

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

March/April 2009

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**“Sleepiness and accidents
are not coincidences.”**

— Dr. John A. Caldwell
Air Force Research Laboratory

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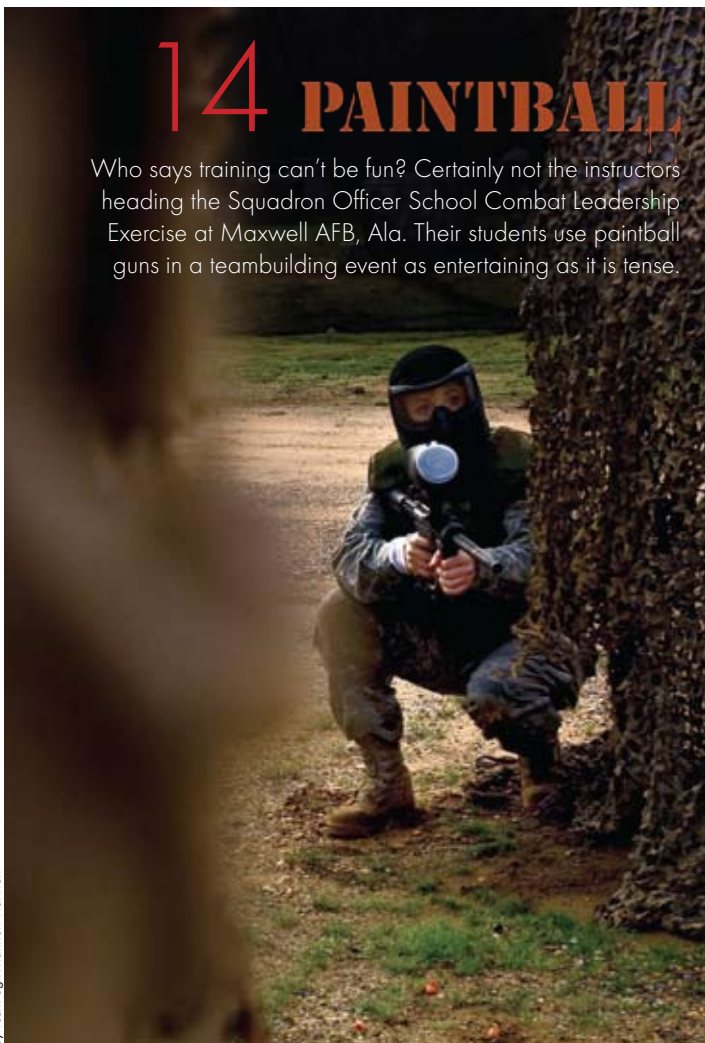
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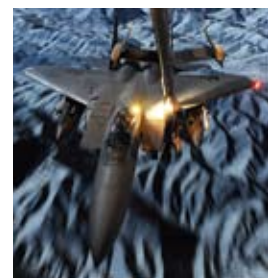


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digital composite by Sammie W. King
Back cover photo by Tech. Sgt. Erik Gudmundson

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

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

HALFWAY THERE

Is the glass half empty or half full?

As we reached the halfway point of fiscal 2009 on April 1, there are certainly two ways to look at this question as far as mishap prevention is concerned.

One who views the world via a glass-half-empty lens might emphasize the five fatalities before April 1 and point out that this is nearly twice as many as at the same point last year. A glass-half-full type person might instead highlight the year isn't over, and champion that we have an opportunity to rebound and make 2009 one of the best safety years yet.

There is truth in both perspectives.

Certainly, we need to look at what's happened so far and learn from mistakes.

■ On Oct. 2, a 25-year-old Airman was riding his bike, and died in a hit and run mishap. He was wearing all of his protective gear.

■ Also on Oct. 2, a 26-year-old staff sergeant suffered fatal injuries when he lost control of his vehicle, left the road, struck a utility pole, and then rotated and struck a tree. He had been driving too fast, and he had been drinking.

■ On Jan. 10, a 20-year-old airman first class attended a party with a friend and became intoxicated. Although the underage drinking put the Airman in a terrible predicament, he did turn his keys over to his friend. Unfortunately, the friend had been drinking also, and while driving from the party, rolled the vehicle, ejecting the Airman who then sustained fatal injuries. The friend was charged with intoxication manslaughter.

■ On Feb. 28, a young couple was traveling to a family funeral. The husband lost control of their vehicle while crossing an icy bridge, and an approaching semi-tractor prompted both to jump out of the disabled vehicle. The husband survived, but the truck killed his wife, a 23-year-old senior airman.

■ On March 27, a 22-year-old Airman was a passenger in a vehicle in which the driver lost control because of hydroplaning. Another vehicle struck theirs, and the Airman sustained fatal internal injuries.

The pessimist might chalk these mishaps up to bad luck and conclude, "Stuff happens and there's not much anyone can do about it." The optimist will look deeper and discover some things that stand out in these mishaps. All five Airmen who died were between the ages of 20 and 26. In two of the cases, alcohol was involved. In three of the mishaps, the Airmen who died were the passengers in the vehicles.

Remove alcohol and driving too fast for conditions, and four of the five mishaps would have probably never happened.

Also, in four of the five cases, the Airmen who perished weren't alone. Their wingmen could have made a difference. That's why we all need to get into wingman mode, and realize each one of us has the ability to save lives. Your buddy doesn't buckle up? Call him on it. You and your friends plan to go out partying? Have a designated driver or take a taxi. A co-worker wants to ride a motorcycle? Encourage him to wear protective gear and drive within his skill level and the law.

Yes, it's the halfway point. And whether you're a glass-half-empty type person or a glass-half-full type, one thing is for sure: You can't approach safety halfway. It needs your full attention whether at work or at play.

Let's gear up for a strong second half.

"The pessimist might chalk these mishaps up to bad luck and conclude, 'Stuff happens and there's not much anyone can do about it.' The optimist will look deeper. ..."

John W. Blumentritt

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT YOU

INJURIES OR DEATH FROM MISCONDUCT CAN RESULT IN LOST BENEFITS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

As 18-year-old Matthew approached his house, his face beamed with excitement. He and his mom had been worrying about how they were going to pay for college, and he was sure he'd found a solution.

"Mom!" he yelled as he swung open the front door. "Our problems are solved."

Then he explained to his mother how he ran into Jim, his childhood friend. The two had bonded as young boys, because both of their fathers had been in the Air Force and both had died on active duty — Jim's dad in combat, and Matthew's in a motorcycle mishap. Matthew told his mom how Jim was going to use Veterans Administration Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits he'd been receiving since his father's death to help pay for college. ... It would cover thousands of dollars worth of expenses.

"I should be eligible for those funds, too, Mom," Matthew said, grinning happily.

But Matthew didn't get the reaction he expected. Instead, his mother looked distraught, as her brown eyes welled and her shoulders slumped.

"We're not eligible for that money," she said sadly.

You see, Matthew's dad had been found not in the line of duty when he died. He crashed his motorcycle while driving too fast, without the proper protective equipment ... and he was drunk. Eight years after his death, his misconduct was still causing financial hardship for his family.

While the above scenario is fictitious, it is definitely not that farfetched.

A few years back, an Airman, who lacked the training and proper safety equipment to ride a motorcycle, drove one anyway. Additionally, he was drunk and drove too fast. He ended up crashing and dying alone on the side of the road.

This Airman left behind a 10-year-old son.

In addition to robbing his son of a father to teach him to play baseball, to talk to about girls, and to love, support and guide him

through life, the Airman also denied his son valuable benefits that would have totaled in the hundreds of thousands of dollars because of the circumstances surrounding his death. That's because the Air Force determined the Airman was not in the line of duty when his mishap occurred.

Determining Airmen to be not in the line of duty is not a task commanders relish. As a matter of fact, the subject so concerned Maj. Gen. Anthony F. Przybyslawski, Air Education and Training Command vice commander, he wrote a recent article on the topic that was distributed throughout the command.

"Commanders make the not in the line of duty determination, and it is one of the most gut-wrenching things they do," said Lt. Col. Vicki Weekes of AETC's judge advocate office. "But when Airmen demonstrate willful personal misconduct or gross negligence, commanders are left with little choice."

Weekes said most not in the line of duty determinations involve cars, motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles. And another all-too-common denominator is alcohol, she added.

"It's depressing to read (about these tragedies)," said Maj. Lisa Winnecke, the Air Force Personnel Center Judge Advocate chief of entitlements and civil law, who sees these cases come across her desk all too often. "Motorcycles are dangerous enough as it is. Add in alcohol and circumstance, and limbs end up all over the place. Loved ones who had nothing to do with the accident suffer the most."

As a direct result of personal misconduct, dependents may lose between \$2,000 and \$3,000 per month in benefits. For a surviving child, that could mean more than \$300,000. For a surviving spouse over a lifetime, it could be well over \$1 million.

Hopefully, your morale code will guide you to do the right things and make good decisions. But if you need more incentive to make the right choices, such as not drinking and driving, remember: It's not just about you. Your family's well-being is also at stake.

— Col. John W. Blumentritt
AETC director of safety



NOT IN THE LINE OF DUTY

According to the Air Force Personnel Center's Casualty Matters Division, dependents of servicemembers who die not in the line of duty still receive elected coverage up to \$400,000 from Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance. They also get a death gratuity of \$100,000 and Social Security benefits on a monthly basis. However, based on the not in the line of duty determination, family members will endure the following:

✿ **No Survivor Benefit Plan payments.** This is a monthly check, paid to a surviving dependent, that is equal to 55 percent of the retired pay base, which is retired pay computed for total disability if the death was in the line of duty.

✿ **No Veterans Administration Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits.** These are monthly payments authorized for surviving spouses who have not remarried, unmarried children under age 18, disabled children, and unmarried children between the ages of 18 and 23 if attending a VA-approved school. These payments are not based on the member's pay grade. The current monthly payment for a spouse is \$1,154 for life, as long as the spouse does not remarry. The amount paid for a spouse with one or more children of the deceased is increased for each child; the current monthly amount per child is \$243. In cases where there is no spouse entitlement, a dependent child receives \$488 per month (those figures increase if there is more than one child). Family members also may lose the Montgomery GI Bill Death Benefit, medical and dental benefits up to three years from the date of death of a member, and access to base facilities.

✿ **No Basic Educational Assistance Death Benefit.** Certain survivors of deceased members entitled to basic educational assistance may be entitled to death benefits, which are jeopardized if there is a finding the member was not in the line of duty.

✿ **No Basic Allowance for Housing.** This benefit allows eligible family members to receive Basic Allowance for Housing, Overseas Housing Allowance or continued occupancy in government housing for 180 days after the member's death. Unfortunately, Matthew and his mom, from the previous story, would not have received this benefit.

'HOLD MY BEER AND WATCH THIS!'

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, Ala. — Handling firearms is a rite of passage where I come from in central Alabama. I practically grew up with a firearm of some type in my hands thanks to my dad, who collected handguns. Honestly, I started firing handguns when I was merely a toddler. My dad would sit me on his knee, hold the weapon and allow me to pull the trigger. He still has the very weapon I learned to shoot with almost 40 years ago — a pearl handled .22 caliber pistol with a crimson stain on the left grip (my blood to be exact; I cut myself on a broken bottle and subsequently bled on the pistol grip while target shooting with my dad).

My dad and two older brothers taught me to respect and safely handle weapons at an early age. Those teachings were reinforced when I became a security policeman in the Air Force. Nevertheless, for one night, some 20 years after I'd fired my first gun and several years into my Air Force career, I threw those teachings out the window ... a mistake that could have cost me my life.

I was at home on leave hanging out with my oldest brother doing a little camping, fishing, and "joy riding" through central Alabama's back woods. One evening, we stopped on a bridge over a rumbling creek to take in the spectacular sunset.

After drinking a few beers and admiring the transition from spectacular sunset to a dark sky filled with stars, I made a bad decision.

I retrieved my Taurus .9mm pistol from my brother's truck and uttered the words that precede many a mishap: "Hold my beer and watch this!"

I bet my brother that I could hit a metal sign positioned about 30 yards away at the end of the bridge.

To recap, it's dark, I've been drinking, I have a gun in my hand, and I'm about to shoot at metal.

I took a defensive position on the rear of my brother's truck, aimed at the moonlit sign and squeezed off a round.

I missed the target.

Not to be made a fool of by some stupid metal sign, I took aim and squeezed off another round.

Pling! I hit it!

At the very same second I heard the "pling," I also heard another not

so loud sound just in front of me and felt a slight thump in my knee area. A sharp pain shot through my knee, and I also felt the warm sensation of blood trickling down my leg into my shoe.

"Aw man, I just shot myself!" I said, blurting out the obvious.

Upon further examination by flashlight, I did indeed discover I was bleeding and found a small chunk of lead lying on the ground near my feet. As if that wasn't bad enough, my brother was none too thrilled when he discovered the fragment had ricocheted off the sign and struck the side of his truck before glancing off my leg.

Not surprisingly, he gave me no sympathy for my wound.

That night I got a rude and embarrassing reminder of the basic weapon safety techniques I learned growing up and as a young security policeman. When it comes to weapons, you must practice safe handling techniques at all times. And never fire a gun under the influence of alcohol.

Some lessons are learned the hard way. I was very lucky the repercussions weren't far worse. Now, in addition to all my childhood and Air Force weapons training, I have another permanent reminder to treat weapons with respect ... a scar just below my knee.

— Tech. Sgt. Chris Haisten
42nd Air Base Wing safety



**"It's dark,
I've been
drinking, I
have a gun in
my hand, and
I'm about to shoot at metal."**

REBUILDING THEIR LIVES

TORNADO SURVIVORS USE LESSONS LEARNED FROM TWISTER

Retired Chief Master Sgt. Wayne Glover and his wife Ilah lost nearly everything when a tornado ripped through their town of Prattville, Ala., last year, turning their home into a pile of rubble.

The only room spared in their house was the bathroom they had helplessly huddled in with their two dogs and a cat Feb. 17, 2008. Everything else around them either disappeared, as if swallowed up by the storm, or was damaged beyond repair. Their house, their vehicles, their Harley Davidson motorcycle, their boat, their furniture, their bushes and flowers, their jewelry, their photos and too many other irreplaceable items fell victim to the twister and 150 mph winds.

Torch Magazine did a feature on them in the March/April 2008 issue. A year later, the Glovers are still rebuilding their lives. On Jan. 29, just shy of a year after the storm demolished their home, their new house was completed.

"We decided to build on the same spot, because you never hear of a tornado hitting the exact same spot twice," Wayne said. "Plus, location, location, location ... it's where all our friends are; it's near all the stores that we shop at; it's home."

"But if we do get hit again, we're not rebuilding here," chimed in Ilah, who until her retirement Jan. 3 worked as the secretary to the commander of Air Force Officer Accession and Training Schools at Maxwell Air

Force Base, Ala., just 15 miles southwest of their home.

When they had their house reconstructed, they did so with the fresh memory of that EF-3 twister that damaged some 900 homes and businesses, injured 50 people and left a devastating trail of destruction in its wake.

They had the walls and framing of their new home reinforced by having them anchored into the foundation.

"It's designed to withstand higher forces," Wayne said. "Survivability would be somewhat higher. But there's only so much you can do if you take a direct hit."

Their new home is just over 2,000 square feet, just like their old one. But for Ilah, one of the benefits of rebuilding is she got her dream kitchen with a double oven.

Living in southern Alabama since 1991, the Glovers had experienced more than a few tornado warnings with zero incidents until that fateful day. And they've endured many since. There was even a day in April when 14 tornadoes touched down in areas surrounding their town.

"I wouldn't say we're scared," Ilah said. "But we're more cautious now."

The couple added that in severe weather warnings, people should stay alert, listen to the radio, and heed warnings.

"If they say to take cover," Wayne said, "then you should take cover. Weather is just too unpredictable."

— Tim Barela



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Matthew Hannen



Twister survivors retired Chief Master Sgt. Wayne and Ilah Glover were a somber couple in February 2008 (top photo) when a tornado destroyed their home in Prattville, Ala. A year later, their rebuilt home put smiles back on their faces.

STORM-RESISTANT HOMES?

By applying the following "code enhancements," you can dramatically improve the odds that your home — and you — will survive wind disasters.

- 1. House shape and size:** One-story homes with shallow roof pitch fare best.
- 2. Siding:** Consider brick, rock, wood or fiber cement.
- 3. Foundation anchorage:** Properly lay out and install foundation anchors.
- 4. Wall top plates:** Overlap wall top plates and nail them securely at all corners to prevent wall blowouts.
- 5. Roof tie:** Connect the trusses/rafters to wall studs using steel straps.
- 6. Roofing:** Add a few extra nails to roof coverings.
- 7. Shelters:** Construct a below ground storm shelter or an above ground reinforced safe room.

— National Association of Home Builders Research Center



From the darkness, a 100-pound dog took Stacy Pearsall by surprise as she jogged near the woods in her neighborhood while listening to music on her iPod.

Hunted!

War hero mauled by dog

By **TIM BARELA**

*Photos by Master Sgt. **ANDY DUNAWAY***

*Digital composite by **SAMMIE W. KING***

As Stacy Pearsall ran in the pre-dawn darkness of a chilly morning in Goose Creek, S.C., she listened to music blaring on her iPod. She liked working out alone while most people still slept. But 15 minutes into her jog, joy turned to terror.

She caught a white blur out of the corner of her left eye. Startled, she turned to face it.

A monster of a dog, all teeth and claws and a mass of fur, lunged at her. Its paws packed a wallop as they hit her in the stomach. Then the angry beast sank its teeth into her chest, just above her right breast. He ripped down hard, tearing flesh and tackling the slender, 5-foot-7 woman to the ground.

Pearsall heard a chilling noise her panicked mind didn't recognize. It was guttural, primal.

With sudden horror, she realized the sound was coming from her. She'd become prey, and she was screaming for her life.



Former active duty Staff Sgt. Stacy Pearsall, a veteran combat photographer and decorated war hero, suffered wounds from two separate roadside bomb explosions in Iraq, one in 2003 and another in 2007. She also witnessed her humvee gunner mortally wounded from a sniper's bullet. She even survived an ambush that nearly wiped out her Stryker armored vehicle unit. But none of the horrors of war prepared her for a dark Dec. 18 at 5:30 a.m. when a neighbor's 100-pound chow-husky mix brutally attacked her.

"I didn't see him coming until it was too late," she said. "And it was the most frightening experience of my life."

Pearsall reacted like a gazelle in the jaws of a lion — with earsplitting shrieks.

"At least in war, you know the enemy is out there, so you're on high alert," she said. "But in this case, I was totally caught off guard. One minute I'm out for a relaxing jog, listening to music; the next instant I'm being attacked by Cujo."

By the time she caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of her eye, the

ferocious canine had already launched himself into the air like a missile.

"I think he was going for my throat, but he sank his teeth into my chest instead," Pearsall said.

After ripping her flesh to drag her to the ground, the dog released its grip on her chest and savaged her right wrist. When Pearsall fought back, wildly swinging her left arm, the dog let go of the wrist and started biting her repeatedly on her left forearm.

She kept her arms up to protect her

Stacy Pearsall recovers from a dog attack in Trident Regional Medical Center, S.C., Dec. 18. A chow-husky mix, which was not on a leash, mauled her while she was out on an early morning jog.



face, neck and head. About 90 seconds into the attack, a neighbor who heard her screams came outside to help.

"What's going on?" he hollered.

His voice halted the dog's onslaught.

The canine sat down about 10 feet away from Pearsall, his menacing stare daring her to move.

She didn't oblige.

"I didn't move a muscle," she said.

She yelled at the neighbor to stay back for fear that the dog would attack him.

The dog's owner, who also heard

the commotion, finally came out of her house. She collared the animal, locked it in her car and called police.

Pearsall gathered herself gingerly. She felt a warm sensation flowing from her chest and arm and wondered if it was the dog's slobber or her blood. Even in her state of shock, it didn't take long to figure out that she was bleeding.

She walked to her home, just a few doors down. Police arrived and called an ambulance. Meanwhile, Pearsall called her husband

Master Sgt. Andy Dunaway, a photojournalist at Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., had gone into work early that morning to prepare for a 22-ship flight of C-17 Globemaster III cargo/troop aircraft. He'd lead a team of 10 photographers on this unique mission.

When his wife called, he thought she said a car had hit her.

He moved to a room where the reception on his cell phone was better.

"Don't worry; I'm OK," Pearsall told him. "I was attacked by a dog, and they're taking me to the hospital in an ambulance. But I'll be fine. Please go on the flight."

"But there was no way I was going on any flight when my wife's just been attacked by a dog and is being taken by ambulance to the emergency room," Dunaway said.

Also, at that point, Pearsall's adrenaline still masked the agony that was soon to come. About halfway to the hospital, a stabbing pain made its unheralded, excruciating debut.

"I wanted medication to make the hurt go away," she said.

When Dunaway made it to the hospital, he was nearly overcome with emotion at the sight of his wife lying there suffering, covered in her own blood. He felt a sense of helplessness.

To cope with the situation and remain calm for her, he did what came naturally for both he and his wife: He began taking photos while the doctor worked on her.

Pearsall was treated at Trident Regional Medical Center and released nearly six hours later, though her injuries caused her to be laid up for two more days at home. After the wounds were cleaned, she received one stitch in her chest and another in her left forearm. She said doctors told her they don't like to close dog bite wounds because they tend to get infected from bacteria found in the dog's mouth. Thankfully, the dog was up to date on its rabies vaccination, she said.

Latoya Combs, the dog's owner, surrendered her pet, which was euthanized later that same day by the Society for

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, according to Goose Creek police.

Combs told police the dog got loose the night before and ran into the woods behind her backyard. She said she tried to find the dog but was unsuccessful.

Pearsall lamented that the dog had to be put to sleep.

"I'm a real animal lover," said the 29-year-old, who owns two dogs of her own, as well as a horse. "He was just doing what came naturally — protecting his owner's property."

Dunaway said he wishes pet owners would be more responsible.

"It was hard to see Stacy in that condition," he said. "But it could have been much worse. If the bites were just a little



A bona fide war hero, Stacy Pearsall, a Bronze Star recipient, was a guest on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in late February during a segment on women in combat.

deeper, she could have bled to death. Or can you imagine what that dog would have done to a little kid waiting for a school bus?"

Ironically, Pearsall's nightmarish jog began on the advice of her doctor. After medically retiring from the Air Force in August with neck and spinal injuries received in combat, her physical activities had been limited.

"I'm afraid to run in the dark now," said Pearsall, who keeps busy as the owner and director of the Charleston Center for Photography. "But for those who do run or walk in the dark, I don't recommend listening to music. That only leaves your eyes to alert you to danger, and they are already limited because of a low-light, low-visibility situation."

She also recommended people carry a cell phone and stay alert and aware of their surroundings, even in a seemingly non-threatening environment.

"I was totally unprepared for this and reacted instinctively instead of calmly," she said. "I was prey."

How to Avoid a Dog Attack

One of the most frightening experiences a walker or jogger can have is coming face-to-face with an angry, aggressive dog. If you are approached by a dog who may attack you, follow these steps:

- Always assume a dog who doesn't know you may see you as an intruder or a threat.

- Be aware of unleashed dogs a block or more ahead and change your route.

- Resist the impulse to scream and run away. A dog's natural instinct will be to chase and catch you.

- If the canine is agitated, remain motionless, hands at your sides, and avoid eye contact.

- Once the dog loses interest in you, slowly back away until he is out of sight.

- If the dog does attack, "feed" him your jacket, purse, stick or anything that you can put between yourself and the dog.

- If you fall or are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball and protect your neck, face and head. Remain motionless.

— The Humane Society



The Stacy Pearsall Combat Photo Gallery



A Military Photographer of the Year, Pearsall's work has been viewed worldwide.




PAIN'TBALL!

An exercise in combat leadership

By Tech. Sgt. JENNIFER LINDSEY





Capt. Maygen Wilson adjusted her lumpy, 5-pound flack vest as she crouched silently behind a large gray concrete pipe.

Her wide, thick-lashed blue eyes cautiously scanned for even the slightest movement. A protective full-face mask pressed awkwardly down on her nose, somewhat impeding her vision. She carefully aimed her rifle downrange.

Pop! Pop! Pop! The “bad guys” had initiated their assault. Their weapons? Paintball guns.

Thus began the Squadron Officer School Combat Leadership Exercise at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., for Flight 60.

Although the exercise has an expeditionary tone, it’s more about honing leadership skills than combat skills. One of several SOS experiential lessons, its success depends on individual willingness to operate as a team, the team’s ability to communicate effectively under pressure, and the team’s ability to take full advantage of its members’ strengths and to help each other overcome weaknesses, said Capt. Lisa Miller, the SOS Flight 60 commander and facilitator.

“We just want to make them better leaders here; we don’t want to break them,” the flight commander said.

The paintballs simply serve as a mildly stinging reminder of the importance of the lessons.

Squadron Officer School is the next step in the Air Force officer professional military education system, after first gaining commission through Officer Training School, Reserve Officer Training Corps or Air Force Academy graduation, and successfully completing the Air and Space Basic Course as a lieutenant.



This isn't your typical game of paintball, as Capt. Maygen Wilson (center) and her teammates quickly discover. The Squadron Officer

Its instruction is designed to help captains with four to seven years in the Air Force and select civilian equivalents hone their team leadership skills in an educational environment, “giving officers more tools for their tool bags,” said Col. Michael Pipan, SOS commandant.

The Combat Leadership Exercise was added to the SOS curriculum about one year ago, and nearly 3,500 students have completed it to date.

In the Game

“What do you see over there,” the team leader asked Wilson as she peered around the barrier a little further.

“I don’t see anybody,” she replied.

Despite the anxiety she felt about the rumored bite of the paintballs, the full-time reserve personnel officer from the 919th Special Operations Wing at Duke Field in Crestview, Fla., volunteered to be in one of the first groups of officers to move out from the defensive position.

The flight’s mission objectives raced through her mind: Eradicate the enemy, rescue an Airman in enemy territory, and have all 14 flight members meet at a safe house located about 35 feet over to the far left of the field.

They had 15 minutes to make it happen.

Strict rules of engagement outlined what the flight could and couldn’t do, both a help and hindrance to the Airmen, just as in the real world. If shot in the head or torso, a player is dead. Limb shots only wound a player, but are nearly as costly. Two healthy players must assist all wounded or killed flight members when moved on the field.

An unidentified rifle fired in full-automatic mode.

“Who was that?” questioned a teammate.

Flight 60 was unexpectedly separated into two teams and placed at opposite sides of the 40-yard playing field at the start of the exercise. The two teams of seven captains had to be careful not to commit friendly fire. Positively identifying a combatant before returning fire is simply exercising good judgment (and one of the tenets of safe weapons handling). But this can be a difficult call when adrenaline and fear rush the brain, even in a game.

“There’s one!” exclaimed Wilson as she attempted to take out an identified combatant about 40 yards straight ahead.

Her weapon misfired.

Leaders Learning

As a grade-schooler building forts and playing with her brothers and sister in Cincinnati, Wilson imagined herself as a military leader defending her home and country. The Sycamore High School graduate desired to be more than just a student at Bowling Green State University and joined the ROTC, where she felt at home as part of a disciplined team.

During the 26-year-old’s Air Force career, she has deployed twice to Southwest Asia in 2005 and 2006, leading teams of two and five Airmen. When she heard she was selected to attend SOS in-residence, she looked forward to improving her teambuilding skills. She’s done that.

The core of SOS instruction consists of seven repeated enduring leadership competencies: Exercise sound judgment, inspire trust, adapt and perform under pressure, lead courageously, assess self, foster effective communication, and promote collaboration and teamwork. Wilson’s flight excelled at this. In its fourth of five weeks of SOS, it had a good shot at taking the title of Top Flight from the 30 flights and 425 captains in session.

“They have everything to gain from working together as a team,” Miller said. “Individually they can graduate, but not as a top class.”

The exercise also encourages the officers to get out of the “heads down” approach by showing them how to use the variety of career field experts at their disposal to successfully accomplish the mission, said Lt. Col. Gerard Ryan, SOS 33rd Student Squadron commander.

Clear Communication

After fixing her jammed rifle, Wilson and her partner crouched behind a vertical pile of pallets and scanned the area for the downed Airman.

“He’s right here!” her partner shouted. “Come on, come on. I don’t feel like getting shot,” he implored.

Wilson changed her rifle to her left hand and grabbed hold of the downed Airman with her right. The mannequin was heavier than it looked.

Wilson struggled to lift the 50-pound dummy by the leg.

A third officer saw the problem, joined the rescue team, and the three quickly carried the downed Airman to safety.

Pop! Pop! Pop! The sound was constant as were shouted



School uses this combat exercise to promote teambuilding and leadership. Students can only graduate as the top class by working together.

instructions from one forward-moving group to another. The rest of the flight successfully took down the enemy.

Wilson's team secured the rescued Airman in a safe house and dashed out to help the other groups with injured Airmen. Teams of Airmen gathered in the safe house as the fog horn sounded; the officers all set their weapons on safe as instructed. Task One was done, and they performed well. They had 15 minutes to accomplish their mission. They did it in six-and-a-half minutes — less than half the time.

"That went text book," Miller said.

The early finish gave the team more time to plan the next and more difficult of two tasks.

"We did a lot better when we spread out," commented one of the team.

"Yeah," confirmed Capt. Brent Curtis, the team leader and an F-15C pilot from Eglin AFB, Fla. "In the future, we'll spread out a little earlier. ..."

"We need cross-field communication," chimed in another team member when invited to share observations. "To ensure we don't get pinned down," explained another. "We need to communicate who is to be laying down the suppressive fire."

Home Stretch

Time was up. The team of 14 captains gathered at the starting point for Task Two, a 15-foot barricade made up of three concrete barriers. The team had to rescue two newly captured, wounded team members, suppress the enemy and still reach the safe area located at the end of the field.

Pop, pop, pop! insurgent fire began.

"All right guys, go!" The second team headed out as Wilson and her partner, Capt. Nick Rowe, a KC-135 pilot from Fairchild AFB, Wash., laid down suppressive fire.

But Task Two hit the team with some well-timed sucker punches.

Minutes in, under their teammates' cover, Rowe and Wilson rushed forward to a stack of pallets, but Rowe was shot in the belly by the enemy when he reached the barrier. Wilson ducked down to prevent from getting hit.

With her partner declared dead, she called to her teammates for assistance in transporting him to the safe zone.

The officers advanced forward in teams, assisting their wound-

ed and carrying their dead in twos, taking turns laying suppressive fire and ending the enemy threat as the next team advanced. Cease-fire and time was called. The exercise was over. The team cheered — it had successfully met its mission objectives within the allotted time with more than nine minutes to spare.

Wilson also met her personal objective of learning how to overcome anxiety on the field and in the office.

"When you're the officer in charge, and a team of (junior Airmen) look to you as the leader, showing fear can potentially instill fear in them," she said. "I learned how to swallow the fear and show courage to accomplish the mission." ✈

Sergeant Lindsey is with Air Education and Training Command Public Affairs at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas.

7 PAINTBALL SAFETY TIPS

- Never take your goggles off when on the paintball field.
- Keep the rifle on safe when not in use.
- Always wear proper paintball safety gear, including paintball goggles, mask and pads that cover at least your eyes, ears, throat and head.
- Never shoot your paintball gun at others outside of an organized (and sanctioned) paintball playing field.
- Never point your gun at something you do not intend on shooting.
- Never shoot anyone at close range.
- As you leave a paintball game, be sure to remove all paintballs first, and then remove your CO2 cylinder.

— Paintball-tips-and-tricks.com


'War Birds'

Safety experts
spearhead efforts to
minimize bird strikes

By Staff Sgt. JASON LAKE


Photo by Staff Sgt. AARON ALLMON





Americans witnessed firsthand the severity of bird strikes when U.S. Airways Flight 1549 crash landed in the Hudson River in New York City after hitting a flock of birds in January.

Lt. Col. Charles Wallace and his team of seven safety experts with the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing Safety Office at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, do their part to ensure a similar disaster doesn't happen at Bagram Airfield through an aggressive Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard program.



An F-15E Strike Eagle deploys counter-measure flares over Afghanistan. These fighters and other aircraft will have fewer worries when flying over Bagram Airfield, which has implemented measures that have cut first quarter bird strikes in half.

“During the first quarter of this fiscal year, Bagram bird strikes accounted for one-third of all strikes in Iraq and Afghanistan,” Wallace explained. “We’ve had twice as many bird strikes as the next airfield in the (area of operation).”

Tech. Sgt. Shane Sweeney, the wing’s weapons safety manager, said Bagram Airfield also was approaching the peak season for bird strikes.

“Based on historical data, the highest threat occurs during migratory seasons, which are early April through June and late August through October,” he explained.

Tech. Sgt. Jason Stiyer, the wing’s flight safety noncommissioned officer, said the first quarter of 2009 was shaping up to be the worst year yet for bird strikes as totals were double the five-year average for the same time period.

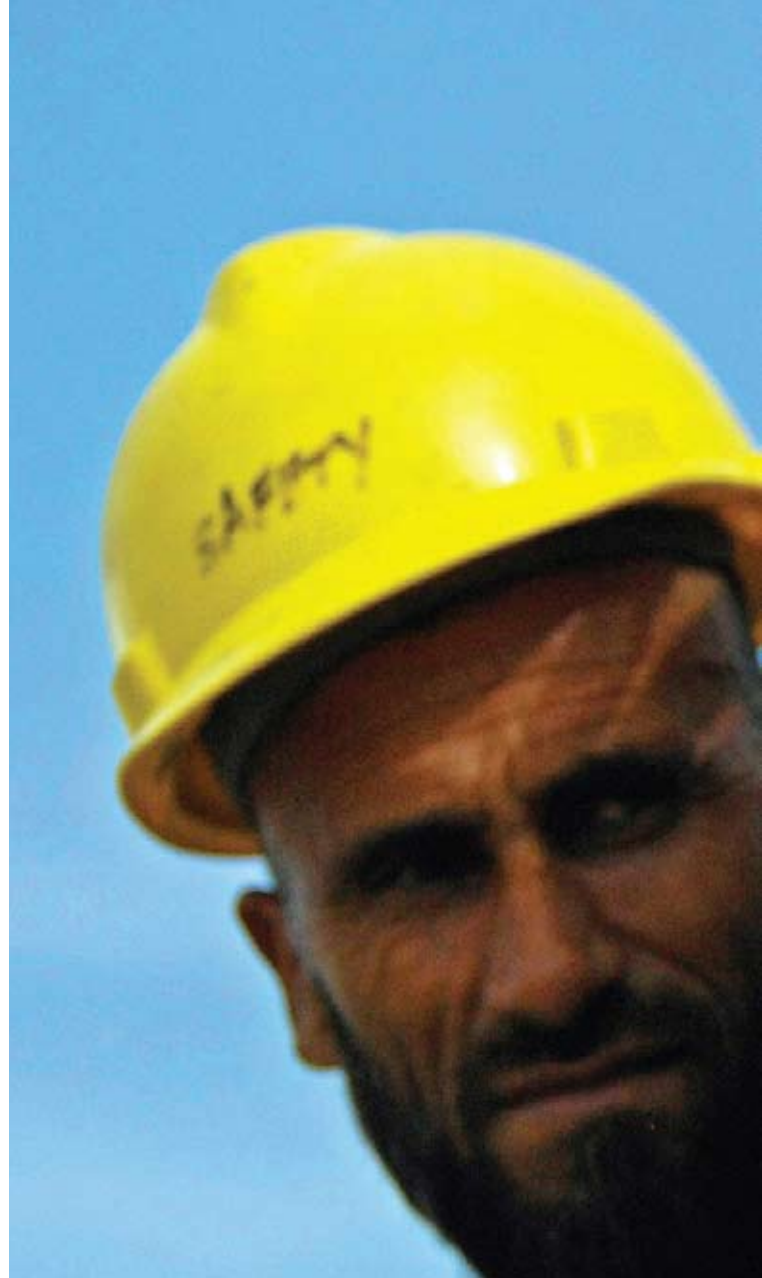
“In the last week of February, we had six bird strikes in nine days,” Stiyer said, indicating that spring migration had started.

But the statistics at Bagram are making a drastic turnaround, and the safety experts attribute this to a new comprehensive strategy of persistent depredation and habitat denial techniques in addition to hiring three local falconers. The team’s new strategy has been so successful over the past month, that it is now being studied at various bases throughout the area of operation.

After employing aggressive depredation efforts and incorporating suggestions made by U.S. Department of Agriculture experts that visited the base in February, the team had cut the first quarter bird strikes in half.

The unit hired three local falconers to see what kind of impact it would have on the thousands of birds that were lining areas near the flight line.

“We hired the team from the local area for a three-month evaluation,” Wallace said about the unit’s effort to hire professional help. “This approach gave us access to local



An Afghan falconer readies to launch one of his falcons March 29 at



Photos by Staff Sgt. Jason Lake

Black kite birds are the target of safety manager Tech. Sgt. Shane Sweeney and this falcon trained by a local Afghan falconer. Kite birds have infested areas near the flight line at Bagram Airfield. The falcon’s feet are rigged with snare traps so that when the larger kite bird attacks, it gets tangled with the falcon and falls to the ground. This also has worked to scare off birds.

expertise so we are supporting the local economy at the same time. It’s a win-win situation.”

The colonel said the falconer team, using three falcons and handmade traps at hotspots around the airfield, caught or killed more than 50 birds on their first day. By the end of their first week in mid-March, the falconers had caught or killed more than 250 birds. More importantly, the birds that were not killed or captured quickly noticed the new predators in their neighborhood and began to disappear from the targeted areas.

“It was a pretty dramatic change after about 10 days,” said Stiyer, who regularly scouted areas with a shotgun and pyrotechnics to scare off birds near the air traffic control tower. “It used to be so bad that we didn’t have enough ammo to scare off the thousands of birds here. Now there are hardly any birds at all.”

The safety team also attributed their dramatic turnaround to several other factors, including the team increasing their inventory of shotguns, ammunition and pyrotechnics for “harassing” birds, monitoring peak hours of bird migratory patterns, and implementing aggressive habitat denial techniques.



Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. After a week of work, the falconers had caught or killed more than 250 birds surrounding the flight line.

“The collective lethal, non-lethal and habitat denial efforts of the BASH program have proven highly effective and will likely become a benchmark program for other bases/forward operating bases in Afghanistan,” said a recent report forwarded to senior leaders within Afghanistan.

The safety officers also have taken some of their program ideas “on the road.”

Stieler deployed to Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan, March 8 through 11 to help develop a BASH program after a series of serious bird strikes at the airfield in eastern Afghanistan. The unit provided airfield management at Salerno with two shotguns, 1,000 shells and a draft BASH operating instruction for implementing bird watch conditions and active depredation on the flight line to minimize the threat of bird strikes.

“(FOB Salerno) never really had a plan in place because the Army’s rotary wing aircraft typically don’t have problems with bird strikes,” Stieler said. “The problem is that the Air Force C-130 (Hercules aircraft) that provide supplies to the FOB are

more vulnerable to bird strikes, so we had to develop a program to minimize the emerging threat,” Wallace said. “Now that we helped set up a BASH program here at one of the largest FOBs in the theater, they are taking off and running with it.”

The safety office also recently shared their program details with safety experts throughout the AOR and Capt. Matt Strohmeier, chief of flight safety, presented the unit’s results during a recent International Security Assistance Force Flight Safety Conference in Kabul. Some of the units at the conference expressed interest in starting similar programs.

The safety office hopes their program will pay off over the long term and keep aircraft focused on their primary mission: supporting United States and coalition troops fighting insurgents on the ground.

“Sustaining the joint fight is what we’re all about,” Strohmeier said. ✈

Sergeant Lake is assigned to the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. (AFNS)

BOOM OPERATOR FALLS ASLEEP ON THE JOB

By 1st Lt. **MICHAEL ARMSTRONG**
Photo by Staff. Sgt. **AARON ALLMAN**

If I knew then what I know now, things would have been drastically different.

As a boom operator, my squadron's high ops tempo kept me deployed quite a bit. I often had the feeling of fatigue, but always thought I could just "man up" and muscle through it. I now know, as an aerospace physiologist, that's a lot easier said than done. As I teach aircrews about fatigue and countermeasures, I often reflect on some of those painful times I spent in the jet, just trying to keep awake. If I knew then some of the stuff I know now, I could have made it through those times a lot easier.

One particular mission as a boom operator really opened my eyes to some of the problems fatigue can introduce.

We deployed shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the Twin Towers in New York. We flew every day, with minimum crew rest between flights. My crew had been doing this since the beginning of the operation and was about three weeks in without a day off. To put this in perspective, an average day consisted of waking up in the middle of the night, eating breakfast (usually an MRE — Meals, Ready to Eat), doing mission planning, mission briefing, preflight, and then an eight- to 12-hour flight.

Usually it was the middle of the day by the time we'd get back to the tent, and it wasn't easy to get good sleep in that environment. I would usually get five or six hours of shuteye.

After a couple of weeks, everyone was feeling the effects of fatigue. It should have been a clue when guys took naps after completing the preflight and waiting for the take-off time.

On this sortie, we had taken off around 11 p.m. for a scheduled six-hour flight; but shortly after arriving in our track, we heard our receivers being diverted to other tankers. We knew it was going to be a long night.

While burning holes in the sky, we started our normal routine of rotating naps. Normally when awakened, you would feel almost worse than before your nap.

About eight hours into the sortie, we got our first set of F-18s to refuel. The refueling was uneventful, and as we were finishing, we received a call that our next set was about 15 minutes out. I decided to just stay in my position (which is much like lying in a bed) until the next guys showed up.

I fell asleep.

The next thing I remember was my pilot on the intercom asking if

I had visual of the receiver. I opened my eyes to see a fighter aircraft about five feet from contact!

I was able to make it through the refueling, but I was definitely not on my best game. The rest of our refueling that night was a total struggle. I was glad it was probe and drogue refueling, which takes a lot less effort from the boom operator.

This event opened my eyes to the increased potential for mishaps from fatigue.

I now know a lot more about how to combat fatigue, and there are many things I could have done to overcome it. The first thing is just knowing the insidious nature of fatigue: Sleep can just sneak up on you, and no matter how much you think you can gut it out, you're eventually going to succumb to it.

There are some good ways to combat falling asleep at inopportune times.

In crew aircraft, getting up and walking around can get your blood flowing, which can help a lot. In aircraft where you can't get up, just flexing your muscles in your seat can get the blood flowing. Something as easy as talking can help both you and the rest of your crew or flight by keeping your mind active.

The strategic use of caffeine before the critical phases of flight can give you a slight boost of energy to get you through the short term. Eating a snack, chewing gum, and eating sunflower seeds are other ways to keep more alert.

All these strategies keep our brains active, which can help us avoid boredom or monotonous tasks that lull us to sleep.

The best way to truly combat fatigue

is the most obvious: Get some sleep.

A short 20-minute nap can have a huge effect on improving your mental process. The drawback of a nap is the potential for sleep inertia, which is a lethargic feeling caused by waking from a deep stage of sleep. You can avoid some sleep inertia by limiting your naps to 20 minutes, or if you have the time, 90 minutes. Both cases should wake you in the rapid eye movement stage of sleep when your brain is more active.

Once you're back on the ground, strive to get a good eight or more hours of sleep a night. I know that's easier said than done. I've also found that ear plugs and a sleep mask can really help. The most important thing to remember is that sleep is the only true way to overcome fatigue.

Lieutenant Armstrong is an aerospace physiologist with the 82nd Aerospace Medicine Squadron at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.

*"I opened
my eyes to see
a fighter aircraft
about five feet
from contact!"*



TIPS ON COMBATING FATIGUE

- ◆ Get up and walk around to get your blood flowing.

- ◆ If you're doing a task where you can't get up, just flex your muscles.

- ◆ Talk to a co-worker.

- ◆ Strategically use caffeine before the critical phases of your mission, which can give you a slight boost of energy to get you through the short term.

- ◆ Eating a snack, chewing gum and

eating sunflower seeds are other ways to keep more alert.

- ◆ But the best, and only true way, to combat fatigue is to get some sleep.

— 1st Lt. Michael Armstrong

CREW CHIEFS STOP RUNAWAY F-16 FIGHTER



TUCSON, Ariz. — Only a Hollywood movie studio could recreate the heroic actions of three Air National Guard crew chiefs who saved an F-16 Fighting Falcon and its pilot at Tucson International Airport one summer day in 2008.

On the afternoon of June 17, a mechanical malfunction caused a fighter jet to lose hydraulic pressure in the braking system while taxiing on the flight line. It began careening out of control and was quickly brought to a stop by maintainers who gave chase and threw chocks in front of the right main tire.

For their actions the three crew chiefs assigned to the 162nd Fighter Wing were awarded Safety Well Done Awards from both the Air Force and Air Education and Training Command in recognition of their exceptional performance in averting a potential mishap.

Tech. Sgt. Jaime Aviles, Tech. Sgt. Daniel Tibbitts and Staff Sgt. Michael Markve were recovering aircraft following the afternoon's launch when they noticed an F-16 taxied past its parking spot and continued to roll behind a row of parked aircraft. The crew chiefs saw hydraulic fluid streaming down the right side of the fuselage and knew that meant the aircraft was unable to stop.

"I noticed the aircraft first," Tibbitts said. "It was weird. It appeared to come in normal. Then, all of a sudden, it veered hard to the left as it was entering the parking row and jumped the curb."

The pilot, returning from a routine training mission, gestured to the crew chiefs that he was unable to control the aircraft and attempted to set the parking brake, which was also non-functional. The hydraulic loss contributed to brake and steering failures. As the fighter jet continued toward a line of parked aircraft, the pilot dropped the tail hook as a visual signal that he had no brakes.

"At that point I started running with both chocks in my hands, and Aviles and Markve followed," Tibbitts said. "When I caught up to the aircraft, I grabbed hold of the missile rail to keep me running because it was going fast. When Markve

caught up to me, I handed him a set of chocks and was like, 'Here man, we have to get this thing stopped.' With the other hand I threw my chock at the tire."

According to the maintainers, the aircraft jumped the chock and rolled right over the curb again. The pilot shut the throttle off to slow his progress. Aviles tossed a chock in front of the right main gear.

The aircraft again jumped the chock and pivoted toward the line of parked aircraft.

"When Aviles tossed his chock, the aircraft rolled onto it and disintegrated it," Markve said.

The attempt slowed the aircraft enough to allow Markve to successfully plant a chock in front of the right main tire, bringing the aircraft to a halt just a few feet from a parked F-16.

"I had the last chock and snapped it under the tire," Markve said. "The aircraft stopped, and that was the end. It happened so fast. From the time it all started until it finally stopped, it took about 45 seconds."

"The pilot egressed the aircraft without further incident due to the decisive and selfless actions taken by Tibbitts, Aviles and Markve," said Lt. Col. Doug Slocum, 162nd Fighter Wing chief of safety.

"The spectacular results in terms of safety record are the direct result of the collective safety-oriented mindset and approach of the people who make up the 162nd Fighter Wing," according to Slocum. "The wing can be very proud to have experienced crew chiefs like these keeping everyone safe out there."

Safety Well Done Awards recognize Airmen who make a significant contribution that affects overall mishap prevention. It is awarded to individuals who demonstrate a skill or ingenuity that prevented or reduced loss of life, injury to personnel or Air Force property damage.

The crew chiefs were presented the awards at the 162nd FW Annual Awards ceremony Feb. 7.

— Staff Sgt. Desiree Twombly
162nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs



by Staff Sgt. Desiree Twombly

Throwing chocks underneath the tires of an out of control F-16,

Tech. Sgt. Daniel Tibbitts (left), Staff Sgt. Michael Markve (right) and Tech. Sgt. Jaime Aviles (not pictured) saved the day on the flight line of Tucson International Airport last summer. Their efforts prevented a mishap that could have cost millions, or maybe even injured or killed someone. Their heroics also earned them Safety Well Done Awards, which they received in February.

INVESTIGATION BOARD DETERMINES CAUSE OF B-52 BOMBER CRASH THAT KILLED SIX AIRMEN

LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Va. (ACCNS) — An improper stabilizer trim setting caused the July 21 crash of a B-52 Stratofortress aircraft northwest of Guam that claimed the lives of six Airmen, according to an Air Combat Command accident investigation board report released Feb. 13.

Analysis of aircraft parts found during salvage operations revealed the aircraft's stabilizer trim was set between approximately 4.5 and 5.0 degrees nose-down at impact. According to the investigation board, this indicates an improper stab trim setting of an aircraft in a nose low descent at low altitude.

Through extensive interviews, and using radar data with simulator and computer modeling, the accident board was able to simulate the turn, descent and aircraft crash. With this modeling, they were able to rule



Six aircrew members died when a B-52 crashed northwest of Guam last summer.

out multiple other causes and scenarios because of lack of supporting evidence.

Based on the generated profile and recovered aircraft parts, the board focused on possible problems with the stabilizer trim function. With no surviving aircrew members, no emergency radio calls and with minimal recovered aircraft control systems or instru-

ments, the specific reason the stabilizer trim was mis-positioned could not be determined by the board.

The board president also found that the combination of low altitude with a descending left turn of the mishap aircraft and late recognition of the serious nature of the situation by the aircrew contributed to the mishap. The board noted that any experienced aircrew could have found it difficult to recognize, assess and recover from the rapidly developing situation involving the stabilizer trim setting.

The B-52 aircrew was flying a training mission that included a flyby in support of the Guam Liberation Day celebration. The B-52 was assigned to the 20th Bomb Squadron, Barksdale Air Force Base, La., and temporarily assigned to the 20th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, Andersen AFB, Guam.

ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT ERRORS LEAD TO COSTLY F-15 MISHAP

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AETCNS) — A sequence of flight analysis and assessment errors led to an F-15 Eagle overrunning the runway and all paved surfaces Nov. 13 at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., Air Education and Training Command officials announced March 16.

The mishap resulted in \$1.25 million damage to the airplane and \$37,000 damage to the airfield and on-base environmental clean-up costs. There were no injuries.

According to the official AETC accident investigation board report, after taking off for an approved training mission, the mishap aircraft's landing gear failed to retract because of a malfunction in the landing gear system's wiring. While responding to this malfunction, the mishap pilot did not run a checklist step that would have allowed for fuel to be burned from an external tank.

After completing several go-arounds to burn off excess fuel, the pilot realized fuel in the external fuel tank remained at the same weight. He mistakenly analyzed the condition as a new malfunction. To compensate for the excess fuel, he was forced to fly an approach with a lower angle of attack and a higher airspeed

than normal. During the landing, the F-15's antiskid brake system failed, and the mishap pilot did not notice it until it was too late to attempt to use any of the aircraft's alternate or emergency braking systems. As a last resort, the pilot lowered the aircraft's hook to engage the arrestor chain at the end of the runway.

The accident investigation board president concluded three additional factors contributed to the mishap:

The failure of two wires in separate wire bundles attached to the right main landing gear significantly contributed to the mishap by preventing the landing gear from retracting and causing a failure of the anti-skid braking system.

A lack of positive interaction or intervention by the supervisor of flying contributed by not providing appropriate assistance to the mishap pilot in determining a course of action.

The presence of an earthen berm and water drainage ditch directly adjacent to the end of the paved surface contributed to the mishap by increasing the amount of damage sustained by the mishap aircraft.

— *Capt. John Severns*
AETC Public Affairs

