

# **TORCH**

Air Education and Training Command's



July/August 2008

**SWEET TWEET**  
Pilot's hours mount in T-37  
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## **TROUBLED WATERS**

A tragedy and daring ocean rescue, a chilling collision at the lake and a second chance for twin brothers who nearly drowned in a swimming pool

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Officer and her children survive head-on crash

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Motorcycle doesn't relieve stress for dad

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### **A PERILOUS PATH**

Pilot has to glide powerless T-6 to landing

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# 8 Troubled Waters

COVER STORY

Summer is a time to get wet ... and to be wary. A trip to the beach turns into chaos, where seemingly a "coin flip" decides who will live and who will die. A lake scene becomes terrifying with an unconscious man face-down in the water and a 10-year-old boy struggling to stay afloat. And an afternoon at the swimming pool finds twin 6-year-old boys fighting for their lives.

# 16 Therapeutic Ride

The problem with "daddy's little girl" is that someday she will grow up and leave home to go out into the world on her own. When this inevitable event happened to one father, he figured a new motorcycle might serve as good therapy to get him through this mourning period. Little did he know that his "road rocket" — aided by some inattentive motorists — would add more stress to his life.

# 18 A Perilous Path



by Tech. Sgt. Matthew Hennen

A T-6 Texan II suffered engine failure in flight! For the pilot, this wasn't quite what he had in mind when he took his two-star general boss up for a little "show and tell." The pilot now had to figure out how he was going to safely land his once powered aircraft that had suddenly turned into a badly behaving glider.

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Readers discuss a wounded war hero and his inspirational recovery, a fire-resistant uniform, too much chlorine in swimming pools, drinking and driving, fireworks and fire ants, increased aircraft crashes and fatalities, and more.

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Volume 15, Number 4

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## FROM THE **DIRECTOR**

By Col. **JOHN W. BLUMENTRITT**  
*AETC Director of Safety*

# A FOUR-STAR EVOLUTION

**W**ith the July 2 Air Education and Training Command change of command ceremony, we said good-bye to Gen. William R. Looney III, who retired Aug. 1, and welcomed our new commander, Gen. Stephen R. Lorenz.

During General Looney's three-year tenure, we made some nice strides in regard to the safety and well-being of our service members. Compared with the three years prior to his tour at the helm of AETC, the command saw motorcycle mishaps go down 9 percent, military lost duty days to mishap injuries decrease by 2 percent and ground fatalities plummet by 15 percent. Fiscal 2006, General Looney's first year in command, was the best year in the history of Air Force flight safety, as well as one of the safest in AETC.

We look forward to building on those positive trends with General Lorenz.

Leadership and teamwork are a major focus of our new boss, so much so that in the summer of 2005, while stationed at the Pentagon, he published an article in *Air and Space Power Journal* titled "Lorenz on Leadership." Thousands benefited from the 13 principles included in this article as well as subsequent ideas he proffered later as the commander of Air University.

He said in a recent AETC News Service article, "All great endeavors are done by teams. And these teams have to have leaders. Everyone, from a slick-sleeve Airman to a four-star general, is going to lead something, even if it's only by the example they set."

This is especially true when it comes to safety and risk management.

In fact, everyone has an opportunity to lead when it comes to developing a strong safety culture with sound risk management practices.

How? Well, actually, it's quite simple. Leaders influence others.

Leaders set the example by buckling up every time they get in a vehicle, and remind others to do the same. Leaders never drink and drive. Leaders get plenty of rest before taking long road trips or flying. Leaders maintain flight discipline and train hard to overcome any aviation adversity they may face. Leaders make good, well-thought-out decisions.

Leaders are also easy to identify. They're the ones wearing helmets while riding motorcycles or bicycles; they're wearing safety goggles while playing racquetball or operating dangerous tools; when driving, they follow at a safe distance and control their temper. Interestingly, others around them tend to imitate their actions.

Leaders learn from their mistakes, as well as from the mistakes of others. And most of all, leaders persevere and continue to seek out ways to improve and evolve.

"General Looney left this command in great shape," General Lorenz said in his news service interview, "and we intend to build on the things he's done and keep moving the ball farther down the field."

**"Leaders are easy to identify. They're the ones wearing helmets while riding motorcycles ... when driving, they follow at a safe distance and control their temper. Interestingly, others around them tend to imitate their actions."**

*John W. Blumentritt*

# SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

Thank you for the outstanding cover story on Staff Sgt. Matt Slaydon and his wife ("The Price of Freedom," May/June 2008 issue, page 8). The courage of both Matt and Annette in dealing with his injuries is unfathomable. Matt is truly a hero, but Annette is no less so. They are two individuals with lots of strength

of character and heart. Thank you, Slaydons, for your service and sacrifice to this country's freedom and for continuing to inspire the rest of us ... even during your darkest days.

*Josh Hines  
Via e-mail*

I am a member of the 162nd Fighter Wing, Tucson Air National Guard. I was in our base dental office waiting for an exam when I glanced at the cover of your latest issue of Torch. I stared at it for several seconds when I realized I knew the person in the cover photo. I was Staff Sgt. Matt Slaydon's roommate at Osan Air Base, South

Korea, and later at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. I haven't seen Matt in almost 11 years, but I remember him as very dedicated and brave. His story really hits home as far as the war in Iraq. ... It brought tears to my eyes. Thanks for printing powerful articles about real people.

*Staff Sgt. Daniel A. Crowl  
Tucson, Ariz.*

From cover-to-cover, your May/June 2008 issue was full of interesting stories ... one of your best yet. Not surprisingly, your cover story stood out. From the opening photo to the last line of the article, I couldn't stop reading about the Slaydons. As somebody who also loves my job, it brought tears to my

eyes when reading about how badly Matt still wants to be a part of the bomb squad, even after all it has cost him. When I read his quote, "If I could get just one eye back, I'd go to Iraq with this claw in a flat second," I welled up with pride. He is a true patriot.

*Capt. P. "Red" Barron  
National Guard*



## LETTERS TO TORCH

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

## 'HOT' PRIORITY

It's about time they're getting fire-resistant uniforms for all Airmen and not just the pilots ("Spurn the Burn," May/June 2008 issue, page 4). I'm glad pilots have this added protection, but all Airmen should have had this extra safety feature in their uniforms a long time ago.

*Retired Master Sgt. Ernie Esquivel  
Via e-mail*



*Digital composite by David M. Shack*

## LET THE SUNSHINE IN

I read with interest your story "Too Much Chlorine in Pool" in the May/June Torch (page 5). My father-in-law spilled too much chlorine into a hot tub. He called the pros, and they told him that he just needed to let the sun burn it off. He followed that advice, and his chlorine levels tested normal within a day or two. Just thought that might be a helpful hint for some folks.

*Terry Alexander  
Via e-mail*

## LEFT BEHIND TO MOURN

"Waiting for Mom to Die" (May/June 2008 issue, page 16) was chilling. When will people learn that drinking and driving hurts more than just the people involved in a crash. The families who lose loved ones are left to mourn.

*Lt. Tia Cross  
Army Reserve*



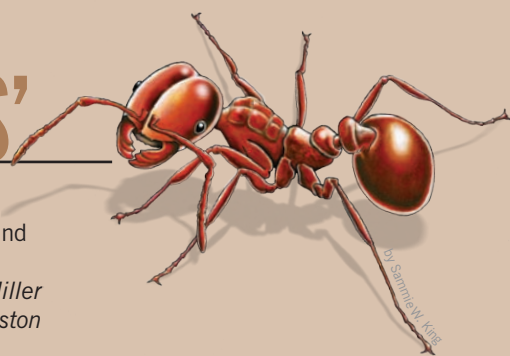
*by Sammie W. King*



# 'STUPID IS AS STUPID DOES'

Your "Tales of the Strange" articles are hilarious. I almost spit out my coffee when I read about the "Fire Ants-in-Your-Pants Dance" (May/June 2008 issue, page 6). Where do you find these guys? Well, in the words of Forest Gump, "Stupid is as stupid does."

J.T. Miller  
Houston



## RECIPE FOR DISASTER?

In reference to the story "Officials Concerned with Alarming Number of Aircraft Crashes, Fatalities" (May/June 2008 issue, page 24), has anyone stopped to think what might be the root cause? I can't give you facts or figures, but I can tell you that we have a stressed out force. I witness it every day.

We keep cutting people and sending

members on longer and longer deployments, and the people left behind keep having the extra work piled on higher and higher. People are stressed out, tired, distracted and, to a certain degree, unhappier than they have been in the past. Does that sound like a recipe for disaster? ... Prepare for it to get worse.

The secretary of defense just basically

fired the Air Force's top two leaders (Air Force secretary and chief of staff) for other breakdowns in the service. But that's not gonna solve anything. It's not their fault Air Force members are spread so thin these days. Bottom line, you can't keep cutting people without cutting duties/tasks.

Maj. L. Sims  
Via e-mail



by Tech. Sgt. Matthew Hannen

## WORDS TO THE WISE



Perhaps Airmen who continue to drink and drive should read the eye-opening breakdown by Chief Master Sgt. Eugene Kampe, the 71st Medical Group superintendent from Vance Air Force Base, Okla. ("DWI — Can You Afford It?" September/October 2007 issue, page 5).

The chief states that the following are three examples of individuals arrested by security forces after drinking a six-pack of beer and driving: "A senior airman reduced to airman first class will lose \$8,006 over the two-year period it takes to earn the grade back. Cost per beer

— \$1,334. For a technical sergeant reduced to staff sergeant over a five-year period, the loss will be \$35,358. Cost per beer — \$5,893. For a master sergeant reduced to technical sergeant, the loss, including the potential effect to retirement pay during an average 30-year lifespan, will rise to \$191,184. Cost per beer — \$31,864."

If Airmen aren't concerned with the potential loss of life they may cause, maybe they will pay attention to the potential loss from their wallet.

Ben Gorman  
Canada

## TWISTERS STRIKE FAST

I recently read your article "Nowhere to Run" (March/April 2008 issue, cover story). I'm no stranger to tornadoes, and you really captured what it's like to be caught in one. People don't realize how fast this happens. When a tornado hits, it strikes almost as fast as a bullet, and almost as quickly, it's on to its next victim.

Gary Olson  
Norman, Okla.

## A GUY YOU WANT IN YOUR CORNER

I just came across a copy of your January/February 2008 issue of Torch and loved the cover story ("Avalanche Angels," page 12). If I'm ever in trouble, I hope Staff Sgt. Jason Weiss and the rest of his team are in the area. If you'll miss your own wedding to help save someone's life, that's the kind of guy you want in your corner. Those kinds of people are why I still sometimes miss the Air Force.

Former Senior Airman Tina House  
Via e-mail



# SEAT BELTS SAVED MY KIDS

**BUCKLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Colo.** — On April 22 at about 5:10 p.m., I experienced every parent's nightmare — a major motor vehicle accident with my children in the car.

I was on my way to drop off our 8- and 6-year-old children with my husband before reporting to work when a car ran a red light and slammed into my vehicle.

I was driving northbound on one of the local roads and was approaching an intersection where I had a green light. As I proceeded through the intersection going 40 mph, a southbound driver decided to make a left-hand turn — into my lane.

I hit the brakes in time to lock us into our seat belts milliseconds before impact. We crashed into a Ford F-350, bounced off of it, and hit it again with the back of our sport utility vehicle before we stopped in the middle of the intersection.

According to witnesses, the driver of the truck didn't even slow down, nor did he look at on-coming traffic. He just turned.

I shudder to think of the outcome had we not been wearing our seat belts. The children would have been tossed around the inside of the spinning SUV, much like the loose papers and toys that seemed to appear from out of nowhere.

Today, my kids are at school showing off their battle wounds, telling all their friends about seat belts. And I am here at work, with nothing more than some sore muscles, bumps and bruises. However, the SUV that I loved to drive is a total loss.

Think about this: We as consumers can upgrade just about any feature in our vehicles — from the rims and tires, to the interior and music system. The one feature that stays the same no matter what level of upgrade you get is seat belts. They are there for a reason. You have no excuse for not using them.

Remember, you may be the best driver out there, but you never know who is



by Tech. Sgt. Matthew Hansen

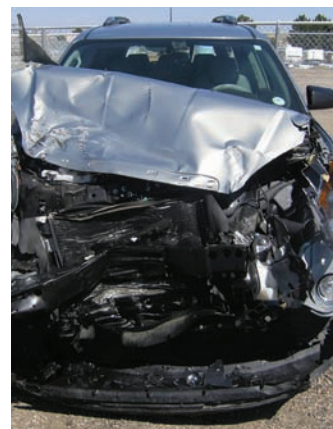
**An officer and her children survived a frightening crash** with another vehicle that ran a red light in Parker, Colo., April 22. The family walked away from their mangled SUV (below) with only a few bruises. They were wearing seat belts.

behind the wheel of every other vehicle on the road.

Do what you can to protect yourself and your family. You only get one chance in an accident. I am thankful that we made the right decision and buckled up.

— 1st. Lt. Trisha Loede  
460th Space Wing Protocol

**The wrecked vehicle** serves as a grim reminder that things could have been much worse if the family had not buckled up.



Courtesy photo

## JUST THE FACTS

- In the past 40 years new vehicle standards have been created and safety equipment has been installed. All the safety precautions together have saved over 300,000 lives. One, and only one, safety feature saved more than half of those lives — seat belts.

- Front seat belt use is 16 percent higher than rear seat belt use.
- Evening seat belt use decreases about 10 percent from daytime use.
- Auto accidents are the number one killer of children ages 4 to 14.

An average of five children die each day, and more than 600 are injured daily in auto accidents. The main reason is improper use of seat belts, booster seats and child restraints.

— National Highway Traffic Safety Administration



# BIKE RIDE KNOCKS SENSE INTO AIRMAN

*FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, Wash.* — On a beautiful summer Saturday morning, I was enjoying the gondola ride up to the top of Silver Mountain, Idaho. In the winter, Silver Mountain is a ski resort, but during summertime it is transformed into a mountain biking playground.

I spent the time on the ride up preparing myself mentally. I'm not an expert extreme bike rider, and I wasn't going on the most difficult trail; yet I knew this wasn't going to be some walk through the park. This was my second time riding down the mountain, and I had an understanding of how challenging it could be.

The major factor to keep in mind? Speed. The fastest I had gone was 38 mph, with an average of 26 mph. To some that might not seem scorching, but when you're going downhill on some rough and sometimes loose trails, it can really get your adrenaline going. You have to stay focused and make quick decisions, or you could put yourself in a bad situation.

Let's face it; falling off your bike at these speeds would not be a pleasant experience.

I made it about halfway down the 14-mile trail before I had a life-changing experience. The part of the trail I was on ran down along the side of the mountain. To the right of the trail was the mountain face, and to the left was a steep drop.

I had just finished making a right turn around a blind corner, when I saw a hard 90-degree left turn about 30 yards ahead. Toward the outer part of the turn, I noticed a puddle of mud.

Wanting to go around the puddle, and going too fast to make a sharp turn to the inside of it, I went high on the outside of the turn cutting close to the side of the mountain. Short brush grew where the trail met the mountain.

As I pedaled around the puddle and into the brush, my front tire washed out from under me, sending me flying over the handlebars.

I landed face first on the ground.

Stunned and still in shock from what occurred, I just rolled over and sat there for a few minutes. I could taste some blood, and my nose hurt a bit from being scraped along the ground.

My first clear thought was that my helmet had saved my life.

I was so grateful to have been wearing it and doing so correctly. I didn't always don a helmet, and sometimes I would let straps dangle instead of buckling them.

With this thought in mind, I slowly got back on my bike and finished out the ride.

*While mountain biking, a staff sergeant had an accident that reshaped his thinking.*

"As I was going around the puddle and into the brush, my front tire washed out from under me, sending me flying over the handlebars."

On the way home I began to ask myself some pointed questions. Why would I ever ride without a helmet when there is always a threat of getting into an accident? Did I find the mountain to be more of a threat than city streets?

Actually, roads are no safer. In fact, 784 bicyclists died on U.S. roadways in 2005 alone. Ninety-two percent of them perished in crashes with motor vehicles. About 540,000 bicyclists visit emergency rooms with injuries every year.

In being part of an organization like the Air Force, safety is something that I hear about and practice on a day-to-day basis at work. As a supervisor, I'm responsible for holding others to the same standards.

So why would I not practice safety in my personal life?

All the possibilities for an accident still exist away from the workplace. My health and safety are still at risk. I guess I just needed an accident to literally help knock some sense into me.

I hope it doesn't take a harsh lesson to motivate you to evaluate the decisions you make and take the necessary safety precautions.

— Staff Sgt. Odin Arcos

92nd Aerospace  
Medicine Squadron

Digital composite by David M. Stack



# WHEELIE OF MISFORTUNE

## HANDLEBAR BREAKS OFF ATV, RIDER GETS DRAGGED

When an Airman decided to do stunts on an all-terrain vehicle, his day got busted up by a crash ... and so did his body.

The Airman hadn't set out to do stunts. He borrowed a 2003 Yamaha Raptor 350cc ATV, which belonged to a friend, just to take it on a short ride. He had no training and limited experience on ATVs.

According to information from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the inexperienced ATV driver was off to a bad start almost from the get go. First of all, the CPSC says that ATV owners should never lend their ATVs to anyone who has not taken a safety training course or has not been driving an ATV long enough to operate it safely. The CPSC also says you should never attempt wheelies, jumps or other stunts, as they can have disastrous results.

Mix those factors with a little bad luck, and the Airman's day was doomed.

He made several passes in a flat grassy field. As he became more and more comfortable, he decided to up the ante. Several

### THE DOs AND DON'Ts OF ATVS

- DO** get trained before riding.
- DO** wear a helmet.
- DO** wear boots, goggles, gloves and long pants.
- DON'T** do stunts (such as wheelies).
- DON'T** ride tandem.
- DON'T** ride on pavement.
- DON'T** ride under the influence.

— U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

other riders were performing tricks on their machines, so he figured he'd give it a try. His stunt would be to pop a wheelie. He'd never done this before, so he was a little nervous.

His first attempt failed miserably.

Maybe a tad bit embarrassed for not getting his front wheels off the ground, he brought the ATV to a complete stop and decided to try again. Determined, he put his right foot in the foot brace that was located on the right rear of the ATV. He

gave the ATV some gas, and then released the brake. At the same time, he attempted to lift the front of the ATV by pulling back hard on the handlebars.

But as he jerked back, the right handlebar broke off!

As the handlebar separated from the frame of the ATV, the throttle stayed in the open position, causing the vehicle to lunge forward. He fell backward onto the ground with his right foot stuck in the foot brace.

With its engine revving, the ATV continued to move forward, dragging the helpless young man behind it like a cowboy with his foot caught in the stirrup of a saddle.

After dragging him for almost 30 feet, the ATV tilted onto its two right wheels. When it tipped, it caused his upper torso to roll over while his right foot remained in the foot brace.

He heard a sickening loud snap.

The ATV then hit a large bush and came to a stop. Bystanders sought medical attention immediately. As there were no medical facilities close by that were equipped to handle an injury of this nature, an ambulance transported the Airman to a hospital 40 miles south of the mishap location.

After X-rays were taken, doctors diagnosed him with a broken right fibula and severe right ankle sprain. It could have been worse, though. The Airman had worn a helmet, gloves, goggles, jeans and boots that helped limit his injuries.

Even so, he still spent the next 14 days in the hospital watching Wheel of Fortune re-runs while thinking about his own "wheelie of misfortune."

*An Airman broke his leg after falling off of an all-terrain vehicle and being dragged for nearly 30 feet. The right handlebar broke off of the ATV when the Airman tried to pop a wheelie.*



by Tech Sgt. Matthew Hansen



# WITH THE FLICK OF A MATCH

## BARBECUES CAN SWITCH FROM GOOD FOOD TO BAD MOOD

**GOODFELLOW AIR FORCE BASE, Texas** — It's the weekend, and you're basking in the sun on your patio. In one hand, you're holding a cool drink; in the other a spatula. A couple of juicy steaks are sizzling on the grill, and you're savoring the smell of the flavorful smoke as it drifts past your nose.

Have you thought about safety yet?

You should. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, warm-weather activities such as hosting a barbecue led to product-related injuries for more than 4 million people in 2006.

When it comes to barbecuing, burns are always near the top of the injury list and can quickly ruin an outing.

In one recent incident with a propane grill, a man tried to light the burner, but it was slow to ignite. He leaned over to get a closer look at what the problem was. By then enough of the propane gas had accumulated, and he ended up with a face full of fire. The burst of flame singed his eyebrows and hair.

In a recent charcoal grill mishap, two men discovered they had forgotten the lighter fluid. They brainstormed, and one of them suggested using gasoline instead. They sloppily poured the gasoline on the



*Whether barbecuing with a propane or charcoal grill, burn injuries happen frequently each year.*

charcoal, spilling some of the highly flammable fluid on the ground and splashing some on one of the man's clothing and shoes. They threw on a match, and the ensuing scene was chaos. The exploding gasoline cost both men some of their eyebrows and hair, and one of the men's clothing caught on fire. In an attempt to snuff out the flames, he dropped to the ground, which ignited the other spilled petro. In the end, both escaped with only minor burns, and a new memo to add to their "don't" list: *Don't cook with gasoline.*

While barbecuing mishaps can and do occur, here's the good news: With just a few simple, precautionary steps, you'll be well on your way to ensuring a safe cookout, every time. After all, what's more important than having the peace of mind to enjoy the real fun at any barbecue — the food, family and friends?

— Will Harding  
17th Services

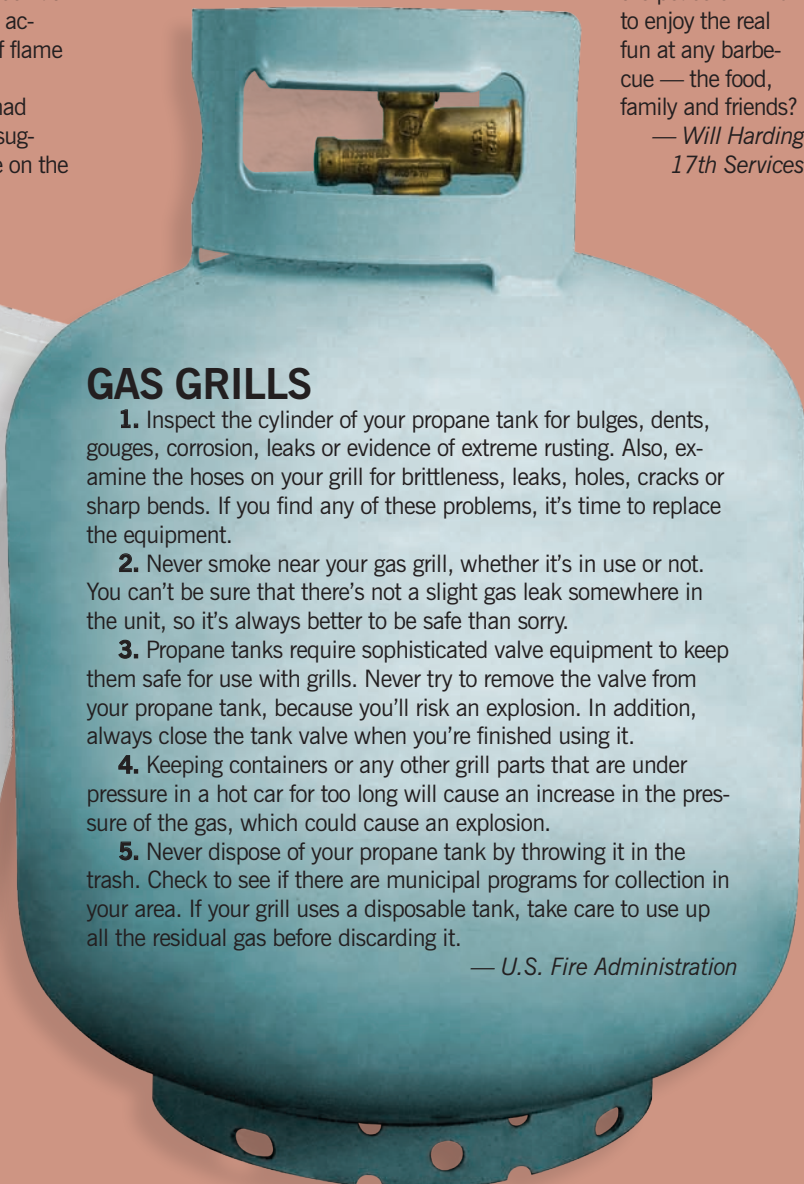
### CHARCOAL GRILLS

1. Operate charcoal grills only outdoors, never inside an enclosed area, such as your home, enclosed porch, garage, tent, vehicle, etc. Even if you've finished grilling, and you assume all the coals are extinguished, they're still producing highly toxic carbon monoxide, so keep your charcoal grills outside at all times.
  2. Don't wear loose clothing, especially long sleeves, while grilling.
  3. Charcoal grills tend to flare up, so keep a fire extinguisher handy.
  4. Use charcoal lighter fluid to light new coals only; don't use it on coals that are already lit.
  5. Don't substitute approved charcoal lighter fluid with other flammable substances such as gasoline.
- U.S. Fire Administration

### GAS GRILLS

1. Inspect the cylinder of your propane tank for bulges, dents, gouges, corrosion, leaks or evidence of extreme rusting. Also, examine the hoses on your grill for brittleness, leaks, holes, cracks or sharp bends. If you find any of these problems, it's time to replace the equipment.
2. Never smoke near your gas grill, whether it's in use or not. You can't be sure that there's not a slight gas leak somewhere in the unit, so it's always better to be safe than sorry.
3. Propane tanks require sophisticated valve equipment to keep them safe for use with grills. Never try to remove the valve from your propane tank, because you'll risk an explosion. In addition, always close the tank valve when you're finished using it.
4. Keeping containers or any other grill parts that are under pressure in a hot car for too long will cause an increase in the pressure of the gas, which could cause an explosion.
5. Never dispose of your propane tank by throwing it in the trash. Check to see if there are municipal programs for collection in your area. If your grill uses a disposable tank, take care to use up all the residual gas before discarding it.

— U.S. Fire Administration





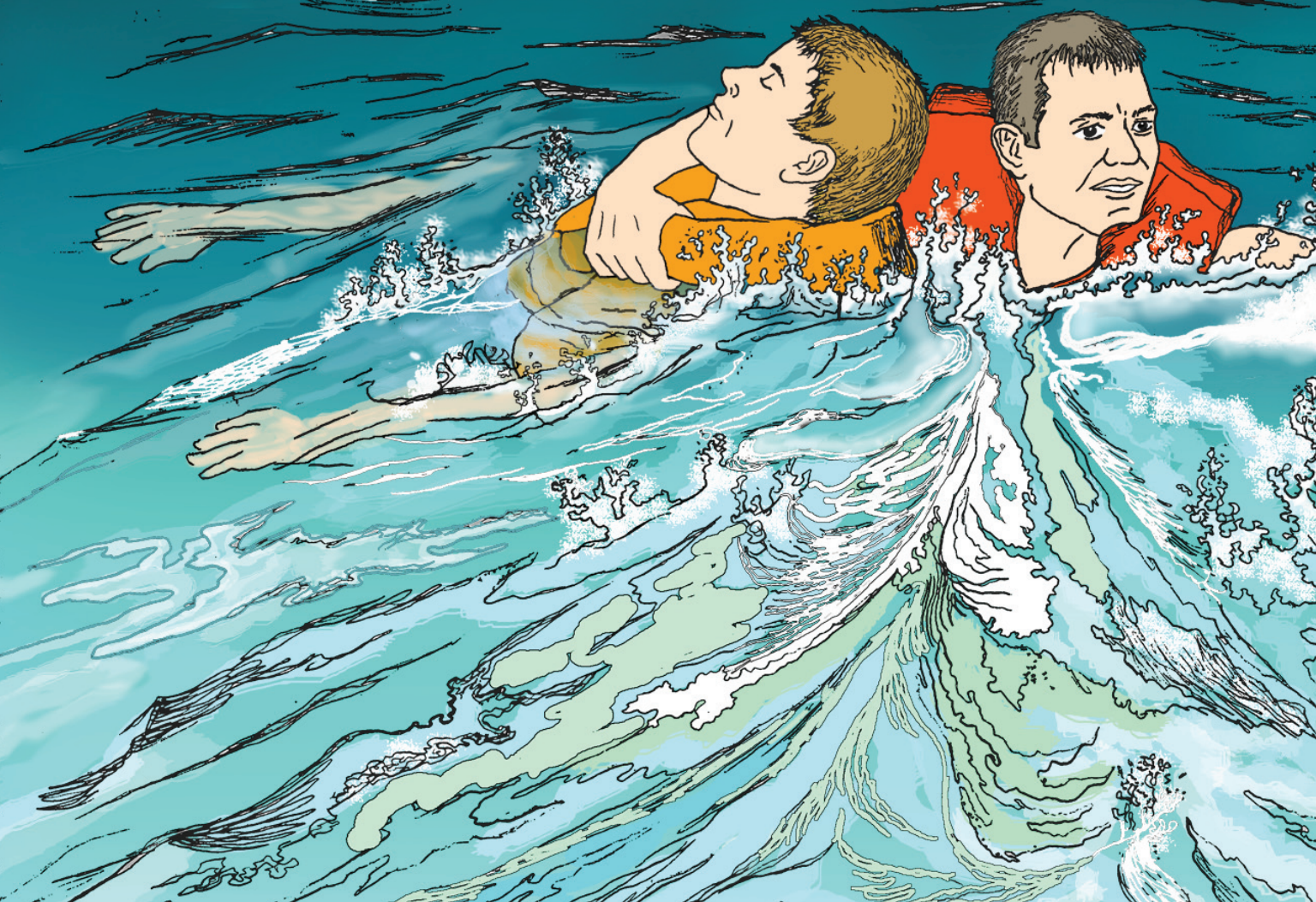
# TROUBLED WATERS

A tragedy and daring ocean rescue, a chilling collision at the lake and a second chance for twins who nearly drowned in a swimming pool

Stories by **TIM BARELA**

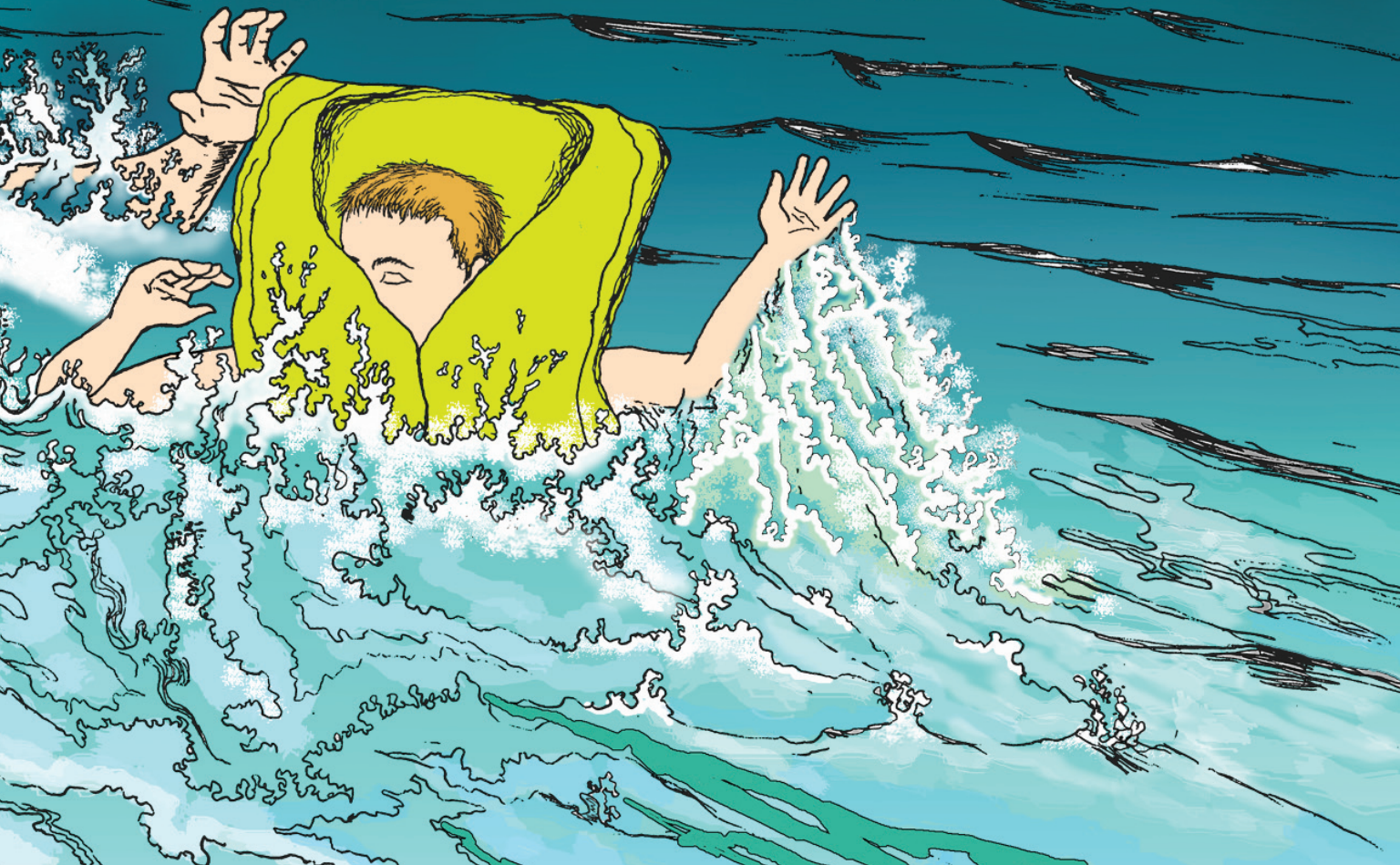
Illustration by **SAMMIE W. KING**

Photos by Tech. Sgt. **MATTHEW HANNEN**





**W**hether in a swimming pool,  
at the lake or frolicking in the ocean,  
summer is a time to get wet! But while  
having fun, you should always keep risk  
management in play — for yourself and  
your wingman. Because as the people  
in the following three stories found  
out, it might be only a short swim  
from joy to sorrow.







# Horror at Harkers Island

Dad fights ocean waves to try to save his two children, another boy and a friend; one of them doesn't make it

For months Staff Sgt. Jay Rosenberry had looked forward to his vacation to Harkers Island in the Outer Banks, the long string of narrow barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina.

He kept busy throughout the year as an F-16 Fighting Falcon crew chief with the Air National Guard's 162nd Fighter Wing at Tucson International Airport, Ariz. He loved his job, but it was time to unwind on the beach.

Unfortunately, it didn't turn out to be the stress-free trip he'd planned.

He arrived at Harkers Island, which overlooks the Atlantic Ocean, July 24, 2006, with his 11-year-old daughter, Josie, and his 9-year-old son, J.J. They were vacationing with Jay's former girlfriend, Kristy Vaughn, and her 10-year-old daughter, Mikayla, and 8-year-old son, Josh. Also accompanying them were Kristy's dad, Johnnie Morris; her stepmother, Betty; and her stepbrother, Mark Emerson, as well as Mark's wife, Angel.

While Jay, Kristy and Betty stayed behind to finish unpacking and to tidy up the quaint cabin they'd rented, the kids, escorted by the other three adults, headed down to the beach.

Less than an hour later, a frantic Mikayla nearly ran into Jay as he stepped out of the cabin on his way to the beach. She'd obviously been running hard and was out of breath.

"The boys are in trouble!" she screamed with a gasp.

Jay's heart sank. It was more than 200 yards to the beach, and he sprinted it as if being chased by a ravenous tiger.

He didn't know it at the time, but J.J., who is autistic, had been pulled in by the rip tide. When 33-year-old Mark, who had been playing with the children, started to

go to help him, Josh also got pulled in by the rough waters. Since Josh was closer, Mark tried to rescue him. But he too got yanked into the ocean's grasp. With no one close enough to save J.J., Josie, who is fiercely protective of her brother, tried to reach him. Unfortunately, the greedy rip tide put her life in danger as well.

Now all four fought for their lives.

Fear mounted as Jay approached the beach and saw four heads bobbing in the water. About 60 yards out, Josie was

closest to the shore. J.J. struggled 30 yards beyond her to the right. Mark and Josh were another 60 yards out from J.J. and even farther to the right. Johnnie, who was 60 years old, desperately tried to break through the surf to help but was having little luck.

Who to save first?

Jay didn't break stride as he made his decision. Mark had hold of Josh. So Jay chose to help the closest person first. He dove into the strong waves and "por-





poised" through, a trick his dad, who had been an expert surfer, had showed him when he was a boy. It didn't take him long to reach Josie, who despite her own dire straits screamed for her dad to help her younger brother instead.

Terrified at the prospect of losing his children and friends, Jay refused to let panic take hold.

"To panic in a situation like that is a death sentence," the 41-year-old said. "If you panic, you don't think straight and tend to make poor decisions."

He got Josie to the shore, then immediately turned back to rescue J.J. By this time, Kristy also had arrived at the scene. She and her dad tried again and again to run through the raging surf to help Mark and Josh, but their futile attempts continued to be thwarted by strong waves that kept pushing them back. Jay again used his porpoise technique to break through.

To this point, adrenaline had fueled Jay, and his body hadn't yet succumbed

to the effects of the massive amount of energy he'd been burning.

"I work out with weights three times a week and am in pretty good shape; but let's face it, if I sprinted 200 yards in a normal situation, I'd be huffing and puffing and out of gas," he said. "But when your kids' lives are on the line, fear can push you past your limits."

Nevertheless, he began feeling tired about three-quarters of the way to J.J.

J.J. didn't know how to swim, but he was doing a pretty good job of dog paddling furiously to keep his head above water. He didn't say anything as his dad approached — because of his autism, he wasn't very verbal. While Jay saw fear on his son's face, the boy never panicked and was immediately calm when his dad grabbed him.

"I think he just felt safe once I had a hold on him," Jay said.

Getting J.J. back to the shore proved exhausting. Jay's extreme exertion started to catch up with him. With wobbly legs he handed his son to Josie, who was crying, and quickly hugged and kissed them both. When he turned around, he noticed that Mark and Josh had become separated. Josh, who also did not know how to swim, slapped the water frantically in an effort to keep his head above water. Mark seemed to be floating.

"I was scared for Mark," Jay said. "But my instinct was to go after the 8-year-old now that he was alone, because I knew he couldn't swim."

As he stumbled back toward the ocean depths, Jay passed Kristy and Johnnie. The last thing he heard before diving into the waves for a third time was Kristy's shrieking voice pleading, "Please save my boy!"

When Jay made it to Josh, the hysterical child grabbed at him, fought him

and tried to climb on him. At first, Jay couldn't reason with him.

"It was a struggle to get him to calm down enough to help him," Jay said. "I was exhausted and swallowed a bunch of salt water. I really didn't know if we'd make it back. I actually felt like I might die out there."

On the verge of collapse, Jay somehow managed to make it back to shore with Josh. Kristy snatched up her son and hugged him tightly. Meanwhile, two other bystanders who had arrived on scene used boogie boards to go help Mark. As they got him close to shore, Jay, Kristy and Johnnie helped pull him in. He was unconscious and Kristy, a nurse, began performing CPR.

Jay slumped and sat down hard.

With his head in his hands, he sobbed uncontrollably.

"I was mentally and physically exhausted and just broke down," he said. "All the fear of coming so close to losing my children just came pouring out. I don't know what I'd do without them. Plus, I barely made it back with Josh ... and then there was Mark ..."

Despite the efforts of Kristy to revive her stepbrother, he died.

"Mark had been in the Navy and he could swim OK, but I think he just became too fatigued holding and struggling with Josh out there for so long," Jay said. "Plus the sea was pretty rough that day, so I'm sure he swallowed quite a bit of salt water."

Paramedics arrived, and a helicopter flew Mark to Carteret General Hospital. A Coast Guard boat took the kids, Johnnie and Jay to the same hospital, as they had all ingested sea water and were throwing up. Jay stayed the longest to be treated for excessive salt water intake.

On April 11, nearly two years after the bitter-sweet day on Harkers Island, the Coast Guard awarded Jay its Silver Lifesaving Medal for his heroic actions. Officials also posthumously awarded Mark the Gold Lifesaving Medal for sacrificing his life to save another. Mark is buried in Jetersville, Va.

"I just thank God for giving me the strength to do what needed to be done," Jay said. "I can't even imagine what my life would be like without my children." ❀



**Playing in the sand with his son, J.J., and daughter, Josie, Staff Sgt. Jay Rosenberry of the Tucson Air National Guard cherishes these moments after his children nearly drowned in the Atlantic Ocean. Rosenberry risked his own life to save his children and another boy, and on April 11, the Coast Guard awarded him with its Silver Lifesaving Medal for his heroic actions.**



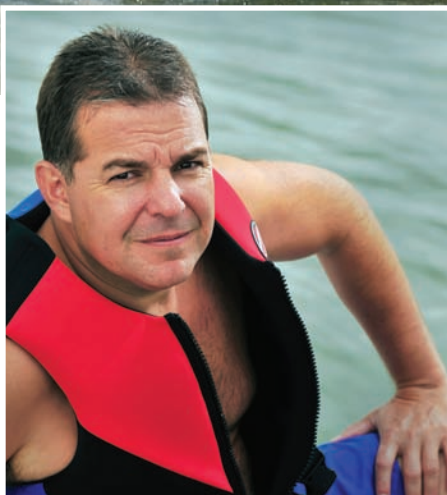


# Life Line at Lake Arrowhead

Sergeant rescues unconscious man, boy in boating accident



**Senior Master Sgt. Mike Stephenson-Pino** is the AETC winner of the 2008 Noncommissioned Officer Association Vanguard Award for saving a man and a boy involved in a boating accident at Lake Arrowhead in Wichita Falls, Texas.



**W**ith his wife, Debra, and 5-year-old daughter, Danielle, manning the boat, Senior Master Sgt. Mike Stephenson-Pino slipped into the water at Lake Arrowhead in Wichita Falls, Texas, to cool off from the hot sun. Shortly after he did so, he witnessed a disaster unfold not 30 feet from his wet haven.

Stephenson-Pino, superintendent of independent duty medical technician technical school in the 383rd Training Squadron at Sheppard Air Force Base,





**When their tube buckled in a wake** while being pulled by a boat, a man and a 10-year-old boy were catapulted into the air and collided. The man was knocked out.

Texas, and his family were at a church outing — barbecuing, boating and waterskiing — when the mishap took place July 29, 2007.

Driving the boat, Debra pulled a man and a 10-year-old boy on a long, cigar-shaped tube. As the vessel turned, it created a big wake behind it. The tube hit the wake, and the nose of the tube got buried under the water. The powerful tug of the boat forced the tube to take a nosedive farther into the lake, which in turn caused the tube to buckle in the middle.

Suddenly, the tube turned into a giant sling-shot, capable of catapulting human beings.

“The man and boy shot up about 12 feet in the air,” Stephenson-Pino said. “If you’re driving the boat, you can help prevent this from happening by cutting the gas when you see the tube take a dip.”

As the duo launched skyward, the man, who had been on the back of the tube, also was propelled forward directly toward the boy. His head struck the boy on the hip.”

They ricocheted off each other and, even with life jackets on, disappeared into the lake 20 feet apart. An instant later both popped out of the water. The boy screamed in panic and agony. Face-down in the water, the man didn’t move.

Stephenson-Pino, who in his profession had saved people who had fallen off cliffs, treated battle-wounded Soldiers in Iraq and revived heart attack victims, didn’t hesitate in his response.

“In an emergency situation, things kind of slow down for me, and my thinking and situational awareness are sharper — I guess that’s pretty common for folks in my line of work,” he said. “I headed straight for the unconscious man. I had to get his face out of the water.”

The sergeant quickly swam the 30

feet and carefully turned the victim over onto his back. He then cleared the man’s airway. Once he ensured the victim was breathing, he tucked the man’s head under his arm. Then, with the injured party in tow, he began to swim another 20 feet toward the frantic boy.

“When I reached the boy, he was thrashing and flailing about because his life jacket was too big and he was about to fall out of it,” Stephenson-Pino said. “He was terrified and crying because he wasn’t comfortable in the water, he was confused, and he was in pain. He probably thought he was going to drown.”

The Airman had to grab the youngster rather forcefully to get him to calm down and stop fighting.

“Once I had him secured, I had to keep swimming with both of them to keep their heads from bobbing in and out of the water,” he said.

Meanwhile, Debra pulled their boat next to the trio, and her husband lifted the boy to the ladder. Relieved, the youngster quickly climbed into the boat.

Then things got tougher.

“It’s difficult to lift a full-grown unconscious man out of the water when you have no footing,” Stephenson-Pino said.

He decided to put one foot on the first rung of the ladder to help gain leverage to pull the victim up across his knee. Then, slowly moving rung by rung, he inched him out of the water until he could finally roll him onto the deck of the boat.

“By the time we got him laid out on the bench seat of our boat, I was totally exhausted,” the sergeant said.

Shortly after getting in the boat, the adult victim regained consciousness.

After reaching shore, the man’s wife rushed him to the hospital. Doctors said the knockout blow had given the man a concussion and caused mild bleeding on his brain. The boy suffered only minor bruising to his hip.

Stephenson-Pino said he and his wife kept their cool through the whole ordeal.

“Debra is a physician assistant, and with my background and all my Air Force Training, we’re no strangers to emergency situations with peoples’ lives on the line,” he said. “It’s what we were trained to do.”

So while some might consider them heroes, for the Stephenson-Pinos, it was just another day at the office. ✦



# Close Call at Kitty Hawk Pool

**Lieutenant revives twin 6-year-old boys who nearly drown**

**W**hen 2nd Lt. Mike Schroeder went to his apartment complex swimming pool March 29 to study for an upcoming advanced navigator test, the usual calming effect provided by a backdrop of palm trees, a pristine rock waterfall and crystal-clear blue water didn't last long on this sunny San Antonio afternoon.

As he pulled up a lawn chair at the Villages at Kitty Hawk pool, something caught his eye. Two young boys lay face-down in the bottom of the pool, five feet below the surface.

They weren't moving.

"At first, I thought they might be playing — having a breath-hold-ing contest and then popping out of the water — especially since there were two of them," said Schroeder, who graduated from combat systems officer training Aug. 1 at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. "But they were very still, and I didn't see any air bubbles."

Uneasy, Schroeder walked toward the boys and saw a man standing near the edge of the pool looking around.

"Are those kids OK?" the 23-year-old lieutenant asked, while pointing at the children.

The man's eyes widened with fear, and he jumped into the pool. The man, who turned out to be the father of the 6-year-old twin boys, grabbed one of them and immediately set him on the edge of the pool while he went to rescue

the other brother. Without hesitation, Schroeder, who learned CPR while going through the Reserve Officer Training Corps program (Detachment 695) at the University of Portland in Oregon, began doing chest compressions on the unresponsive youngster.

"It was eerie because his eyes were wide open, his mouth was filled to the brim with water, and he wasn't breathing. He looked dead," said Schroeder, who flew in T-43s and T-1s at Randolph.



"And I had never performed CPR on anyone in an emergency situation before, so I was nervous."

While someone called 911, Schroeder gave the boy four chest compressions. To the lieutenant's relief, the youngster started spitting up water, coughing ... and breathing!

"I turned him on his side to help the water run out of his mouth, and as soon as he caught his breath, he started to cry," Schroeder said. "Then I asked another bystander to watch over him and ran to his brother."

The second twin's eyes were closed, and he also had a mouth full of water. After five chest compressions, he too began coughing and spitting up water.

"After my success with the first boy, I felt much more confident with the second," Schroeder said. "Once he was breathing, I just tried to think about what else needed to be done."

As he placed towels over the boys to help prevent shock, paramedics arrived and took over. They put the twins on oxygen and a pulse monitor. When they were sure both were stabilized, they transported them via ambulance to the hospital. The twin brothers made a complete recovery.

"This incident just goes to show that you can never lose track of your children near water," said the lieutenant, who grew up around lakes and rivers. "Their father got momentarily distracted, and they ended up at the bottom of the pool."

Knowing life-saving CPR and first-aid buddy care also doesn't hurt.

"I never thought I'd actually have to use it, but I'm glad I took CPR," said Schroeder, who was assigned to Alpha Flight in the 562nd Flying Training Squadron. "It's kind of ironic, because a week before this incident we had a safety briefing in the squadron where they stressed being a good wingman."

Fortunately for the twins, their wingman was ready. ✈

**At the scene of the near double drowning,** 2nd Lt. Mike Schroeder said he's glad CPR training paid off.



# Drowning an Epidemic

Each year, nearly 6,000 people drown in the United States. Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental deaths for people 15 to 44 years of age. What is really surprising is that two-thirds of the people who drown never had an intention of being in the water!

The four major causes of drowning are not wearing a life jacket, abuse of alcohol, lack of sufficient swimming skills and hypothermia.

At right are some tips to help you have a safe experience around water.



**Two-thirds of the people who drown** never had an intention of being in the water, according to the National Water Safety Program.

## Swimmers!

- Learn how to swim and perform a basic survival float.
- Don't take chances by overestimating your swimming skills.
- Swim in designated swimming areas.
- Never swim alone.
- Never leave a child alone near water. Kids don't drown only in pools or at the beach. Bathtubs, buckets, toilets and hot tubs present drowning dangers as well.
- Never rely on toys such as inner tubes and water wings to stay afloat. They can't replace life jackets.
- Never dive in unknown or shallow waters. Every year, diving accidents result in more than 8,000 people suffering paralyzing spinal cord injuries, and another 5,000 dying before they reach the hospital.
- Don't underestimate the power of water. Even rivers and lakes can have undertows.
- Learn CPR.

## Boaters!

- Know your boat, and know the rules of the road. Take a safe boating course (free through many base outdoor recreation programs).
- Check your boat for all required safety equipment.
- Don't overload the boat.
- Wear your life jacket — don't just carry one on board.
- Leave alcohol behind. More than half of all the people who drown each year had consumed alcohol prior to their accident.
- Check the weather forecast.
- Always have a first-aid kit and emergency phone contacts handy.

— National Water Safety Program



# Therapeutic Ride

## New motorcycle helps dad with stress ... or does it?

By **BILL JAMES**

Photos by Tech. Sgt. **MATTHEW HANNEN**

Last year, my oldest daughter went out into the world on her own. Oh, I knew it would happen eventually. But after 18 years, seeing her pack up one day and leave the next was alarming. The total lack of preparation bothered me. Not hers. Mine. I knew she was leaving; I just wasn't ready for it to happen. I had to find a way to cope with my loss, so I bought another motorcycle.

Good therapy.

Knowing my wife has a soft spot for strays, I told her the bike followed me home. I said I would take care of it, clean it, take it out for long "walks," and even get it licensed. She acted like she was mad, but her generous heart was apparent as she gave me a blanket so I could spend a few quality nights in the garage with my new "pet."

While I obviously have a lot to learn about women, I also discovered there is still a lot I don't know about motorcycles. The "stray" motorcycle I adopted is considerably smaller than my other bike. It has two cylinders for 650ccs of engine and weighs a mere 363 pounds. Its biggest wind-blocking component is the headlight. ... That's about as naked as a machine can get and still have paint.

Of course, I took it to the range and practiced cornering and stopping techniques. Of course, I considered myself proficient in handling it. Of course, I proved myself wrong.

On my way to a friend's house to attend a going away party for one of our deploying troops, I traveled in a straight line at the posted speed limit. I saw a car heading toward me with its blinker on, signaling the driver's intention to turn left into a strip mall.

I covered the brakes just in case he decided to turn in my path.

He did.

I mentally patted myself on the back for my superior risk management as I applied both brakes to slow enough for him to turn safely in front of me. Then faster than you can say, "Man, I'm good!" the car behind him also turned left, putting us on a collision course.

This I hadn't anticipated.

We were so close I could almost swear I saw the Our Lady of Grace statue on his dashboard cover her eyes.

I applied increasing pressure to both brakes but noticed things weren't going like I imagined in my practice stops. First of all, while I was wearing all of the appropriate personal protective



**Bill James barely escaped** with his life when a car made a left turn in his path.

gear, nobody ever told me that it might also be a good idea to strap on an athletic supporter cup. But I was wishing I had as I was quickly and painfully introduced to the gas tank.

Next, I found myself staring at asphalt because the rear end of the bike didn't stay on the ground where it belongs. I craned my neck to reacquaint myself with the horizon and realized if I didn't let off the front brake I was going to flip over. However, I also understood that if I released the front brake to get the rear tire on the ground, I would hit the car.

Well, at least I was wearing clean underwear.

I eased off the front brake just enough to keep from somersaulting, but squeezed it enough to still slow quickly. The car crowded past, and I returned the rear tire to good ol' Mother Earth.

I arrived at my friend's house 10 minutes later. It was another 30 minutes before I stopped shaking.

The incident reminded me how quickly a fun moment can turn into a scary one. All of these moments, though, are an occasion to learn. I used the experience to reinforce the fact that if you buy a new motorcycle, you should take the time to get very familiar with it ... such as practicing your quick stops.

I also learned that while my newly independent daughter had left home, it wasn't forever. She returned for Christmas and kicked my butt in a video game of Rock Band and Guitar Hero.

I'm just happy that I survived my close call and can continue to witness the wonderful woman she is becoming. ✨

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Mr. James heads motorcycle and traffic safety in the 37th Training Wing safety office at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. He also is the editor and publisher of The Lackland Mentor, a motorcycle safety newsletter.





# Motorcycles

*by the Numbers*

**4,810**

Number of motorcyclists killed in 2006, an increase of 5 percent over the previous year. Another 88,000 were injured.

**1,658**

Estimated number of motorcyclists saved by helmets in 2006. An estimated 752 more could have been saved had they worn helmets.

**40**

Percentage of fatal crashes involving a motorcycle and another type of vehicle in which the other vehicle was turning left while the motorcycle was going straight, passing or overtaking the vehicle, resulting in 883 deaths in 2006.

— National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Digital manipulation by David M. Stack



# A Perilous

Pilot has to glide T-6 in for landing after engine

By TIM BARELA

Photos by Tech. Sgt. MATTHEW HANNEN



*When a pilot took his new boss on an orientation flight in the T-6, the mission took a turn for the worse.*



# Path

power shuts down



Maj. Kent Currie woke up in a good mood for a Wednesday morning. Sometimes rolling out of bed at 6:30 a.m. in the middle of a workweek can be a drag. But on March 5, Currie would be flying the T-6 Texan II. And like most Air Force pilots, the major felt any day spent flying is a good day.

Kerry, the major's wife of three years, sat at the kitchen table studying for an upcoming nursing exam. She'd had a rough night. Nearly three months pregnant with their first child, she often experienced the dreaded "morning sickness." Currie poured himself a bowl of Mini-Wheats, and the couple tossed around a few more possible baby names ... a conversation habit they'd fallen into ever since they'd found out she was expecting.

Currie finished his breakfast, kissed his wife good-bye, and stepped outside to feel the warmth under a sunny, cloudless San Antonio sky.

"What a perfect day for flying," he thought.

Little did he know that this ideal setting was about to take a turn for the worse.

Today's mission? A little "show and tell" in the Texan II. He'd been tasked to take his squadron's boss — Maj. Gen. Erwin F. Lessel III — on an indoctrination flight in the T-6, and was more than enthusiastic for the opportunity.

Currie had been flying the T-6 for more than seven years and has nearly 4,000 flying hours in the T-6, T-37, T-38 and C-130 combined. As the director of operations in the Air Education and Training Command Studies and Analysis Squadron at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, one of the numerous things his unit does is test and evaluate the Texan II. Since his boss, who is director of AETC Plans, Programs, Requirements and Assessments, writes the checks for all the systems they test on the aircraft, Currie wanted to show him some of its issues.

The general had been a T-37 instructor pilot in his career and was looking forward to seeing the replacement for the venerable Tweet first hand.

Ground ops, take off and flying into the military operating area all went smoothly. Currie demonstrated maneuvers, and the general repeated them. They each did a spin to compare the T-6 to the old Tweet. Next they set up for some aerobatics.

This plan never happened.

As the general accelerated in max power, the aircraft, suddenly and with no warning, decelerated.

Currie scanned the engine instruments to see if he could determine the exact problem, and he had a sinking feeling.

"What happened?" the general asked.

Then he heard words no one ever wants to hear from a pilot.

"We're in trouble," Currie said.

The propeller speed was decreasing, the torque increasing, and the aircraft was decelerating, all the while making a noise like it was in pain.

"No way is this happening," Currie thought. "Not with the boss on board."

If they lost all power, gravity would soon do its job.

When an engine malfunction occurs in a single-engine aircraft like the T-6, one of the first steps is to turn toward an



airfield. They had one nearby, but it was a short 4,000-foot private airfield. The minimum runway for normal operations in the T-6 is 4,000 feet, but without engine power, there is very little margin for error.

For Currie, the 8,300-foot runway back at Randolph seemed the better idea ... if they could make it.

Though still nearly 30 miles out, he felt the aircraft had just enough energy to return home safely.

The real wild card now proved to be the winds. Fortunately, they didn't face a significant headwind to impede their progress. Instead a strong tailwind aided their "mad dash" to the base.

In handling the emergency, the roles were clear for both men. This was the general's first flight in a T-6, and Currie is one of the most experienced Texan II pilots in the Air Force. So in this case, the major had the responsibility as the instructor pilot in command of the aircraft. The general served as his "wing-man," assisting where he could by flying the aircraft back to the airfield, confirming checklist actions and providing a second set of eyes as a safety observer.

Part of the emergency procedure was to pull a circuit breaker. Although Currie had done this in the simulator many times, it proved to be a little more difficult strapped to the seat wearing a bulky helmet and gloves. He located and pulled the circuit breaker, hoping to fix the problem. But he had an uneasy feeling it wouldn't work.

The next few seconds would reveal that suspicion as correct.

Engine malfunction lights illuminated and warning alarms sounded as the engine began to vibrate.

Ironically, Currie had helped develop the checklist for this type of malfunction. Perhaps fittingly, he'd be the first one to use it in a real life emergency.

Engine indications were confusing since it looked like they should have power but did not. Currie pulled the power back to prevent the motor from over-torquing, and slowly the engine began to indicate near normal.

Despite the distressing grinding, the major hoped the worst was over.

But as the propeller slowed, that alarming clatter escalated rapidly as if someone had dropped a spoon into a garbage disposal.

Again he reduced the power — this time near idle. Despite high torque readings, the propeller produced little to no thrust, and they were unable to maintain level flight.

Currie declared an emergency with San Antonio approach control. Understanding what an engine failure meant to a T-6, they cleared the pilots direct to Randolph.

The major discussed the situation with the supervisor of flying at the base, and he helped verify that they had run the appropriate checklists. As they got closer to Randolph, Currie began to feel things were under control despite the clanking from the propeller and being involuntarily pulled toward dirt.

They arrived over Randolph with excess altitude and set up an orbit pattern. As they spiraled down, the general backed up Currie with descent rate calculations and wind adjustments.

Then, with an eerie thump, the propeller stopped turning and the grinding ended.

"There it goes!" they said in unison.

The ominous silence from the frozen propeller proved to be even more unsettling than the racket the prop had been making.

"This wasn't quite the show I had in mind for my two-star boss!" Currie thought.

## With an eerie thump, the propeller stopped turning.

All things considered, the major felt reasonably comfortable with the situation. He had practiced engine out patterns countless times, and they had 8,300 feet of runway available. It was a little unnerving, however, when they heard conversations with the tower instructing aircraft on the ground to get away from the area near the runway.

Since the normal landing gear control didn't work with the engine out, they'd have to use the emergency extension to lower the gear. Currie worried that with so much to think about, he

could become distracted and forget that critical step. He made the general aware of this concern, and Lessel assured him that he would not let him forget.

Currie started the last orbit and lowered the gear with the emergency extension. Three green indications told him the system worked, and he then concentrated on flying the engine out pattern correctly, being careful to adjust to the strong winds.

As they came within reach of the runway, the major selected the flaps to help slow them down.

But something else went terribly wrong.

Currie wasn't feeling the normal pitch change sensation from lowering the flaps. He looked back inside the cockpit, and sure enough, the flap gauge hadn't budged.

"Not now!" he thought. "Not after we're so close."

For the third time since their problems began, the general thought back to the ejection seat and parachute training they'd received through life support.

The cold reality? They were running out of options and might have to bail.

Currie quickly realized that he had to abandon the idea of having emergency flaps available to slow them down. He had to figure out another way to get this \$4.5 million aircraft on the ground ... and stopped.

For obvious reasons, he also wanted to ensure their flight path didn't take them over a nearby fuel storage facility.

After weighing his options, he decided the best way to slow down was to speed up.

He chose to lower the nose and accelerate to a velocity well above the best glide speed. This move would create additional drag and help them to lose energy.

Going nearly 40 knots too fast for their configuration, the deafening wind rush told



**No worse for wear,** Maj. Kent Currie relied upon his training to fly out of a danger. He earned an Air Force Aviation Well Done Award for the skills he displayed in the T-6 emergency.





**With no power and the propeller grinding,** Currie glided his T-6 in for a successful emergency landing at Randolph AFB, Texas.

them all they needed to know about their speed. And with that speed, the 8,300-foot runway that normally looked so long now appeared awfully short.

Currie waited to set the plane down until he was sure they wouldn't hit the nose gear first, which could cause it to collapse. The tire squeaks on the runway felt good. But after touching down more than 3,000 feet down the runway faster than anyone has ever landed a T-6, they weren't out of the woods yet.

The T-6 has warnings about applying the brakes above 80 knots because of the tendency to lock the brakes and blow the tires. They were doing nearly 50 knots faster than the recommended speed and needed to start braking now!

Currie braked as hard as he felt he safely could, and the

## They were going too fast, and needed to start braking now!

aircraft began to decelerate. As they passed the "3,000-foot remaining" marker under 100 knots, he finally started feeling some relief.

He brought the aircraft to a stop with less than 1,000 feet of runway remaining. The two officers egressed the aircraft as firetrucks and other emergency vehicles swarmed the scene.

As the pair moved away from the aircraft, the hair raised on the back of Currie's neck as he contemplated what might have happened had they decided to land at that small 4,000-foot private runway. His thoughts then turned to his pregnant wife, who is due in September.

"Kerry isn't going to like this," he thought.

With that in mind, the major looked up to see his boss holding a camera. "Smile," the general said, as the shutter clicked.

And for the first time since the emergency began, they finally had reason to grin from ear-to-ear. ✈

## Life Lessons for a Pilot

For his actions in the March 5 T-6 emergency landing at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, Maj. Kent Currie earned an Air Force Aviation Well Done Award for "outstanding airmanship that prevented a serious flight mishap."

The citation credits him with saving the \$4.5 million aircraft, as well as the lives of the two crewmembers. Base leadership says his example should be followed by other pilots.

"Major Currie did an outstanding job safely recovering our T-6," said Maj. Gen. Erwin F. Lessel III, who flew with Currie that day. "He quickly identified the problem and took appropriate corrective action, putting his airmanship skills to the test."

The general went on to say that the events of that day reinforced what Airmen already should know: "Flying is inherently dangerous; we must train the way we'll fight, and we must always be prepared to deal with the unexpected."

According to Lt. Col. Sean McGlynn, a T-6 pilot who serves in the Air Education and Training Command Safety Directorate, "This emergency was about as complex as it gets. Fortunately, Kent Currie, without a doubt, was the right pilot to have in the air."

McGlynn says the major also provided some important lessons for other pilots to follow:

- His mission planning was impeccable.
- He understands that there's never a "routine" mission and prepared himself accordingly.
- Even though he's so experienced, he didn't cut any corners; he still diligently followed checklists and procedures.
- He demonstrated outstanding situational awareness, systems knowledge and crew resource management.
- He remained cool, calm and collected under pressure.



# SWEET TWEET

AS THE T-37 ERA WINDS DOWN, ONE PILOT HAS FLOWN MORE HOURS IN IT THAN ANY OTHER

Story and photos by Tech. Sgt. MATTHEW HANNEN

There can be only one. ... As the T-37 Tweet era winds down and gives way to the T-6 Texan II, one pilot will have logged more hours in this iconic aircraft than anyone else in Euro-NATO joint jet pilot training, and possibly the Air Force. And he resides at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, also home of the last remaining active T-37s in the Air Force inventory.

Lt. Col. Bo McGowan, commander of the 97th Flying Training Squadron, has accumulated more than 4,000 flying hours in the Tweet. His first T-37 flight launched April 9, 1984, at Mather AFB, Calif.

"I have so many sorties because I fell in love with the pure passion and desire of flying and wanted to pass that on to others," McGowan said. "I am never more filled as a professional than when I get an opportunity to teach these student pilots how to fly. I enjoy showing them how to fly safely, disciplined and smart. You can't teach from behind a desk; you've got to get them into the machine."



Lt. Col. Bo McGowan

The truth of the matter is, McGowan said, he never passed on opportunities to fly — sometimes even flying three sorties a day.

"Every time they needed an extra guy to fly with a student, I would go do it," he said. "I love to fly, I love to teach, and I love to watch these young men and women from all these incredibly different backgrounds come in and be able to participate in something bigger than themselves. I could never get over the fact that a kid like me went from farming peanuts in Georgia to flying the most advanced airplanes just because of the training, discipline and desire. I pour my heart and soul into these student pilots because they are the future."

They couldn't have a better role model.

McGowan's safety record in the Tweet has been stellar with no mishaps. But it is perhaps crashing a fighter jet early in his flying career that helped shape his success as an instructor even more.

On April 4, 1991, he was involved in a near midair collision in an F-16 Fighting Falcon while assigned to Moody AFB, Ga.





"To keep the other plane from hitting us, I jerked and pulled my plane out of the way," he said. "When trying to recover, I got disoriented. I was about 80 degrees nose low and 60 degrees at a left bank at about 1,500 feet above ground before I bailed."

From the time he narrowly missed the other aircraft to the time his parachute deployed only took eight seconds, he said. He ejected only two seconds before the aircraft smashed into the ground.

McGowan landed in a tree in the Okefenokee Swamp, 18 miles southeast of Moody. He worked his way down to the waist-deep water and then trudged his way out of the swamp.

"I had one moment in time during the (mishap) sequence where if I hadn't let myself be distracted, I would have probably had an opportunity to fly it out," he said.

"But I missed the window and had to punch out before the plane hit the ground."

The mishap occurred at his first F-16 unit, and the colonel still

shakes his head when he reflects on the most notorious day in his distinguished flying career.

"That incredible failure is key to who I have become," McGowan said. "I've flown probably 4,000 Air Force flights after that and

have over 6,100 flying hours (as a pilot in the Tweet and the F-16 and as a navigator in the T-43 and KC-135; he also has another 1,200 flying hours as a 737 pilot for United Airlines). Out of huge failures can come great successes if you're just willing to learn and don't give up."

Luckily for his students and the Air Force, giving up on his dream never even crossed the colonel's mind.

"I remember being a 10-year-old boy, walking up to my daddy and telling him I wanted to be a pilot in the Air Force," he said. "I wanted to be like those men

who flew in Vietnam. They were such honorable warriors. If the Air Force had told me I had to pay for my training, I would have handed over my credit card. I believe that much in what we do."

***"I had one moment in time during the (mishap) sequence where if I hadn't let myself be distracted, I would have probably had an opportunity to fly (the jet) out. ... But that incredible failure is key to who I have become."***



# COURAGE, QUICK THINKING SAVE AIRCREW

WASHINGTON (AFPN) — An MH-53M Pave Low helicopter pilot's calm demeanor, quick thinking and eventual course of action saved the lives of his crew during a harrowing September training mission, according to Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Duncan J. McNabb.

In a Pentagon ceremony June 9, the general presented the service's top individual flying safety award — the 2008 Koren Kolligian Jr. Trophy — to Lt. Col. Eugene V. Becker from the 20th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

During a nighttime tactical training mission Sept. 7, Becker's MH-53M experienced a "catastrophic mechanical failure" while hovering over a training area. After overriding the aircraft's flight control system and calling in two maydays, he successfully negotiated 90-foot trees and a small-landing zone, and brought the broken aircraft into an autorotation landing.

His actions not only saved the multi-million dollar aircraft, but the lives of his seven crewmembers, the citation said.

"When you talk about flying helicopters into a small-landing zone surrounded by trees, and you put night-vision goggles into the middle of it, it's about the hardest thing to do," McNabb said as he recalled his own experience flying helicopters at Andrews Air Force Base, Md.

"If you end up with a critical gear box failure, and you're about to lose power, your ability to do everything perfectly is the only thing that will allow you to get to the ground safely," he said. "You put the two together, and it takes it to a whole different level."

McNabb highlighted Becker's calm response and ability to think clearly during the emergency as the reason for the crew's survival. Furthermore, Becker calmly directed the actions of other crewmembers during the emergency landing — a trait taught to all Air Force aviators, the general said.

Becker, however, preferred to praise each of his teammates for their heroism and tenacity.

"It was a moment our crewmembers trained for their entire careers," he said.

Becker, a command pilot with more than 4,600 flight hours in various Air Force helicopters, also touted the abilities of the Pave Low helicopter and its many accomplishments, ranging from search

and rescue to special operation missions. He spoke fondly of the aircraft and its dedicated crews, bringing particular attention to his own helicopter, tail number 69-5794, which was heavily damaged in the crash.

"In her last 45 seconds in the air, she gave us the critical seconds we needed to get over a clear area," the colonel said. "Her final act was to sacrifice herself so that her crew should live another day."

— Tech. Sgt. Nick Choy  
Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs



*When his MH-53 Pave Low suffered a catastrophic mechanical failure, Lt. Col. Eugene Becker had to use all his flying skills to land the helicopter safely and save all on board. For his actions, he earned the Koren Kolligian Jr. Trophy — the Air Force's top individual flying safety award.*

by Senior Airman Andy M. Kim



# LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS LEADS TO FATAL F-16 CRASH

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas — On July 3, Air Force officials completed an investigation of the March 14 F-16 Fighting Falcon accident in Arizona that resulted in the death of a pilot.

The pilot was assigned to the 62nd Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz.

The accident investigation board determined the cause of the mishap was the pilot's loss of consciousness from not properly managing high gravitational forces while executing a turning maneuver.

At the time of the mishap, the pilot was flying a training mission involving simulated air-to-air combat "dogfights" between himself and the mission instructor pilot, also of the 62nd FS.

The \$22 million aircraft went down in an unpopulated Bureau of Land Management wilderness area 71 miles northwest of Luke and was destroyed.

There were no civilian injuries as a result of this mishap.

*An F-16 pilot from Luke AFB, Ariz., died after blacking out during a turning maneuver that produced high gravitational forces.*



by Master Sgt. Rob Wieland

## FIVE TIPS TO AVOID G-LOC

**1 Good physical fitness:** Cross-train to include weight training and cardiovascular.

**2 Hydration:** Put water or non-caffeinated fluids into your body. Good hydration all day long improves performance. Don't just drink water right before you fly.

**3 Proper fit and wear of life support equipment:** Follow the technical orders and

ensure daily and periodic inspections are performed, as well as refits accomplished.

**4 Anti-G straining maneuver:** Master this. Follow the techniques and good habit patterns. Take a big breath, contract all muscles, and every three seconds have a rapid exchange of air.

**5 Accurate awareness of energy status:** Know the maneuvering potential of the aircraft.

**BONUS TIP:** *Know when to stand down: If today isn't your best day — you're not feeling well, you didn't get enough sleep, etc. — fly another day. Pilots don't like to miss sorties, but they shouldn't push themselves to the danger point.*

— Lt. Col. Jon Counsell  
Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas

# JET'S LANDING GEAR RETRACTS ON RUNWAY

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas — An accident investigation board determined that raising the landing gear prior to the aircraft safely becoming airborne caused an F-16 Fighting Falcon accident at Gila Bend Auxiliary Airfield, Ariz., April 2.

The Air Force board completed its investigation June 20.

The accident resulted in substantial damage to the aircraft after the pilot initiated landing gear retraction during the takeoff phase of the touch-and-go prior to the aircraft becoming safely airborne.

The F-16D and mishap pilots were assigned to the 61st Fighter Squadron, 56th Fighter Wing, at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. The aircraft was flown from the rear cockpit by a pilot going through the instructor pilot upgrade course. A current and qualified

instructor pilot occupied the front cockpit during the mishap.

For the second half of the mission, the aviators dedicated their training to practice approaches for rear-seat proficiency at Gila Bend Auxiliary Airfield.

"That's why it is extremely important to establish good habit patterns through repeated exposure in the training environment ... to reduce the likelihood of mishaps of this nature," said Col. John W. Blumentritt, director of the Air Education and Training Command Safety Directorate.

The report said retracting the landing gear before advancing the throttle to full power caused the aircraft to settle to the runway because of insufficient speed and lift to return to flight.

Proper emergency procedures were fol-



USAF photo

*An F-16 Fighting Falcon sustained substantial damage after the pilot initiated landing gear retraction during the takeoff phase of a touch-and-go prior to the aircraft becoming safely airborne.*

lowed, and both pilots safely exited the aircraft on the runway. Neither pilot sustained injuries; and other than the damage to the aircraft, there was no collateral property damage.





# Their Finest Hour

"To every person, there comes in their lifetime that special moment when they are tapped on the shoulder and offered that chance to do a very special thing, unique to them and fitted to their talents.

What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared and unqualified for the work that would be their finest hour."

— Winston Churchill

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