. He thought nothing could be worse than that until he graduated to a walker a few weeks later.

"I hated the walker," he said. "I got my fair share of weird looks scooting around with that thing. It was humbling. I wasn't very impressive. You learn to get over yourself really quick."

With the help of family, friends, doctors, therapists and academy leadership, Hunter, against all odds, recovered enough from his injuries to graduate on time with the class of 2013. He said his rehabilitation proved grueling. And to get his diploma, he still had to successfully complete five physical education classes.

He did so, albeit with a lot of teeth gritting.

"I still hurt physically," he said. "I have a plate in my right leg that causes me discomfort, my left wrist is still stiff and sore where my bone dislocated and jammed into my carpal tunnel, and my pinky doesn't hardly bend at the top knuckle. Doctors have assured me I will suffer from arthritis as I age. So I will pretty much pay for this the rest of my life."



Hunter got all-too-familiar with his wheelchair. Wearing a back brace, casts on both arms and brackets on his right leg, he spent the entire summer confined to his electric ride.

“Doctors have assured me I will suffer from arthritis as I age. So I will pretty much pay for this the rest of my life.”

The physical debt yet to be paid appears guaranteed. But after graduation he had a chance to put the incident behind him. A fresh start. Nobody at his new base had to know of his past misdeeds. Nobody twisted his arm and forced him to share his story as a form of punishment or redemption.

"I'm not going to lie; I'm still very embarrassed to tell this story," Hunter admitted. "It sucks."

So why do it?

"I should be dead, but I'm not," he explained. "There must be some reason for that. If telling my story helps one person make better choices or makes someone think twice about binge drinking, then everything I've been through will have been worth it. One mistake doesn't define me, but what I do or don't do about it might."

"I'm not going to hide from this." ✈



Hunter stays more grounded these days. He is a civil engineer project manager at Goodfellow AFB, Texas, and a member of the Air Force's 2014 Airman-to-Airman (A2A) Safety Advisory Council. He can be reached at stephen.hunter.8@us.af.mil.

BINGE DRINKING

- Binge drinking for men means drinking five or more alcoholic beverages in about two hours; for women it's four or more drinks.
- The average number of drinks per binge? ... Eight.
- One in six adults in the United States binge drink. That's more than 38 million.
- Men binge drink twice as much as women.
- Although college students commonly binge drink, 70 percent of binge drinking episodes involve adults age 26 years and older.
- Binge drinking leads to an increase in unintentional injuries (i.e., vehicle crashes, falls, burns, drowning) and intentional injuries (i.e., suicides, sexual assault, domestic violence).
- Drinking too much, including binge drinking, causes 80,000 deaths in the United States each year.

— Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Nearly 'Re-tired'

After blowout causes highway crash, injured instructor pilot flies again

By Airman 1st Class **JIMMIE PIKE** and **TIM BARELA**
Photos by Airman 1st Class **JIMMIE PIKE**

Covered in her own blood and writhing from a stabbing pain emanating from her left leg, 1st Lt. Laura Jones didn't worry about bleeding to death or losing her mangled limb. The first lucid thought she could recall was whether or not she would be able to return to the cockpit.

A tire blowout that caused a two-ton minivan to veer into her path on Highway 90 near Knippa, Texas, Jan. 2, nearly cost 1st Lt. Laura Jones her life.





Jones is all smiles after harnessing up in the 85th Flying Training Squadron life support aircrew flight equipment room in preparation for a flight in the T-6 Texan II April 21, less than four months after her accident. She suffered extensive injuries, including a broken femur in her left leg, in the highway crash. As seen from the damage to the driver's side of her 2003 Volkswagen Jetta, she was lucky to walk again.

"I was terrified that I'd never be able to fly again," said the T-6 Texan II instructor pilot, who is assigned to the 85th Flying Training Squadron at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas. Her career seemed ruined, her dreams grounded.

The culprit?

A tire blowout.

On Jan. 2, Jones was returning to her home base at Laughlin after spending the holidays with her family in Ohio. After flying into San Antonio International Airport and collecting her car from long-term parking, she drove west on the last leg of the trip — a rural stretch of Highway 90 near Knippa, Texas. Traveling in the opposite direction, a minivan occupied by a driver and four passengers suddenly veered into her lane.

"There was nothing I could have done," Jones said. "We were both traveling about 75 miles per hour. I hit the brakes. But we were too close."

The minivan's driver, a middle-aged man, lost control of his vehicle after its front right tire exploded. The 4,000-pound minivan smashed into the front driver's side of the lieutenant's 2003 Volkswagen Jetta and crushed it like an empty soda can. Only, this "can" wasn't empty.

The force of the violent impact jammed the Jetta's left front wheel into the cabin, pinning Jones' left leg. Both vehicles spun out of control across the highway, coming to rest in the dirt and grass at the side of the road.

Trapped and in shock, Jones watched almost surreally as the dust that had been kicked up by her car settled. But the agonizing pain shooting from her lower left limb snapped her from her trance.

"It was pretty apparent that my leg was broken," the 25-year-old said. "I was trapped, but I didn't want to move much anyway because I didn't know how much damage had been done to my neck and spine. The pain from my leg pretty much masked all of my other injuries, so I didn't know how bad it was."

The answer? ... Very bad.

She shattered her left femur, fractured her right wrist in four places and broke her jaw in two places. She also suffered lacerations to her kidney and spleen, bruised lungs, and multiple scrapes and bruises all over her body.

"An off-duty National Guardsman arrived and managed to get into the back of my vehicle," she said. "He stabilized my neck to keep me from damaging my cervical spine and talked to me until the paramedics arrived."

An Air Life Helicopter and ambulances rushed the driver of the other vehicle and his four passengers to emergency medical care. Jones was airlifted to San Antonio Military Medical Center for emergency care and surgery.

The injured instructor pilot — who stayed conscious throughout the wreck, the rescue from her vehicle and the extraction to the hospital — couldn't help but worry if this would be her last flight.

One thing was for sure: Her flying career would be grounded for the foreseeable future.

Fortunately, doctors assured her that her neck, spine and eyes remained intact — a big lift for someone wanting to get back in the cockpit as soon as possible. Nevertheless, she spent 11 days in the hospital and faced several grueling months of physical therapy and rehabilitation.

"My main concern was when I would be able fly again," said the Columbus, Ohio, native, who confessed she was one of those kids who dreamed of flying as far back as she can remember. Her dad had been a security forces officer at

“There was nothing I could have done. We were both traveling about 75 miles per hour. I hit the brakes. But we were too close.”

Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base, Ohio, so she grew up watching KC-135 Stratotankers take off and land, knowing she belonged in the cockpit of an Air Force jet.

"When I talked to the flight doctors, they said I'd be shooting to fly again in June," she said. "I was bummed that it would take so long."

But that initial dejection turned into a defiant determination that manifested itself in her rehab efforts.

"We started her with basic range of motion exercises to work up to light weights and ensure she didn't overwork herself," said Kira Pie, a local physical therapy assistant.

But they couldn't hold Jones back.

Weeks ahead of schedule therapists had “her going through impact workouts, like skipping, to get her body adjusted to the feel of pressure on the joints and bones,” Pie said.

Even though her body ached and her workouts were intense, Jones pushed herself with one goal in mind.

“After I started progressing so quickly, I knew I could fly sooner,” she said.

Jones’ hard work and dedication in physical therapy paid off when she had her first flight since the accident April 21, less than four months after the mishap and two months ahead of schedule.

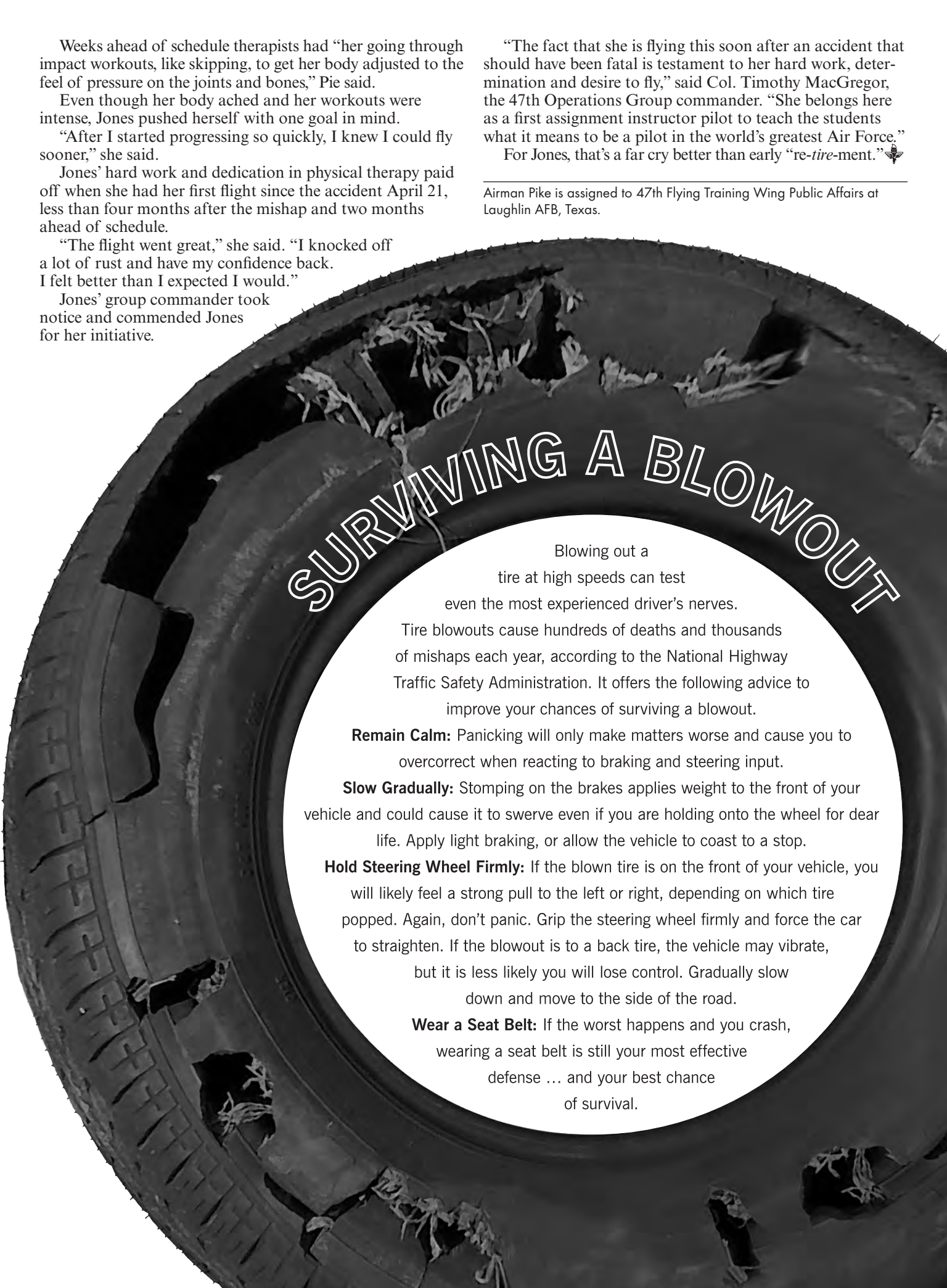
“The flight went great,” she said. “I knocked off a lot of rust and have my confidence back. I felt better than I expected I would.”

Jones’ group commander took notice and commended Jones for her initiative.

“The fact that she is flying this soon after an accident that should have been fatal is testament to her hard work, determination and desire to fly,” said Col. Timothy MacGregor, the 47th Operations Group commander. “She belongs here as a first assignment instructor pilot to teach the students what it means to be a pilot in the world’s greatest Air Force.”

For Jones, that’s a far cry better than early “re-tire-ment.” ✈

Airman Pike is assigned to 47th Flying Training Wing Public Affairs at Laughlin AFB, Texas.



SURVIVING A BLOWOUT

Blowing out a tire at high speeds can test even the most experienced driver’s nerves.

Tire blowouts cause hundreds of deaths and thousands of mishaps each year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. It offers the following advice to improve your chances of surviving a blowout.

Remain Calm: Panicking will only make matters worse and cause you to overcorrect when reacting to braking and steering input.

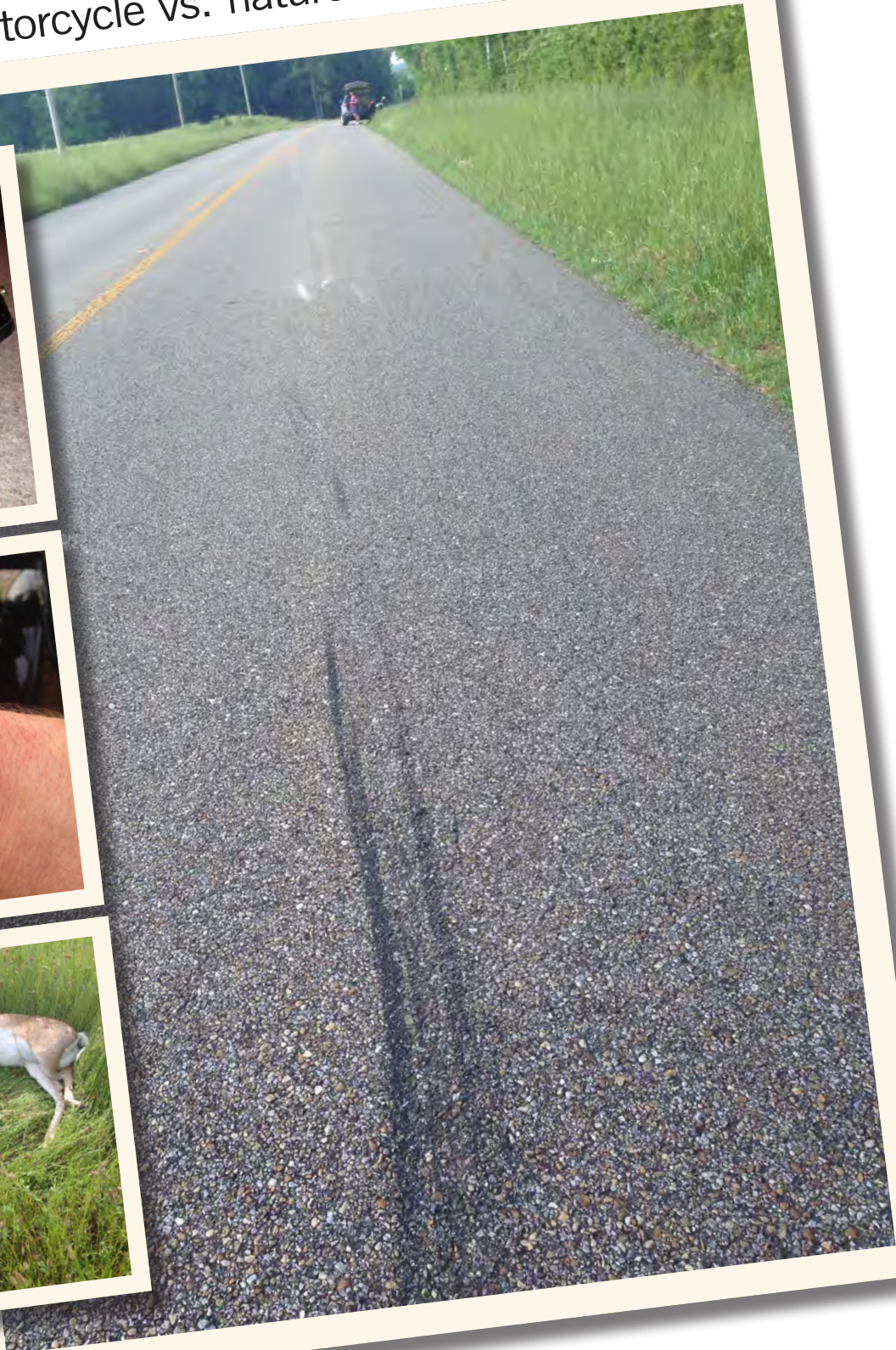
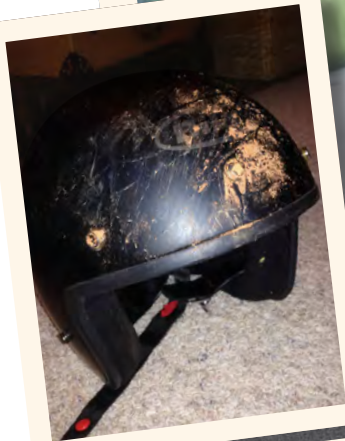
Slow Gradually: Stomping on the brakes applies weight to the front of your vehicle and could cause it to swerve even if you are holding onto the wheel for dear life. Apply light braking, or allow the vehicle to coast to a stop.

Hold Steering Wheel Firmly: If the blown tire is on the front of your vehicle, you will likely feel a strong pull to the left or right, depending on which tire popped. Again, don’t panic. Grip the steering wheel firmly and force the car to straighten. If the blowout is to a back tire, the vehicle may vibrate, but it is less likely you will lose control. Gradually slow down and move to the side of the road.

Wear a Seat Belt: If the worst happens and you crash, wearing a seat belt is still your most effective defense ... and your best chance of survival.

OH, DEER!

It's motorcycle vs. nature in highway mishap



On a beautiful spring day May 7 in Autauga County, Ala., I had just started my morning motorcycle ride into work as a student at Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala. I turned off of County Road 40 onto County Road 85 and was about five minutes into my commute when I settled into a comfortable position, enjoying the ride on the straightest part of the road. I shifted to fifth gear, which for the way I rode my 2013 Harley Davidson Road King meant I was traveling somewhere between 50 to 60 mph.

As the sun crept above the horizon, it cast golden rays across the lush, green landscape. I couldn't have asked for better riding conditions, with temperatures sitting at about 70 degrees. To top it off, I had the road to myself. ...

Or so I thought.

From my right at about my 2 o'clock position, I glimpsed a flash of movement. A deer darted from the trees and bushes lining the street. In two short jumps it had bounded from obscurity to directly in my path!

It was a bang-bang moment.

With no time to brake or swerve, I hit the deer straight on.

The four-legged beast struck my two-wheeled vehicle at the right fork. Its chest hit the right headlight, and its front legs smacked my front wheel.

For a split second, we came face-to-face. I can still picture staring into the deer's big, brown eyes as they were about 6 inches from my nose. This was the last image I recall of the impact.

My world turned black. ...

I regained consciousness as I was rolling side-to-side like a log. I thought, "Bunch up and keep my head up." At this point I brought my arms into my chest and tried to make myself as round as possible.

As I continued rolling, I worried about hitting my motorcycle as I had no clue where it was. Seconds seemed like an eternity. I finally came to a stop in the dirt on the right side of the road, my eyes blinking into the sun.

I wiggled my fingers and toes. I slowly moved my arms and legs. My quick self-diagnosis didn't turn up any substantial pain. I noted a tingling in my wrist as I started to get up, and spotted a small circle of road rash.

I looked left (northward), and there were some cars in the distance. I looked right and saw a truck still a good bit away.

“For a split second, we came face-to-face. I can still picture looking into the deer's big, brown eyes as they were about 6 inches from my nose.”

My motorcycle had stopped sliding near the center of the oncoming lane about 20 feet to my left. With traffic bearing down on the scene, I thought, "Get the bike out of the road!"

As I reached the motorcycle, I shut off the ignition and power even though the engine wasn't running. I picked up my bent and broken Harley, which seemed heavier than I had anticipated.

The road tells part of the story. The skid marks and scuffs on County Road 85 in Autauga County, Ala., show the results of a May 7 motorcycle-deer collision. The inset photos reveal the scrapes where the rider's helmet struck the asphalt and road rash to the rider's right wrist, as well as the unfortunate deer, which made it to the tall grass just beyond the side of the road before succumbing to its injuries.



A happy Maj. Jason Ross stands in front of his brand new Harley Davidson Road King in July 2013. Little did he know the motorcycle would be totaled less than a year later while he was attending Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB, Ala.

I quickly depressed the broken clutch handle and pushed the bike off of the road.

By this time, the vehicles that had been off in the distance were now on scene. They had pulled over, and their occupants had run to my aid.

They all asked if I was OK, which I felt I was. I did another assessment of my body — this time visually. My right wrist had road rash in the exposed area between my Airman battle uniform sleeves and my gloves. My left knee had a tingling sensation where the ABU pants had torn. I peered through the hole and saw my knee had suffered some road rash as well. Aside from those two parts of my body I did not have any pain.

At this point, I pulled out my phone and tried to call my wife, Becky. Cell service wasn't good, so the call did not go through.

The people who had stopped began to pick up some of the pieces of my bike, which were strewn across the road. After I reassured them that I was OK, they got back in their cars and left.

About this time, Becky called me. I told her about my mishap and explained where I was.

One last car pulled over, and a retired Air Force couple got out. I did not catch their names, but they were a bit more insistent on staying to ensure I was indeed OK. I felt a sense of embarrassment but now am deeply grateful for their aid.

The man called 911 to report the accident, while his wife took a closer look at my injuries. She inspected my wrist and knee and discovered some scrapes on my right elbow as well. She went to her car and returned with a first aid kit.



Post-mishap photos show how lucky Ross was to walk away. At top left, another scrape to the other side of his helmet indicates how he rolled along the street. The two center photos show more road rash to his left knee and right elbow, as the rough asphalt tore through his Airman battle uniform. The bottom left and top right photos reveal some of the damage to his prized motorcycle, while the last picture exposes the scuffs to his riding gloves, which successfully protected his hands.

up in its final spot. I could see the motorcycle's impact spot on the asphalt as well as its stopping point.

At 8:08 a.m. I stopped taking the first round of pictures.

Shortly thereafter, the Alabama Highway Patrol showed up, at which point the couple who had stayed to help left. A patrolman took my driver's information to run a report. About this time, Becky showed up. The patrolman called a tow truck. Once the bike was on the tow trailer, I took a few more pictures ... the last one with a timestamp of 8:57 a.m.

Then Becky and I headed home so I could change clothes and do a better assessment of my injuries.

My injuries were very minor. The worst scrapes I had were on my left knee, right elbow and right wrist. My right knee and left wrist had minor abrasions. As far as pain was concerned, my wrist hurt the worst. After changing and looking over my injuries, we went to the hospital and spent the rest of the day there.

A day later, I reflected on and analyzed what happened.

From a safety perspective analyzing the "chain-of-events," perhaps I could have driven slower at that time of day and along that route. Deer tend to feed at the side of the road more at dusk and dawn, and the road is lined by a wooded area, which provides a good refuge for deer to hide. That said, the road I took was my favorite route to work, and I had never seen a deer along this route before. All events were "normal" and no extenuating circumstances existed prior to the accident to suggest that anything other than "normal" was to occur.

Based on the evidence captured in the pictures I took the previous day and using Google Earth for measurements, I was able to determine that the bike, which was totaled, slid nearly 238 feet.

I rolled approximately 278 feet.

Although I don't recall leaving the bike, I can only assume — based on my injuries, position of the motorcycle's wheel and scrape marks on my helmet — that I left the bike with my right arm extended farther than my left. As I flew through the air, my legs must have been traveling higher and faster than my

“I walked along the asphalt and found the deer about 200 feet away lying on its side in the tall grass near the road. It was still breathing, but it wasn't long before the slight rise and fall of its abdomen stopped completely.”

core as the impact spot on my helmet suggests my head scraped the pavement at about a 45-degree angle. This seems consistent with my injuries. My right wrist probably came into contact with the pavement first, followed by my right elbow and head. Then, as I began to roll, my left knee took the next hit and then I started to slow down because my other knee and other wrist sustained less damage.

She proceeded to clean my wounds.

As the Good Samaritan finished tending to my scrapes and cuts, I thought, "I hit that deer pretty hard. I wonder where it is?"

I scanned the road and nearby field, but did not see it anywhere. I started to search for it.

I walked along the asphalt and found the deer about 200 feet away lying on its side in the tall grass near the road. It was still breathing, but it wasn't long before the slight rise and fall of its abdomen stopped completely.

At this point, I went into mishap investigation mode. I started taking pictures of the accident scene with my phone. The first time-stamp was 7:41 a.m. I continued to take pictures for the next few minutes to try to capture as much of the accident proof as possible.

It was amazing what detail was revealed. I could see the point of impact because of the tire mark on the road, which must have been left when the deer hit me. I could see in the flattened areas of the tall grass how the deer flipped over and eventually ended



Using Google Earth, this map shows County Road 85, where Ross's motorcycle struck the deer and where he, the motorcycle and the deer ended up. In the major's case, that meant he rolled about 278 feet from the point of impact.

The deer, of course, didn't make it. I might have suffered the same fate. But it is without question my protective gear helped save my life.

I was wearing a helmet, which protected my head at the impact and also during the roll. My gloves were military-issue tactical gloves with knuckle guards. Based on the scrape marks on the guards, undoubtedly they prevented knuckle injury. The ABUs helped during the roll; but at the points of impact with the asphalt, they ripped. Had I been wearing a jacket with armor, I think it would have kept the scrapes from occurring on my elbows.

With no time to brake or safely swerve, hitting the deer straight on might have worked in my favor, as well. While I don't recall leaving the bike or impacting the ground, I can only guess the fact that I didn't hit my head directly was because my body was in alignment ... that, and, of course, a good bit of luck.

I hit a deer head-on traveling between 50 to 60 mph and walked away. Sure, luck played a role, and maybe some will say it just wasn't my day to die. But take another look at the "evidence." The reason I survived to see my wife and two children again was no accident. 🍀



Because of his protective equipment and training, Ross survived. He is now the commander of the 35th Maintenance Squadron at Misawa AB, Japan.

Major Ross is the commander of the 35th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Misawa Air Base, Japan.

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

What to do if a deer jumps in front of your motorcycle

Deer strikes on the road are unpredictable, and even the most experienced riders can fall victim to them. If a deer suddenly jumps in the path of your motorcycle, here are some steps you can take.

- Brake slowly if there's time; aggressively if there isn't. Use both front and rear brakes.
- Swerve to avoid if you can do so safely. But inadvertently swerving into the path of an 18-wheeler, or even a small car for that matter, to avoid hitting a deer is not the best trade off.
- Most importantly, do your best to avoid the mishap in the first place. Deer love to feed on the grass at the side of the road at dusk and dawn. They frequent country roads and can appear from the woods in a split second. Reduce your speed when you see "deer crossing" warning signs or spot deer grazing near the road. And, remember, they are herd animals; so they rarely are alone.

— Motorcycle Safety Foundation and AETC Ground Safety Division

MAN on WIRE

Pilot overcomes losing legs after crashing plane into power lines



COURTESY PHOTO BY MICHAEL G. MARKET/INSET CRASH PHOTO BY BRAD GRANVISON



A double amputee, retired Capt. David Berling, a 56th Contracting Squadron contract specialist at Luke AFB, Ariz., stands in front of his 1977 Cessna Cardinal RG at Glendale Airport in Arizona. Berling lost his legs in a 2007 plane crash, the subject of which he has written about in a book. Inset photos include the aircraft wreckage and Berling still in a coma eight days after the mishap.

By Airman 1st Class **JAMES HENSLEY**

After a plane crash, nine days in a coma and 28 surgeries, including a double amputation of his legs, retired Capt. David Berling understands what it means to overcome adversity.

On April 29, 2007, Berling flew his private plane into a power line, just 20 seconds from landing at Hawthorne Municipal Airport near Los Angeles. Crashing into a dark, vacant dirt field, the aircraft flipped onto its top. The violent impact pushed the plane's engine into the cockpit, crushing Berling's legs.

His lower leg bones splintered into pieces, and he was bleeding to death. He needed to have both limbs removed to save his life.

"When I heard what happened to my husband, I was in shock," said Melissa Berling, David's wife.

She said she focused on getting to him and saved "freaking out" for later. David was already on the operating table when she arrived at the hospital.

"I was rushed to Harbor UCLA Medical Center, where I underwent life-saving surgery," said Berling, now a civilian working as a 56th Contracting Squadron contract specialist at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. "I was transferred to Naval Medical Center, San Diego, after five days, where I remained an inpatient for more than two months and in rehabilitation for another year."

In addition to his amputations, the former captain suffered a traumatic brain injury; broken ribs and femurs; a fractured jaw, humerus, radius and ulna; chipped vertebrae; eight busted teeth; bruised lungs and kidneys; and a lacerated spleen and liver.

"I don't remember any part of the accident," he said.

According to the National Transportation Safety Board investigation report, Berling descended below the published minimum descent altitude for an instru-

ment approach into that airfield, which resulted in the collision with the wires and terrain. The report added that his inexperience in instrument landing at night and in bad weather likely contributed to his spatial disorientation. Additionally, the report pointed to his lack of familiarity with his plane (it was his first solo flight in his recently purchased 1988 Beechcraft Bonanza Turbo) as playing a role in the mishap, as well.

Berling said some errant information from an air traffic controller also didn't help.

"After my accident, I realized, as the pilot, you're in command and ultimately responsible for that aircraft," he said. "Air traffic control is your adviser. If

you're not comfortable with their direction, ask for alternatives. If you aren't given any, get the aircraft on the ground safely and be prepared to answer for any deviation from their direction. ... Live to fly another day."

With help from family and friends and sheer determination, Berling recovered from his nearly fatal accident and even wrote a book about the experience. The book, "Just Living the Dream: No Way Out but Through" (available at amazon.com and theberlingdream.com), chronicles his crash and comeback.

"I want people to know they are not alone when going through tragedies like mine," he said. "I hope people can

see there's light at the end of the tunnel."

Berling didn't let the accident deter his love of flying. He still pilots a private Cessna.

"No matter what you try in life, you will have failures," he said. "The goal is to learn from those failures and not dwell on them." ✈

Airman Hensley is with the 56th Fighter Wing Public Affairs at Luke AFB, Ariz. Stephen Delgado and Tim Barela contributed to this article.

His lower leg bones splintered into pieces, and he was bleeding to death. He needed to have both limbs removed to save his life.



'THINGS I COULD HAVE DONE TO PREVENT THE CRASH'

I could have flown into Hawthorne Airport with an instructor the first time.

With the fog layer, I could have denied the approach and flown to an alternate airport to see if the weather was more cooperative there.

I could have turned around and flown back to Glendale, Ariz. I always carried the max fuel, so I would have options in case of diversions.

I could have been more familiar with the aircraft. This includes flight time and having flown practice instrument approaches in it.

I could have slowed down. While the tower would have been upset, I was the pilot in command, and the ultimate responsibility to get on the ground safely was mine.

I could have left earlier in the day. This would have lowered the chance of fog and raised the opportunity that I arrived during daylight.

— David Berling

HOT AS HADES

TO HELP DEFEAT ENEMY, DEPLOYED MAINTENANCE CREWS
FIRST HAVE TO BEAT HEAT | *By Staff Sgt. SHAWN NICKEL*
Photos by Staff Sgt. VERNON YOUNG JR.

Even with the doors open, temperatures inside the KC-135 Stratotanker can rise high enough to safely cook meat. Sweat pours down Airman 1st Class Joseph Swartz's face as he triple checks the work his team just completed on the equally hot metal outside.

Airmen who perform maintenance on the flight line at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, endure stifling heat, sand and wind to keep air refueling aircraft and a multitude of other airframes constantly taking off and landing, day and night.

"We're here to get a job done so other Airmen can get their job done," said Swartz, a KC-135 crew chief from the 340th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Unit. "It's definitely hot out here, but it's all worth it every time you see one of these jets take off and know you were part of the bigger picture."

Swartz and his coworkers often leave work with minor burns on their exposed skin from touching scorching metal. Not to mention that after a day's work, their Airman battle uniforms are stiff with sweat, grease and dust.

That's why they have an unwritten recipe to stay hydrated and beat the heat.

"I wake up, drink two bottles of water, go to breakfast and drink two more, then down between 12 and 16 more throughout the day," the New Castle, Penn., native said.

Another key to beating the heat is attitude. Swartz's supervisors refer to him as goofy. The 6-foot-plus Airman celebrates small maintenance victories by doing an "end-zone" dance similar to a pro football player who just scored a touchdown. His subtle New

England accent also cools the mood with jokes as the work pours in after sorties are flown all over U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility.

Their work has been put to the test and proven. In July, they broke a previous all-time record by enabling the 340th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron to fly 1,108 missions, delivering 57 million pounds of fuel, mostly in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

"These Airmen deploy here from all walks of Air Force life," said Senior Master Sgt. Ernie Goethe, a 379th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron tanker senior. "We have more than 400 active-duty, Air National Guard and Reserve Airmen out here, and you wouldn't be able to tell the difference either way — they all hit the ground running when they got here and are all here to work."

Goethe takes pride in this accomplishment, but leaves all the credit to his team, which often works more than 12-hour shifts to keep flights moving. He said Airmen proudly perform the work needed with few complaints.

"Overall, these Airmen are overcoming massive obstacles when it comes to weather, especially heat, to make sure the pilots and boom operators can fuel the fight, so other airframes can complete their missions," Goethe said. "When it comes down to it, you have to be amazed by the discipline and professionalism. Every single Airman should be proud of our accomplishments and abilities to contribute to decisive airpower."

Sergeant Nickel is with Air Forces Central Command public affairs. (AFNS)



Heat rises from the flight line as Sweeney moves equipment during a post-flight inspection at Al Udeid AB. During these inspections, the 340th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Unit hydraulic systems craftsman ensures the boom is functional and prepared for the next in-air refueling mission.



Wiping sweat from his brow,
Tech Sgt. Ryan Riley, along
with Airman 1st Class Connor
Sweeney, works to adjust a
KC-135's boom pod shaft
Aug. 5 at Al Udeid AB,
Qatar. Airmen who perform
maintenance on the flight
line here endure stifling heat,
sand and wind to keep
air refueling aircraft and
a multitude of other
airframes taking off and
landing day and night.

A WEEKEND'S WORK

FAIRCHILD RESCUE FLIGHT SAVES TWO LIVES



COURTESY PHOTO

Bart Rayniak gets rescued by Airmen from Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash., June 13, after his kayak flipped and sent him into the icy water where Marble Creek flows into the St. Joe's River in Washington. The 36th Rescue Flight Airmen answered the call, saving not one, but two lives that same weekend.

FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, Wash. (AETCNS) — Airmen from the 36th Rescue Flight, an Air Education and Training Command unit here, answered the call to save not only one, but two lives in one weekend.

On June 13 at 5:30 p.m., Capt. Berto Holt, the 36th RQF operations supervisor, received a call that a kayaker was stranded 70 miles southeast of Fairchild AFB. Within a few hours, the crew launched the UH-1N Huey and was en route to the man's location.

The individual had been kayaking where Marble Creek flows into the St. Joe's River when his craft flipped over, ejecting him into the cold water.

"There were some challenges that occurred during the rescue due to the weather, but the crew of Rescue 48 never gave up," said Maj. Jennings Marshall, the 36th RQF commander.

At 8:30 p.m. with the victim on board, Capt. Nate Jolls, the pilot of the rescue mission, began an approach back toward the ambulance where Maj. Montsho Corppetts, a 336th Training Support Squadron medic, awaited.

Two days later, on June 15, the crew received another emergency call at about 11:30 a.m. An injured hiker along the Pacific Crest Trail in Northern Washington needed a quick extraction after sustaining injuries from a fall.

"He had been walking along a steep and snowy section of the trail when he slipped and tumbled down the mountainside, hitting a tree and breaking several ribs," Marshall said. "Fortunately, his hiking buddy was able to call for help."

Capt. Erik Greendyke, the 36th RQF operations supervisor, worked with Marshall to assemble a crew. The crew then launched at 1 p.m. and followed the Methow River past Mazama, Wash., to the hiker's location.

"Other hikers prepared a bright orange tent along the ridgeline that helped us immediately identify the area with minimal searching," Marshall said. "As soon as we rescued the injured hiker and his buddy, the survivor was loaded onto an ambulance."

Helicopter rescue operations can be dangerous, but the 36th RQF crews constantly train to maintain proficiency in rescue operations as part of the mission to support the Air Force's only survival, evasion, resistance and escape school.

"We take great effort to ensure rescues are executed safely and with as little risk as possible," Marshall said. "Our normal training missions take place at Fairchild and in the Colville National Forest, and we have been tasked to perform civilian rescues throughout the Pacific Northwest in Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Montana."

Bart Rayniak, the kayaker, was happy the Air Force "stopped by."

"I was never able to truly thank my rescuers," Rayniak said. "They were so wonderful! They put their lives on the line to save mine. They are amazing flyers and crew ... professional and caring ... damn good at what they do."

— Airman 1st Class Janelle Patiño
92nd Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

“They put their lives on the line to save mine. They are ... damn good at what they do.”

FOUR AIRMEN KILLED

HELICOPTER CRASHES AFTER COLLIDING WITH GEESE

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany (AFNS) — A flock of geese caused an HH-60 Pave Hawk to crash near Cley, Norfolk, England, Jan. 7, according to U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa officials. The crash resulted in the death of all four crew members aboard the helicopter.

The recently released accident investigation board report said the multiple bird strikes rendered the pilot and co-pilot unconscious, with at least three geese penetrating the aircraft's windshield. According to the report, the impact with the birds also disabled the trim and flight path stabilization system.

The crew and the aircraft were assigned to the 56th Rescue Squadron, operating out of Royal Air Force Lakenheath, United Kingdom. Cost of the mishap is estimated at more than \$40 million, the report said.

— Capt. Sybil Taunton
USAFE-AFACRICA Public Affairs



BY STAFF SGT. EMERSON NUNEZ

An HH-60 Pave Hawk from the 56th Rescue Squadron, Royal Air Force Lakenheath, United Kingdom, struck a flock of geese earlier this year, causing the helicopter to crash and kill all four crew members on board. Cost of the mishap is estimated at more than \$40 million.

SPATIAL DISORIENTATION CAUSES F-16 CRASH, PILOT DEATH

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany (AFNS) — Spatial disorientation led to the destruction of an F-16 Fighting Falcon and the death of its pilot Jan. 28, 2013, over the Adriatic Sea, according to U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa officials.

The recently released accident investigation board report said evidence pointed to the pilot suffering symptoms of spatial disorientation from a combination of weather conditions, the pilot's use of night vision goggles, the aircraft's attitude and high rate of speed, and the pilot's breakdown in visual scan. The pilot ejected, but he did not survive the crash. His body was found Jan. 31, three days after he and his fighter jet went missing nearly 150 miles south of Aviano.

Assigned to the 555th Fighter Squadron, the pilot was flying an aircraft assigned to the 510th FS, both of the 31st Fighter Wing, Aviano Air Base, Italy. Mishap cost was estimated at more than \$28 million, the report said.

Navy divers perform deep sea salvage

Feb. 15, 2013, recovering the wreckage of an F-16 Fighting Falcon that crashed into the Adriatic Sea Jan. 28, 2013. The divers, from Mobile Diving Salvage Unit 2, Company 4, prepare to dive from the salvage vessel USNS Grapple (T-ARS 53).



BY STAFF SGT. EVELYN CHAVEZ