

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



September/October 2011

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IN FLORIDA**
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Gen. Edward A. Rice
Commander

Col. Creig A. Rice
Director of Safety

Timothy P. Barela
Editor
timothy.barela@us.af.mil

Sammie W. King
Senior Designer
sammie.king@us.af.mil

David M. Stack
Designer
david.stack@us.af.mil

Tech. Sgt. Samuel A. Bendet
Photojournalist
samuel.bendet@us.af.mil

Subscriptions and Contributions:

To request unit subscriptions or address changes, or to submit articles, photographs or artwork, e-mail information to torch.magazine@us.af.mil. Or you can write to: Editor, TORCH, HQ AETC/SEM, 244 F Street East, Suite 1, Randolph AFB, TX 78150-4328. You also can fax to: (210) 652-6982 or DSN: 487-6982. For customer service, call (210) 652-5818 or DSN 487-5818. Include your name, full unit address, phone number, fax number and e-mail address on all submissions. Unit distribution is based on a ratio of one copy per seven persons assigned. For personal subscriptions, call toll free 1-866-512-1800 or write to New Orders, Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Col. CREIG A. RICE
AETC director of safety



WINDS OF CHANGE...

In the 1990s, the Scorpions released a song called "Wind of Change" that captured some of the political changes in Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War. Just like changes creating the "new world order" in the 90s, our Air Force and Air Education and Training Command are undergoing changes because of resource constraints.

One step we are taking to reduce costs is to move Torch magazine from a bi-monthly issue to quarterly, with spring, summer, winter and fall issues. We will continue our Web page, and you will see the popular 2012 Torch Calendar in October. But reducing the number of magazines we produce each year is not only fiscally smart in these times of belt-tightening, but it also makes way for more emphasis on another rapidly growing form of communication ... social media.

We've already launched our own Facebook page, posted videos on YouTube and had thousands of visitors in search of high-quality photographs on our newly established Flickr page. Our goal is to provide a variety of ways to share safety information and imagery and connect with others to increase mishap prevention efforts.

Why do we do all of this? Because marketing mishap prevention is one of the main ways we can reduce mishaps. Until a year ago it was nearly inconceivable that AETC, with nearly 71,000 active-duty, Reserve, Guard, civilian and contractor team members, as well as more than 340,000 students per year, could survive a summer fatality free. Why? ... Because it had never happened before. Now we've created a new reality after last year's first-ever fatality-free summer for the command.

Strong leadership, individual responsibility and alert wingmen have definitely had a positive impact on our safety culture; thank all of you for that. But before we go patting ourselves on the back too hard, we must recognize that even though we have done remarkably well during our summer campaigns the past few years, we still lost nine Airmen in AETC in FY 2011, including two during the last weekend of the critical days of summer.

Out of the nine deaths we suffered earlier this year, eight could have been prevented by the Air Force member, which shows that we still have work to do. This is especially true while off duty, with regard to risk management and mishap prevention.

As we come out of the critical days of summer and enter a new fiscal year, we hit the "changing times" of our new resource constrained reality. With all of the talk about RIF (reduction in force) and SERB (selective early retirement board) actions, civilian hiring controls, efficiency drills, etc., being a good wingman and checking each other's 6 o'clock will be even more important. Change normally brings stress, and some in our work force will be concerned about their jobs, some will be figuring out how to do "more with less" ... all of us will be impacted by our changing resource environment.

Please take some time to think and talk about these changes, to talk with your leaders, peers and subordinates. ... The "winds of change" are upon us.

"Reducing the number of magazines we produce each year is not only fiscally smart in these times of belt-tightening, but it also makes way for more emphasis on another rapidly growing form of communication ... social media."

DIVING? NO THANKS!

Interesting read on your cover story "Waiting to Inhale" (July/August 2011 issue, page 12). Even though he made plenty of mistakes, 2nd Lt. Aaron Hoff still managed to keep his head and stay focused enough

to save himself and his friend. My brother is always trying to get me to dive. No thanks! I choose life.

*Brady Kemp
Via e-mail*

A BAD SCALP TREATMENT

I liked your story "Scalped!" in the July/August 2011 Torch ("Tales of the Strange," page 6) ... even though the photo was disgusting! I often ride my bike without a helmet, but I think you've managed

to cure me. I don't want my head to end up like the guy in the picture.

*Emma Montoya
Via e-mail*



CLEAR TO PARTLY CLOUDY

Just wanted to provide some clarification and additional information on the "Arkansas Twister!" article in the May/June 2011 edition of Torch (page 14):

The 26th Operational Weather Squadron, Barksdale Air Force Base, La., provides resource protection for the Department of Defense across the southeast United States. The 26th OWS area of responsibility covers 13 states and includes 133 Department of Defense installations housing more than \$220 billion in assets and 1.2 million personnel.

Little Rock AFB, Ark., is one of these locations and recently experienced an EF-2 tornado. The 26th OWS regional weather team responsible for Little Rock keyed in on a dangerous weather pattern 48 hours in advance of the tornado occurrence. The 26th OWS forecasters worked hand-in-hand with forecasters from the 19th Operations Support Squadron weather flight at Little Rock to assess the timing and intensity of the storms projected to develop on the evening of April 25.

Little Rock AFB agencies require 30 minutes advance notification of tornado threats to warn the base populace and institute protective measures. Because of the outstanding collaboration between the 19th



by Airman 1st Class Ejlora Stewart

OSS and 26th OWS forecasters, the 26th OWS issued the tornado warning 56 minutes prior to the tornado's touchdown on the installation.

Exceeding the required notification time undoubtedly saved lives in what could have otherwise been a very deadly situation.

*Second Lt. Steven S. Graves
Barksdale Air Force Base, La.*

LETTERS TO TORCH

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PRESENTATION PARADISE

All of us here in the Civil Air Patrol National Headquarters' Public Affairs were very impressed by Torch's presentation in the May/June 2011 issue on our Hawaii Wing's role in broadcasting warnings about the March Tsunami ("Messin' with Paradise," page 16, and "A

Vital Link," page 20). Our director was so impressed that he's interested in presenting the text and photos on our Web site, VolunteerNow (www.capvolunteernow.com).

*Dan Bailey
Via e-mail*

NOW, THAT'S USING YOUR HEAD

With 2011 being the Air Force Year of Motorcycle Safety, Torch's emphasis on motorcycle safety-related articles (i.e., "Pedal to the Metal," cover story, May/June 2011 issue) generated the following testimonial from one of our readers. Unlike the gentlemen featured on page 6 of this issue ("Tales of the Strange") the guy who sent this letter learned the importance of wearing a motorcycle helmet just in the nick of time.

Well, it has been an interesting couple of days for me. I left my house on a recent Saturday morning to go to the office for a couple of hours. I got on my brand-new (three months and not even 1,000 miles on her yet) Harley-Davidson V-Rod with my HD ball cap and sunglasses ready for a beautiful south Texas motorcycle ride.

Before I left, though, a little voice in my head said, "Hmmm, maybe I'll go back in the house and get my helmet." So in I went and strapped on my Department of Transportation-approved full-face helmet.

I got about 2 miles from the house and pulled up to a red light (first in line). I placed my bike in neutral, planted my feet, smiled at the woman in the truck next to me (motorcycles are known chick magnets),

and then in the blink of an eye I woke up 25 to 30 feet in front of where I was parked, face down on the asphalt.

I jumped to my feet and took care of the most important thing — Veronica (my bike). I picked her up (all 650 pounds) to assess her damages and then tried to find my cell phone to call 911.

A person (practicing restraint here) hit me from behind doing 45 mph trying to avoid having to stop at the red light. I flew through the air end-over-end, landed on my helmet and right side, and then slid 5 to 10 more feet.

Fortunately for me, a good Samaritan (the woman in the truck next to me whom I had smiled at) saw me get hit and pulled up to prevent cross traffic from running over my limp body and causing further injury.

I received treatment from the Leon Valley cops and emergency medical services in San Antonio who were all fantastic, and then escorted Veronica to her ER.

Once she was set, my wife forcibly took me to Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, so they could fix all my damaged body parts.

The preliminary diagnoses are not so good — my Veronica will survive but so far parts alone are climbing past \$4,000 and that's without labor costs yet. It will be another six weeks or more before she's home from the "Harley Hospital." I miss her already. I, on the other hand, am doing OK with a few bruises, road rash, and a whole lotta body soreness. In a nutshell, I'm fine and will heal as good as new. Thanks to Valium, Percocet, Ibuprofen, nice long hot baths, and everyone's well wishes, I will be ready to ride again soon.

After 37 years of riding mini-bikes, dirt-bikes, crotch-rockets, baggers, and now a real motorcycle (Veronica), I hardly ever wore a helmet (except on base) ... until now. I will not drive without one again (may look dumb in my car but I'll have to evaluate that one).

If you ride, do it for your loved ones.

If your husband or wife rides, make them wear one for you.

*Rick Johnsen
San Antonio*



by Leah, Sgt. Samuel Bender

A DECADE SINCE 9/11

STRIVING TO CREATE A RESILIENT AIR FORCE

As we reflect on the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and the operational tempo of our Air Force in the past 10 years, I can't help but be humbled by the sacrifices our Airmen make.

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 took the lives of 2,977 people and invoked a military response that is still on-going. Many of our Air Education and Training Command Airmen have deployed numerous times to Iraq, Afghanistan and other places around the world and have been exposed first hand to the horrors of war. In Iraq and Afghanistan alone, we have lost nearly 6,200 U.S. troops — fellow warriors who were fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters.

Each of us probably knows someone who lost his life in Afghanistan or Iraq or knows somebody who lost co-workers, family members or friends. These losses affect each of us in different ways, and coping with these losses and the increased ops tempo associated with continuous combat operations can be difficult.

Last year while serving in Afghanistan in the air advisor mission, one of our Mi-17 helicopters returned after being hit by small arms fire. The Mi-17 was piloted by one of our American advisors, and the rest of the crew was from the Afghan Air Force. The Afghan flight engineer took an AK-47 round through his leg.

You can imagine the screaming that was going on, as he was losing a significant amount of blood. Our Afghan interpreter was able to apply a tourniquet.

The pilot diverted and landed next to the NATO hospital in Kabul and arranged for medical care for the Afghan Air Force member. Needless to say, it was very chaotic and stressful in the cockpit, and our pilot was still a bit shaken when I arrived at the aircraft. The coping skills that he used, and we used as a team, are the same types of tools that we all use when facing stressful situations. He demonstrated a great amount of resiliency in this and many other cases in Afghanistan.

Recently, the Air Force implemented the Comprehensive Airmen Fitness initiative to help make our Airmen more resilient. The goal of Comprehensive Airmen Fitness is to enhance and sustain a culture of resilience by fostering mental, physical, social and spiritual health.

The Air Force chief of staff recently said, "Resilient Airmen and families are key components to a well-functioning force. As leaders, supervisors and wingmen, we must strive to promote resilience and reduce risk through education and outreach. Comprehensive Airmen Fitness is vital to this effort."

As we take time to reflect on the decade since 9/11 and the journey we, our Air Force and our nation have taken, please think about the ways you can increase your resiliency and help those around you.

— Col. Creig A. Rice
AETC director of safety

Col. Creig A. Rice, AETC director of safety, visits the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio. Rice recently served in the air advisor mission in Afghanistan. He is stressing resiliency in dealing with the stresses of war to help combat suicides and stress-related mishaps.



by Tech. Sgt. Samuel Bender

AN UNFORGETTABLE SCREAM

METAL WORKER LOSES EYE IN SHOP MISHAP

About 14 years ago when I was 16 years old, I, like many young teenagers, got a summer job. I was lucky; my father got me a job doing miscellaneous tasks at a metal fabrication shop where he worked. When I was dismissed from school for summer break, I could not wait to get started.

On the first day of my new job, I went to new employee orientation and job safety training. I, with a few other new employees, met with our new supervisor, Jeff. He was an older gentleman who was very rough around the edges. One of the first things he mentioned was how dangerous the work area was.

Jeff told us about welding fumes, machine guarding, confined spaces, lockout/tagout, fall protection, respiratory protection, overhead cranes, steel rollers, presses, and many other dangerous areas and operations within the shop. After the briefing, we watched a video produced back in the 1950s that highlighted industrial safety requirements.

As we ended the meeting Jeff looked us all in the eye and told us that we all had a responsibility to each other to “stop any operation that looked unsafe.”

After orientation I met with a young man named Pete, who was going to be my trainer. I was issued personal protective equipment, such as earplugs, leather gloves, steel-toed boots, eye protection and a hard hat. For the first few weeks I tagged along with Pete, and he showed me everything I needed to know.

A few weeks turned into a few months, and I was starting to get to know everyone in the shop, as well as what areas to stay away from to reduce my risk.

One day while sweeping the shop floor, I spotted one of the older workers, Gary, operating a piece of machinery. The operation was loud, but other than that, I didn't see anything out of the ordinary about the machine. I did, however, notice that Gary was wearing chemical goggles and not safety glasses.

I figured he had been running that machine for more than 20 years and was an expert at using it. Who was I to correct him?

I continued sweeping the floor when the 10 o'clock buzzer went

off, signaling break time. Old Gary came over to me, and I started asking him about what he was doing and what he was operating. He told me that he was punching out three-eighths-inch holes in one-quarter-inch steel using a punch press. He had to punch out a couple thousand of them.

When the buzzer went off again, we both went back to work. About 10 minutes later, I heard an unforgettable scream.

I ran in the direction the scream came from. I was the first on-scene. Gary was lying on the concrete floor bleeding profusely and grabbing the left side of his face. Others arrived immediately and provided first aid. Shortly thereafter the paramedics showed up and transported Gary to the hospital.

At 16 years old I was in awe of what just happened. But I wasn't alone. Everyone at the company was in shock.

The supervisors and production superintendants started to investigate the mishap. They inspected the machine and found that the die used to punch out the steel had broken off during use and struck Gary in the eye. They asked me what had happened, and I told them everything that I knew. The investigation found that Gary was using chemical protective goggles, not the safety glasses that he was issued.

Gary's choice cost him his eye.

I felt horrible about what transpired. I ran the events leading up to the mishap a hundred times in my head. I kept hearing in the back of my mind what Jeff had told us during orientation. Looking back at the mishap, I should have questioned Gary about his choice of personal protective equipment, but I thought that I was too young to challenge a seasoned technician.

No matter what the job or operation, we all owe it to ourselves, co-workers and family members to take care of each other and to prevent similar mishaps in the future.

— Tech. Sgt. Jeremiah K. Carpenter
42nd Air Base Wing ground safety,
Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.

“Gary was lying on the concrete floor bleeding profusely and grabbing the left side of his face.”

A metal shop worker lost his eye when he failed to use the appropriate eye protection for the job. He was using chemical eye goggles instead of hardened safety glasses.

by Tech. Sgt. Samuel Bender

LIFE CLAIMED BY INTERNET 'PLANKING' CRAZE

When a 20-year-old Australian man fell seven stories to his death while planking on a high-rise balcony railing, it brought a whole new level of "crazy" to the planking craze.

Planking, the on-line fad where people lie face down as stiff as a board in odd places, has taken on deadly consequences. This internet phenomenon is widely believed to have gotten its start in England, but has since gone global with hundreds of thousands of photos posted on-line. But as people try to outdo each other, the wacky game has gotten riskier and deadlier.

Type "planking" in just about any search engine and photos of people lying rigid on signs, basketball hoops, ladders, light poles, chimneys and other less than safe spots abound.

One man was critically injured recently when planking from the roof of a moving car. He fell from the vehicle headfirst and was rushed to the hospital in a battle for his life.

Despite the injuries and even deaths, planking has shown no signs of slowing down. If anything, the mishaps seem to have created more interest and garnered new planking recruits. Even a recent episode of the popular sitcom "The Office" featured the actors planking.

"As people take these planking photos, they are trying to stand out in a pool of hundreds of thousands of pictures on-line," said Robbie Bogard, with the Air Education and Training Command

Ground Safety Division. "Unfortunately, in their pursuit to be the most shocking, many are throwing common sense and risk management out the window. It's about making smart decisions. Lying across railroad tracks or planking from a skyscraper probably aren't the best life choices."



by Tech. Sgt. Samuel Bender

Planking can have deadly consequences — especially with people trying to outdo each other by finding the oddest places to take their pictures.

MOTORCYCLIST DIES WHILE PROTESTING HELMET LAW

Police say a motorcyclist participating in a protest ride against helmet laws in upstate New York died after he flipped over the bike's handlebars and hit his head on the pavement.

The accident happened on the afternoon of July 3 in the town of Onondaga, in central New York near Syracuse.

State troopers tell The Post-Standard of Syracuse that 55-year-old Philip A. Contos of Parish, N.Y., was driving a 1983 Harley Davidson with 550 other motorcyclists to protest the state's mandatory helmet law by not wearing helmets. Troopers say Contos hit his brakes, and the motorcycle fishtailed. The bike spun out of control, and Contos toppled over the handlebars. He was pronounced dead at a hospital.

"The medical expert we discussed the case with who pronounced him deceased stated that he would've no doubt survived the accident had he been wearing a helmet," state Trooper Jack Keller told ABC News 9 in Syracuse.

The ride was organized by

American Bikers Aimed Toward Education, known as ABATE, a group of motorcycling enthusiasts who lobby for motorcycle awareness and freedom.

The Onondaga chapter of ABATE has sponsored the helmet protest ride for the past 11 years every July 4 weekend.

"ABATE is very saddened and still shocked about the fact that we've lost another rider in Philip, and our hearts go out to him and our prayers as well," Syracuse chapter president Christina Rathbun told ABC News 9.

Still, ABATE states on its Web site that the decision to wear a helmet should be up to each individual motorcyclist.

New York is one of 20 states that requires motorcyclists to wear helmets.

Jim Hedlund of the Governors Highway Safety Association told the Associated Press that a helmet meeting federal standards reduces the chance of fatality in an accident by more than 40 percent.

— From wire reports



by Tech. Sgt. Samuel Bender

Only 20 states require motorcyclists to wear helmets, but military members are required to wear them any time they ride.

KEEPING LITTLE PRINCESSES AND PIRATES SAFE

Soon children will be sneaking and slithering through the neighborhood in search of Halloween treats. But you should beware of the real dangers of Halloween. These five tips will tell you how to keep your little princesses and pirates secure this season.

1 Keeping Costumes Safe

The best part of Halloween is dressing up, of course, but ensure that costume is trick-or-treat friendly. It should be well-fitted, and especially don't let your kids wear costumes that are too long. Tripping is the number one cause of injury when trick-or-treating, according to the National Safety Council.

Shoes also should be appropriate. Don't have your child clomping around in oversized shoes or high heels. Avoid masks that can reduce your child's visibility.

Instead, think about using face paint. And make sure store-bought costumes and accessories are labeled "flame resistant" — and use flame-resistant materials if you're making costumes.

Children should wear costumes that make them more visible to drivers. Trick-or-treaters roaming the streets after dark will need flashlights or a light stick. You also should put reflective tape on their costumes and trick or treat bags — it's available at any sporting goods or biking store. If it's possible, choose a costume that is very colorful. Glow-in-the-dark stickers can be added to darker costumes to make them more visible.

2 Use Your Trick-or-Treating Smarts

Kids between the ages of 5 and 14 are four times more likely to be killed by walking on Halloween than on any other night, according to the Centers for Disease Control. This is because they cross streets mid-block and often can't anticipate driver behavior.

If you have a young child, you should go trick-or-treating along with them. Young kids need adult supervision to ensure they cross streets at the corner and don't dart out between cars. And take them out while it's still light out.

Make sure your trick-or-treaters only ring the doorbells of houses

with their porch lights on. Additionally, they should know never to enter a stranger's home. And, finally, it's a good idea to pin their name, address and phone number somewhere on their costume, just in case.

3 Check Those Sweet Rewards

Remember the story of the razor blade in the apple? Dangerous treats are no wives' tale. It's very important that you're on the lookout for suspicious candy. Don't let your little one eat candy before you've had a chance to go through it. Throw away candy if wrappers are faded, if they have holes or tears or if the candy has been unwrapped.

Ensure chocolate doesn't have faded spots on it. You should throw away any candy that you have doubts about. And don't let your kid eat a homemade treat unless you know the person who handed it out.

Also, don't let them eat candy while still running around trick-or-treating as this presents a choking hazard.

4 Prepare Your Home for Trick-or-Treaters

If you're the one getting ready to hand out treats, ensure your yard is clear of hoses, dog leashes and flower pots. Keep lighted pumpkins located away from walkways or steps. Sweep away those wet leaves. If you have pets, think about keeping them confined to a section of the house. Pets may get frightened or anxious with all the unfamiliar visitors.

5 Be smart with decorations

It's a good idea to replace the candles in your jack-o'-lantern with battery-powered candles. Keep in mind that small children should never carve pumpkins. Children can draw a face with markers, and then parents can do the cutting.

Under parental supervision, children also can carve with pumpkin cutters equipped with safety bars. Make sure to remove all decorations from candles. Bales of hay and corn stalks may be decorative, but they're also highly flammable. And don't overload electrical outlets with holiday lighting or special effects. (CNN)

File photo



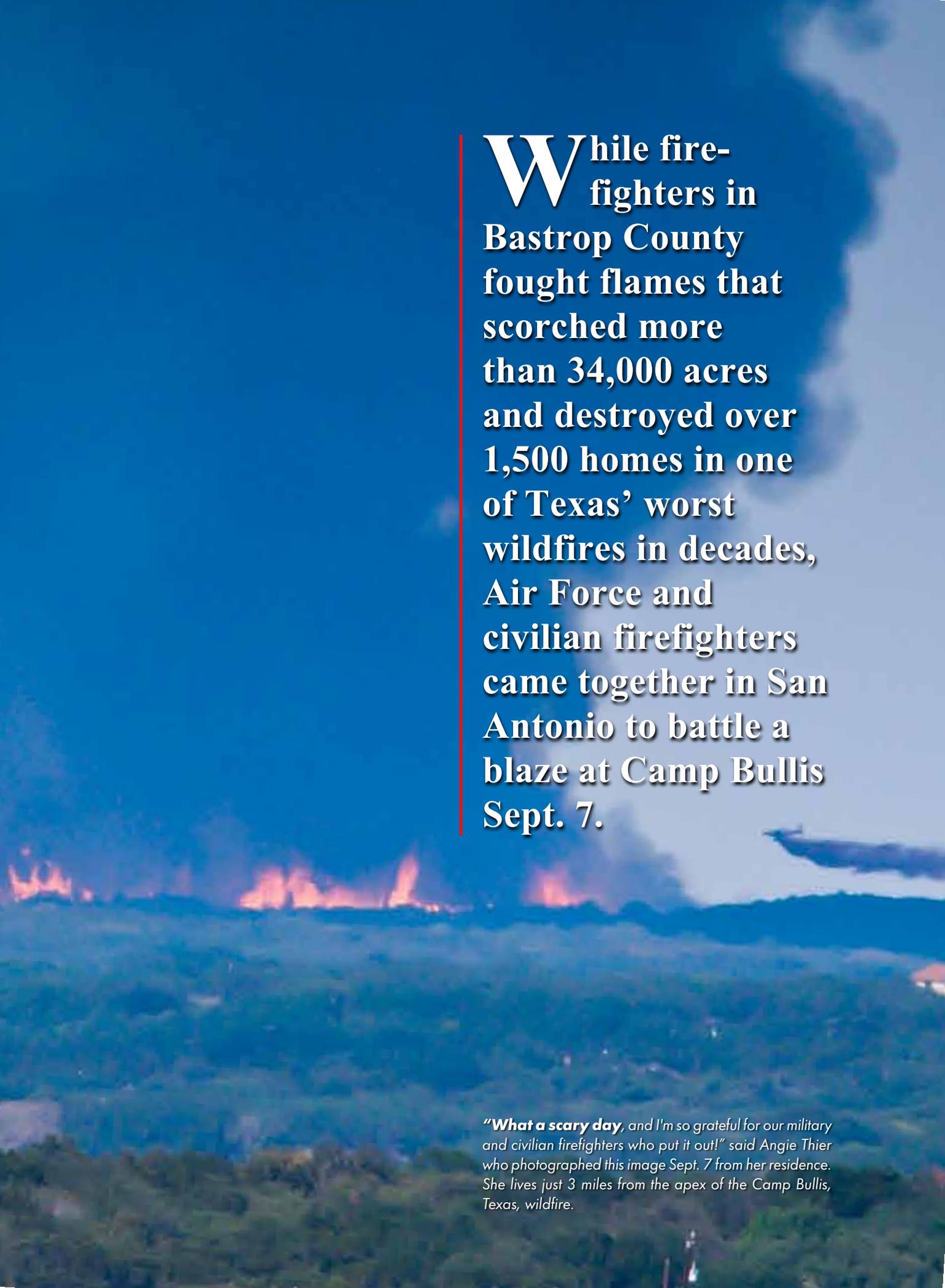
Tripping is the number one cause of injury when trick-or-treating, according to the National Safety Council. So don't let your kids wear costumes that are too long.

SPREADING LIKE WILDFIRE

FIREFIGHTERS STAVE OFF FOREST FIRE
AT CAMP BULLIS

*By Tech. Sgt. SAMUEL BENDET
Photo by ANGIE THIER*

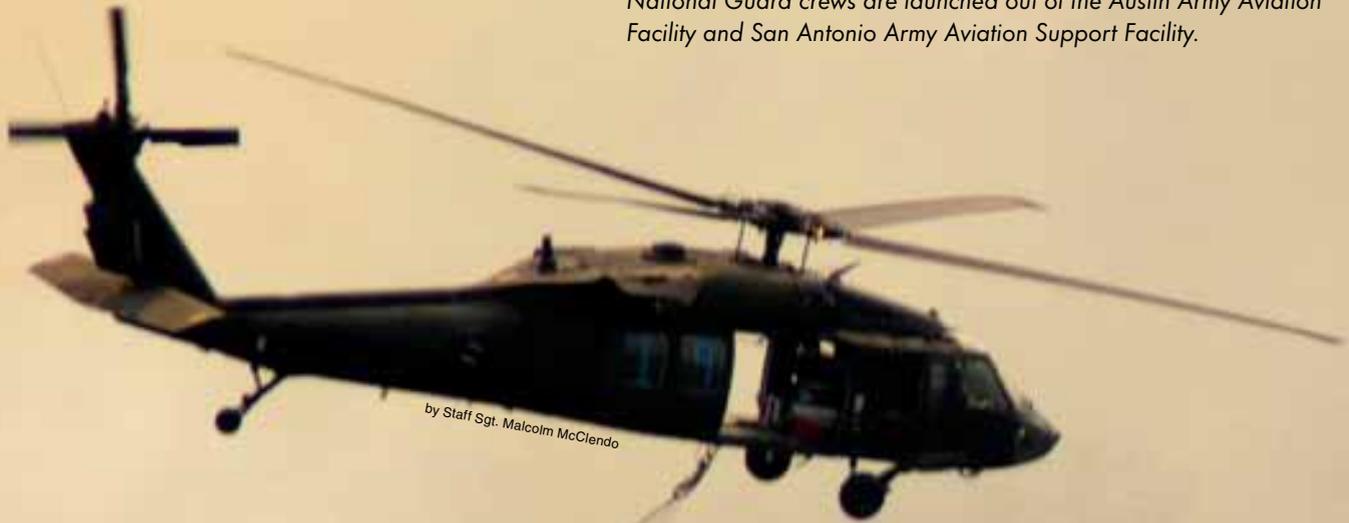




**While fire-
fighters in
Bastrop County
fought flames that
scorched more
than 34,000 acres
and destroyed over
1,500 homes in one
of Texas' worst
wildfires in decades,
Air Force and
civilian firefighters
came together in San
Antonio to battle a
blaze at Camp Bullis
Sept. 7.**

"What a scary day, and I'm so grateful for our military and civilian firefighters who put it out!" said Angie Thier who photographed this image Sept. 7 from her residence. She lives just 3 miles from the apex of the Camp Bullis, Texas, wildfire.

Bombs away! A Texas National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk flies right into the smoke to dump water over a wildfire. The Texas National Guard crews are launched out of the Austin Army Aviation Facility and San Antonio Army Aviation Support Facility.



Brush fires raged through nearly 300 acres of forest at Camp Bullis. But unlike the devastation in Bastrop, the Camp Bullis fire was mostly contained within eight hours.

"The intensity of the heat at the apex of the fire was so hot that our truck lights and paint started melting," said 34-year veteran Eric Ruggs, assistant chief at the Camp Bullis Fire Department.

All the initial responders had to back out of the fire area and had to relocate the incident command post because of the rapidly spreading fire, Ruggs said.

"With the intense drought, it made the fire spread so rapidly," he added.

While the fire was mostly contained that first day, "mopping up" the hot spots lasted for another week, Ruggs said.

During this mop-up phase members of the Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, Fire Department were called in to support their brethren's efforts in controlling the blaze. Randolph's 4,000-gallon tanker truck arrived on scene to resupply water to Joint Base San Antonio and fire departments from all around the area.

"All the credit goes to the Fort Sam guys ... They were working (the toughest parts)," said Randolph firefighter Staff Sgt. Devin Blue.

As part of a nearly two-week, two-man operation on rotation for days and nights, Blue and his partner, Timothy Hagan, served on the mop-up crew. This entailed driving around the perimeter and checking for hot spots, busting up smoldering stumps, digging up the ground and putting out smoldering remains to try to protect the remaining green areas, Blue said.

"It's hard to contain fires here because of how dry it is," Blue said. "All it takes is a little gust of wind to throw embers in a certain direction; and with stuff being so dry, it goes up like a match book! And without heavy equipment here, everything had to be done by hand."

For some, like Airman 1st Class Perry Robinson of Ran-

dolph, the experience served as his wildfire fighting initiation.

"It was my first time seeing water dropped from airplanes and seeing whole fields of burned trees," the Airman said.

It was even Robinson's first time for wearing a "banana suit" — the protective gear that helps keep firemen cooler while battling these wildfires.

During Robinson's shift, spot fires were prevalent, and they were constantly rekindling.

"I had to help put them out," he said. "It was kind of fun."

At press time, it was still unknown what had caused the Camp Bullis blaze.

"In Texas, 91 percent of wildfires are caused by humans," said Bill Paxton, information officer for the Texas Forest Service. "At this point, the best thing I could recommend to Texas residents is to be extremely careful with fire. The best line of defense we have right now is people, because we can stop many of these fires from starting in the first place." ❖



Firefighter captain Blair Rowley, from the Hoopa Indian reservation Fire Department, Calif., sprays water on a smoldering tree to prevent the fire from spreading at Camp Bullis.

by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder

SEVEN WAYS

HUMANS START WILDFIRES

**1. LEAVING CAMPFIRES
OR BARBECUE GRILLS
UNATTENDED**

**2. LITTERING WITH
SMOLDERING CIGARETTE
BUTTS**

**3. BURNING DEBRIS
AND TRASH**

**4. PARKING HOT
VEHICLES ON DRY GRASS**

**5. DRIVING VEHICLES
OFF-ROAD THAT THROW
SPARKS**

**6. SHOOTING OFF
FIREWORKS**

**7. KIDS PLAYING WITH
MATCHES**

—*Smokey the Bear*
United States Forest Service



Off the reserves, firefighters Michael Korb, left, Lonnie Risling, center, and Blaine McKinnon, from the Hoopa Indian Reservation Fire Department, put out a hot spot to prevent the fire from re-igniting at Camp Bullis. They have been volunteering to fight fires within the state of Texas.



Feeling completely exhausted, Airman 1st Class Perry Robinson of Randolph AFB, Texas, cools down and rehydrates after pulling his shift of fighting hot spots throughout the 300 acres at Camp Bullis. It was the Airman's first experience fighting a wildfire.

by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder

by Staff Sgt. Conrado Jaquez



HEAD HUNTER

Fall from deer hunting
stand puts former
Airman in coma

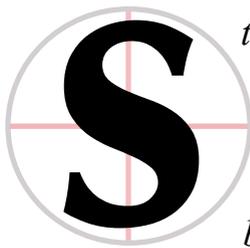
By **TIM BARELA**

Photos by Tech. Sgt. **SAMUEL BENDET**



Call him Mr. October.

It's Curtis Hahn's favorite month of the year because it marks the start of deer hunting season and time for him to take aim with his beloved bow and arrows.



Staff Sgt. Curtis Hahn inched his way up the tall oak tree branch by branch. He planned to climb to about 20 feet, then pull up his deer stand chair by a rope he'd attached to his safety belt and secure it — and himself — to the trunk. As the 170-pound bow hunter ascended nearly 16 feet up the old oak, the branch he shifted his weight to suddenly snapped. He clawed wildly in an attempt to grab anything that could arrest his fall but only got a handful of air. As he plummeted toward earth, he pin-balled off another limb, which flipped him upside down into a horrifying headfirst dive.

Waiting for him at the base of the tree to break his fall? A small boulder, seemingly with his name on it.

The back of his head hit the solid rock with a sickening thud. Everything went black. ...

Hahn was a T-37 Tweet aircraft mechanic stationed at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, at the time of his hunting accident Oct. 10, 1990. When his head slammed into the rock, he was knocked unconscious and slipped into a coma for the next 23 days. He awoke from his dream world to a real-life nightmare. At 30 years old, the Airman could no longer walk or talk. He couldn't even remember the names of his wife or two daughters. Twenty-one years later, at age 51, his recovery continues.

Hahn started his hunting excursion Oct. 6, four days prior to the mishap, on a 288-acre ranch owned by his in-laws in Llano, Texas. He'd gotten off to a great start, bagging two deer in the first three days. And one of the kills was the best shot he'd ever made with a bow and arrow — 20 yards with the deer on the run.

"My brother-in-law taught me how to bow hunt; once I tried it, I was hooked," said Hahn, who never had the opportunity to hunt growing up in Cypress, Calif., 15 miles from Long Beach.

On the fourth day, Hahn was out at the ranch by himself.

His wife was supposed to be with him, but they'd gotten into a heated argument and both needed a little space to cool down. So his wife stayed home in Cibolo, which is conveniently close to Randolph AFB but more than a two-hour drive to the acreage in Llano.

"I broke one of the first rules of hunting safety ... don't fight with your wife," Hahn joked. "Seriously, though, you should always hunt with a buddy."

Instead, the aircraft mechanic flew solo that morning. To make matters worse, he wasn't having much luck. By 10 a.m. he decided to move his deer stand elsewhere on the property.

When he found just the right spot, he began scaling the live oak tree. He wore a safety harness, but didn't intend to attach himself to the tree until he reached the point he planned to secure his chair. That's a decision he would later regret.



Scaling a tall oak tree, Hahn secures his deer stand chair to the trunk in preparation for a bow hunt.

"I should have used my harness on the way up the tree," he said. "Then when the branch snapped, I would have gotten hung up and maybe sustained a few scrapes and bruises."

Instead the fall and collision with the rock knocked him out. To anyone who might have happened upon the scene, it probably would have appeared as though Hahn was taking a late morning nap. But while he had no visible injuries on the outside of his body, the impact had severely traumatized his brain.

"I hit the back of my head, but the worst damage was to the frontal lobe where my brain crashed into my skull," Hahn said.

Phyllis, Hahn's wife at the time, tried to reach him via telephone at about noon that day. When he didn't answer after several attempts, she called her aunt who lived close by to go

"I BROKE ONE OF THE FIRST RULES OF HUNTING SAFETY ... DON'T FIGHT WITH YOUR WIFE. ... SERIOUSLY, THOUGH, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS HUNT WITH A BUDDY."

check on him. The aunt drove around the property, but was unable to find Hahn.

"You have to remember, I was trying to make myself invisible to the deer," he said. "I was in the trees, wearing camouflaged clothing — even my face was painted."

They deduced that he was still out hunting and was simply difficult to see. So the aunt went back home.

But when midnight rolled around, Phyllis knew something was definitely wrong.

She loaded the kids into the car and called her father.

“Her dad told her to stay put and let him go look for me,” Hahn said. “I think, more than anything, he worried that he was only going to find a corpse, and he didn’t want his daughter and grandchildren to be the first ones to come upon that.”

At about 1 a.m., Hahn’s father-in-law called Axel Bigingham, the brother-in-law who had taught the staff sergeant how to bow hunt. By the time Phyllis’ parents stopped to meet Bigingham at his house in Cherokee, Texas, they didn’t end up arriving at the Llano ranch until shortly after 3 a.m.

“I had been at the ranch (earlier in the week), and Curtis had shown me his tree stand,” Bigingham said. “He said he might hunt somewhere along the mountain later and pointed out the truck window in the general vicinity (where he planned to hunt). I wish I had paid more attention to where he had pointed.

“This really disturbed me ... it would be hard enough to find him in the dark. He could be anywhere. Still, I came to the realization that I had a better chance of finding Curtis than anyone.”

Indeed, Bigingham not only had an idea, albeit sketchy, where Hahn might have headed, but he probably knew the Airman’s hunting habits better than anyone.

As they arrived at the ranch, Bigingham said he “hoped for the best, but feared the worst.” His anxiety was well-placed. For even though, unbeknownst to them, Hahn clung to life, the swelling in his brain was reaching the critical point. Only the miracle of the year’s first cold front, which had moved in that morning to interrupt an unusually hot fall, had slowed the swelling enough to give Hahn a chance at survival.

“We searched the immediate area around the house and barn, but Curtis was not to be found,” Bigingham said. “We got his dog Cain and brought him along, hoping he might be helpful in finding Curtis.”

They drove out to Hahn’s original deer stand, only to discover his platform gone.

Now the search would quite literally be a shot in the dark.

“I drove along the base of the mountain to a spot where it seemed as good a place as any to start looking,” Bigingham said. “What made me stop there I don’t know.”

They all got out of the truck and began calling for Hahn. ... No response. Cain sniffed about and headed off in one direction with Phyllis’ parents in close pursuit, but some nagging feeling told Bigingham that the dog was not going in the right direction.

“I grew impatient and (went) in the direction I wanted to go,” he said.

What drove him that way, he still can’t answer. Just a gut feeling or divine intervention, he said. But as he moved toward the mountain and shined his flashlight through the trees and the blinding darkness of 4 a.m, something reflected off of the beam.

“All of a sudden, I saw part of the stand sticking up from behind some rocks near the base of the tree,” Bigingham said.

“*I found the stand!*” he hollered to his in-laws.

“I rushed on up ahead and looked up in the tree hoping to see Curtis hung by his heels or something simple like that. But he wasn’t there,” Bigingham said.

With his head on a swivel and his flashlight breaching the darkness, he did a 360-degree search of the surrounding area. Abruptly, he flashed the beam toward his feet. There lay Hahn. Bigingham was nearly standing on him.

“*I found him!*” he shouted.



Taking aim while safely strapped to the tree trunk nearly 20-feet up, Hahn takes practice shots at a deer effigy.

“Curtis looked almost as though he were asleep,” Bigingham said. “I quickly checked for a pulse and was I ever relieved to find one. And he was warm to the touch, which made me feel better.”

Hahn stirred slightly and moaned.

“I told him to lie still,” he said. “We didn’t know the extent of his injury, and we didn’t want him to hurt himself any further.”

Paramedics quickly arrived, but their ambulance couldn’t traverse the rugged terrain en route to the austere mishap site.

So they secured Hahn to a backboard and loaded him into the back of Bigingham’s truck. After transferring him to the ambulance, they rushed him to the emergency room in Llano. From there he was airlifted to Brackenridge Hospital in Austin where they were better equipped to deal with severe head injuries.

Hahn was in a coma for close to a month, during which his body often went into convulsions and shook violently. When he finally awoke, he had screws in his head, hoses going down his nose and throat, and wires “coming from everywhere,” he said. Suffering severe brain damage, he initially was robbed of the ability to walk and talk.

When he was well enough to move after six weeks, the Air Force had him transferred to Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB in San Antonio.

After three months, and with some intensive physical therapy, he regained his ability to walk normally. The first words he was able to speak were “my wife,” but he was unable to remember her name for nearly nine months. His hearing, which hadn’t been great after nearly 10 years of working on A-10 and T-38 jet aircraft, was even worse after the mishap.

“I was out there 18 hours before they found me; so even the cold front wasn’t enough to keep my brain from swelling and doing more damage,” Hahn said. “Parts of my brain were dead.”

During his recovery process, he had to use flashcards a kindergartener could master. They included pictures with simple words, such as phone, dog, book, toothbrush and airplane.

While he got out of the hospital in December 1990, just in time for Christmas, “it took me three years to be able to go into

a store, buy something and leave without them knowing I had a problem,” said Hahn, who had to be medically discharged from the Air Force. “Even today, before I speak I have to know what words I am going to say before I open my mouth because there’s a lot more going on in here than what I am able to elaborate,” he added as he

pointed to his temple. “It’s a war that’s not over yet.”

The accident changed him in other ways, too.

“I was tough to live with for a while,” he said. “I would lose control and break things: cups of coffee, the wall, the car.”

He believes the results of the mishap helped lead to a divorce from his first wife six years after the fall. He remarried eight years later and now lives with his new bride, Robin, and her 14-year-old son, Christopher Stultz, only 15 minutes from Randolph AFB. Hahn owns a small 11-acre ranch in Seguin, Texas, where he raises whitetail deer as a business/hobby. He also is a wildlife photographer. And he still goes bow hunting every year, usually at Camp Bullis on the northwest side of San Antonio.

“I still love to hunt,” Hahn said. “Nowadays, I’m just smarter about it.”

“I WAS OUT THERE 18 HOURS BEFORE THEY FOUND ME; SO EVEN THE COLD FRONT WASN’T ENOUGH TO KEEP MY BRAIN FROM SWELLING AND DOING MORE DAMAGE. ... PARTS OF MY BRAIN WERE DEAD.”



At his 11-acre ranch in Seguin, Texas, Hahn feeds one of the 13 whitetail deer he is raising – partly as a hobby and for future sale.

HURT ON THE HUNT

A DOZEN HAZARDS THAT CAN GET YOU INJURED OR KILLED
THIS HUNTING SEASON

by Todd Frantom

- ⊕ Falls from slippery mountain terrain, deer stands or trees.
- ⊕ Getting shot by other hunters, yourself or a hunting dog knocking over a loaded weapon.
- ⊕ Gun noise that is loud enough to cause permanent hearing loss.
- ⊕ Eye damage or sunburn from the sun's ultraviolet rays.
- ⊕ Getting lost in the wilderness.
- ⊕ Cutting yourself with a knife while dressing out the kill or falling on the blade.
- ⊕ Hypothermia if you forget matches or don't have proper survival gear.
- ⊕ Dehydration if not enough water (snow is not a good substitute as it can cause body temperature to lower to dangerous levels).
- ⊕ Attacks by animals and not just mountain lions, bears or snakes. Deer, elk, moose and hogs, for example, can make for nasty opponents, as well.
- ⊕ Drowning. Hunters are often near or even on the water. There is always a chance of falling through ice on a lake or stream. Flash floods also cause a drowning hazard.
- ⊕ ATV mishaps.
- ⊕ Not using the buddy system.

— International Hunter Education Association
and Air Education and Training Command Ground Safety Division

FIVE THINGS IN THE **HERC** THAT

WILL KILL YOU

By Lt. **JOSHUA M. FULCHER**

Photo by Airman 1st Class **NATHAN DOZA**

There's an old, and rather sick, joke about flying the C-130 Hercules: "There's five things in the Herc that'll kill you: bleed air and propellers 1, 2, 3 and 4!"

While those will undoubtedly ruin your day if they get out of hand, I've found something equally as dangerous that can get you in trouble way quicker than any of the aforementioned aircraft systems: poor communication with air traffic control.

First, I must say that our best friends in the sky are air traffic controllers.

Because of radar coverage alone they have big picture situational awareness that no aircrew could ever hope to have. Add to this the facts that they are managing all filed flight plans and in direct radio communications with the vast majority of aircraft — especially those operating anywhere near an airport — and you have aviation's most valuable resource.

Like any other aspect of aviation, however, even the best systems are limited by a very important item: the human factor.

Rewind four years and three time zones. A good friend of mine was flying the mighty Herc to a lovely place in Alaska called "Cold Bay." (They don't call it "cold" bay for nothin'!) On this particular day, he and his band of merry men were on a logistics mission to run some supplies and a fresh crew out to a helicopter that had laid over a night on its return from a search and rescue mission out in the Aleutian Islands.

The weather was marginal but doable that day; so the crew headed into the clouds to deliver said supplies and personnel.

They arrived to find the weather not as bad as they expected, but still right at minimums. Now, Cold Bay is an old World

War II-era stopover point for aircraft crossing the Pacific and boasts a great approach lighting system and a 10,000-foot runway — supposedly it's an alternate for the space shuttle.

The crew approached from the south. They reached minimums, didn't see the runway and executed the missed approach. No big deal ... the missed is a simple straight ahead climb to 4,000 feet and proceed out about 3 miles north of the field. They caught a glimpse of the runway lights as they went missed, and the weather was, according to the forecast, supposed to be improving rapidly. So they contacted air traffic control and requested another approach.

Simple right?

Air traffic control cleared them to land and told them to maintain 4,000 feet for the initial part of the approach.

"Roger that," the crew responded. The approach was in the clouds and pretty bumpy. The winds were gusting 20 to 30 knots from the northeast, which caused a significant amount of turbulence off the proximal mountainous terrain.

Despite the bumps, everything was going great — just



another routine instrument flight rules approach, until ...

About 4 miles south of the

initial approach fix and perfectly in position (so they thought), the most terrifying thing an aircrew can hear while flying in mountainous terrain screamed through their headsets: *"WHOOP, WHOOP, PULL UP!"*

In utter disbelief of what the ground proximity warning system was telling them, the crew did as training directed and pulled back on the yoke, applied full power and began an emergency climb. The co-pilot and navigator both glanced at their approach plates and, to their horror, saw that they were nearly 3,000 feet lower than the approach plate called for and 2,200 feet below minimum safe altitude for that sector of the approach! (Of note: About 5 miles south of the initial approach fix and about a half mile right of the arcing course lies a 3,920-foot peak. Recall the clearance issued by ATC, "... maintain 4,000 feet....")

Fast forward three years (and three time zones) to Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark., where I had been assigned as the Coast Guard liaison officer to the Air Force. It was a great assignment that allowed me to, among other things, instruct at the Air Force C-130 Flight Training Unit, a.k.a., "the schoolhouse."

On this day, my crew and I were executing a completely different kind of mission in a completely different environment

— formation visual low-level combat airdrop training. The scenario was to launch a two-ship flight of C-130s, fly a visual low-level route to "Blackjack" drop zone, kick out a heavy equipment load, and "escape" back to the airbase for some pattern/assault work. The lead crew consisted of the following: yours truly at the controls in the left seat, a flight evaluator standing behind me giving me my final "flight instructor training" evaluation flight prior to designation as full up schoolhouse instructor, a student pilot with about four hours of C-130 time in the right seat, an instructor flight engineer standing up with his student in the engineer seat, and an instructor navigator standing up with his student in the nav seat.

Basically, there was not a fully "qualified" aircrew member directly at the controls of the lead aircraft. (At the time I had just less than 4,000 hours of C-130 flight time and was a flight examiner in the Coast Guard, but still required this final evaluation to be a fully qualified Air Force flight training unit instructor pilot.)

The number two aircraft had basically the same compliment, except it was commanded by a very experienced instructor pilot, Maj. David Smith.

No big deal, however; this is what we do at the schoolhouse, and this mission had the distinct advantage of having great weather and a pack of very sharp students.

The formation took off at the planned time, flew our route, executed a perfect "point of impact" airdrop, and escaped from the simulated combat zone without incident.

We contacted air traffic control off the drop zone. Positively radar identified, we proceeded on the very familiar recovery route that takes crews from the drop zone to the airbase every

"SUDDENLY, 'TRAFFIC, TRAFFIC!' BLARED IN MY HEADSET. BEFORE I COULD UTTER A WORD, AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL BOOMED OVER THE RADIO, 'JODY ONE ZERO TURN RIGHT 45 DEGREES IMMEDIATELY!'"

day. About five minutes later we identified the final turn point, pointed the nose westward toward home, and began the climb to 1,800 feet for the overhead back at the airbase.

Everything was going great, and the students were looking at great write ups for an outstanding job on this mission when ...

The traffic collision avoidance system, known as TCAS, showed an aircraft directly in front of us, but didn't display an altitude. Almost immediately after we saw it on the instrument, air traffic control made the following radio call, *"Jody one zero flight, traffic, one o'clock, altitude unknown."*

"Traffic not in sight, searching," the trusty student co-pilot responded.

Suddenly, *"TRAFFIC, TRAFFIC!"* blared in my headset. Before I could utter a word, air traffic control boomed over the radio, *"Jody one zero turn right 45 degrees IMMEDIATELY!"*

The monkey at the controls that day did exactly what he was told, and I rolled into a hard right turn and somehow managed to blurt over the interplane frequency, *"Jody one zero CHECK RIGHT, NOW!"*

"Anybody see him?" I yelled.

Before anyone could answer, a calm but stern voice sounded in my headset, *"Lead two, roll out, NOW!"* Another banana...



by Senior Airman Caleb Pierce

Air traffic controllers from the 19th Operations Support Squadron manage aircraft in the tower cab Sept. 26 on Little Rock AFB Ark. The Little Rock flight tower manages air space for 95 assigned C-130s and other Air Mobility Command traffic.

I leveled the wings to see a white and red Mooney Acclaim Type S cross left to right just off the nose of my aircraft. I remember distinctly that the airplane was white with a red belly, and the pilot was wearing a blue polo shirt, Dave Clark headset and pair of those cool Ray Bans I've been meaning to pick up. All kidding aside, we were really close!

Air traffic control wasn't talking to the Mooney, and he never deviated from his course. So I wonder if that guy has any idea how close he came to dying that day. Had I remained in that turn, there is a very good chance we would have hit.

All I have to say is, "Thank you, Dave, I owe you big!"

Wait a minute, rewind the black box 15 seconds. ... Didn't ATC say the traffic was at "one o'clock?" If the traffic was ahead and to the right, why the heck would he tell me to turn right? The world will never know. My theory is that the controller got a bit nervous because of the

impending collision — he likely had some sort of collision alarm going off at his station — and said the wrong thing. No matter what I believe he meant to say, there was nearly a midair collision between two aircraft during broad daylight!

We shook off the near miss, said a few choice words (rated "M" for mature!) to each other about the you-know-what in the Mooney and motored in for the overhead recovery. The remainder of the flight was uneventful, and we made a full stop back home to debrief then retire to the squadron bar for a much needed adult beverage. I was proud of the crew, especially the students on board, for their ability to quickly get past what just happened and focus on the more important task of getting the plane safely on deck. Once inside, we debriefed and filed a hazardous air traffic report to the Air Force Safety Center.

In both cases above, the pilot at the controls, backed up

by the crew, did exactly what air traffic control told them to do and nearly died because of it. Now, keep in mind that air traffic controllers are highly intelligent, highly trained, highly motivated and highly regulated. They are bound by a set of regulations that make Air Force Instructions read like a cheap novel. One has to also consider the daunting task that most controllers face on a daily basis in regards to traffic they handle.

In the Alaska example, the controller was an "Anchorage Center" control-

"THE AIRPLANE WAS WHITE WITH A RED BELLY, AND THE PILOT WAS WEARING A BLUE POLO SHIRT, DAVE CLARK HEADSET AND PAIR OF THOSE COOL RAY BANS I'VE BEEN MEANING TO PICK UP. ... ALL KIDDING ASIDE, WE WERE REALLY CLOSE!"



by Senior Airman Caleb Pierce

ler and was physically sitting about 550 miles from where the incident happened. In fact, because of the mountainous terrain around Cold Bay, the plane was likely not even on the controller's radar screen. The missed approach holding altitude was 4,000 feet, and the southern half of the arc was 4,600 feet. The controller could have very likely issued the clearance with the assumption that the crew would maintain 4,000 feet until commencing the approach, vice maintaining that assigned altitude for the entire approach. Seemingly clear instructions led to confusion and near disaster.

The event at Little Rock happened in one of the most intensive military training areas in the nation. On any given week-day, Little Rock AFB launches and recovers somewhere around 40 C-130s. Add to this, Little Rock National Airport 20 miles to the south, an Army National Guard airfield 5 miles west, and two busy civil aviation fields within 20 miles of the field, and you have a swarm of airplanes at any given time under control of Little Rock approach. Also consider the weather the day of the incident: clear and a million. While we would normally think of clear skies being a positive thing, we also must consider that when the weather is good, people fly, and they fly visual flight rules. More people in the air, more likelihood of traffic conflicts. So, it's hard to estimate the number of contacts on the controller's screen that day, but it would be reasonable to guess he had 20 or more aircraft under his direct control.

As stated earlier, the one factor that can never be taken away from aviation — whether it be operators, controllers or ground handlers — is the human factor. Controllers, just like pilots, are human, and just like pilots, they make mistakes. No amount of training or regulations can totally prevent this. Did the controllers make mistakes in both cases listed? Yes. Did the aircrew also make mistakes in the scenarios? Most certainly yes. More important than the mistakes, however, are the lessons learned (see "Lessons Learned" at right). We must take incidents like these, analyze what happened and learn from them. And, most importantly, take what you learn, and pass it on! ✈

Lieutenant Fulcher was a U.S. Coast Guard Liaison flight safety officer with the 314th Air Wing at Little Rock AFB, Ark.

LESSONS LEARNED

▶▶ **Trust but verify.** If air traffic control hands you a clearance, abide by and execute it as stated. But take the time to double check your approach plate or chart to ensure you and the controller are on the "same page."

▶▶ **Take midair collision avoidance training seriously.** It is a significant part of any aviation safety program. Take the time to stop by your air station, squadron or wing safety office and read over the local policy. Then go back to your flight planning room and positively identify proximal airports and analyze where the highest potential for traffic conflict will be. The near midair discussed in the article happened on a corridor where lots of civilian traffic transits north and south just outside the airbase's Class D airspace. Make sure and look at any training routes or areas where you'll be operating outside of air traffic control radar contact. Consider also any agricultural areas that may have crop dusters operating on a routine basis. (While you're at it, take a look at the bird aircraft strike hazard info for your area; so you're just as prepared to avoid a midair with a snow goose as you are to avoid a Mooney.)

▶▶ **Take an active part in the process.** Like the number two aircraft in the story, if you're wing or element lead in a formation flight, don't just stare at the plane in front of you, relax and blindly rely on them to get you home. Take an active part in the process, and back up the leader in any way you can. In the example, the additional eyes and situational awareness in the number two aircraft — and the intervention by Maj. David Smith — likely saved his leader from a midair collision. Both scenarios took intervention by the aircrew members, or the outcomes could have turned out tragically.

— Lt. Joshua M. Fulcher

LIGHTNING STRIKE IN FLORIDA



By **CHRISSEY CUTTITA**
Photo by **DARIN RUSSELL**

With the arrival of the joint strike fighter at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., July 14, the military continues setting the historic milestones for the worldwide aviation industry in preparing the first F-35 Lightning II pilots.

Lt. Col. Eric Smith became a part of history himself as the first Airman to fly the new stealth fighter for his service, an honor he said he never expected during his 16 years in an Air Force flight suit.

"It all came to light six months ago," said Smith, who moved to the 33rd Fighter Wing in 2009 after spending two years as a developmental test pilot with the 46th Test Wing at Eglin AFB. "I was picked because of my test background and the training I had in 2005."

At Eglin, he was able to apply his experience flying A-10 Thunderbolt IIs and F-16 Fighting Falcons to the test mission before transferring over to the 33rd FW just as the wing ended its era of F-15 Eagle air dominance.

"Taking off in the F-35 for the first time, I experienced an adrenaline rush like I hadn't felt since I flew an A-10 for the first time," Smith said. "The difference this time is the fact that the F-35 is such

a new airplane. If something goes wrong, you may be the first pilot to deal with the problem with only your previous fighter experience to rely on. Fortunately, my first flight went off without a hitch."

As an A-10 "Warthog" pilot, he knew the risks of flying in a single seat aircraft.

"Your first flight in an unfamiliar airplane means it's also your first solo flight," he said. "Once you leave the ground you have the next two hours to figure out how to safely land the jet."

The pilot spent a month flying F-35 test missions to ensure the Air Force's smooth transition from developmental test flights at Edwards AFB, Calif., to the training flights that are scheduled to begin at Eglin by the end of the year.

Air Force Materiel Command's training program at Edwards is designed for test pilot school graduates with flight hours in a variety of airframes, Smith said. The pilot completed courses in F-35 academics, emergency procedures via simulator, engine run and high-speed taxi with three F-35 flights, while an instructor pilot flew in a chase plane.

"I'm extremely thrilled to be honored as the first Air Education and Training Command F-35 instructor pilot," Smith said. "It means a lot to me but more for the 33rd Fighter Wing (members) who can now execute the training plan they have been working on for two years."

F-35 LIGHTNING II ARRIVES AT EGLIN WITH FIRST AIR FORCE PILOT AT THE JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER'S CONTROLS



Lt. Col. Eric Smith, of the 58th Fighter Squadron, talks with his squadron and wing commanders after piloting the first F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter to its new home at Eglin AFB, Fla., July 14.

By Samuel King Jr.

“The F-35 is such a new airplane. If something goes wrong, you may be the first pilot to deal with the problem with only your previous fighter experience to rely on. . . . Once you leave the ground you have the next two hours to figure out how to safely land the jet.”

“We have a great team and will soon begin training F-35 pilots and maintainers,” he added.

Smith will oversee flight operations of the initial F-35 pilot cadre as the director of operations for the 58th Fighter Squadron. He said the training program will be more robust than what he needed to qualify in the F-35.

A student pilot at Eglin will receive approximately 200 hours of academics, 14 simulators, a high-speed taxi and six flights in the airplane before deemed qualified. Technological advances in virtual reality pilot and maintenance training are the biggest differences 33rd FW students will experience with the military's latest, greatest weapons system.

“I've got 80 hours in the simulator and only logged nine actual flying hours,” Smith said. “That is a testament to how good the simulator is. Everything is digital.”

Other new devices to be introduced are the F-35's unique set of pilot flight equipment, including an anti-gravity suit, a jacket with integral arm restraints and a helmet-mounted display system.

“It forced me to change all of my habits when it came to ‘strapping on’ the jet (for the first time),” Smith said. “The HMD is an extremely complex piece of equipment that uses two projectors to display independent images on the pilot's display visor.”

The pilot said it took approximately six hours to fit and focus the helmet that will eventually give pilots a full 360-degree view around them in flight using cameras located around the exterior of the aircraft.

The F-35 helmet-mounted display system provides a combination of impact protection, heads-up display information and night vision, combining legacy aircraft systems into a single unit, according to officials with Lockheed Martin.

Smith's experiences will be shared among an integrated team of 33rd FW Nomads, who are preparing for a pipeline of students from three different branches of service.

With the success of fifth generation stealth aviation training at the wing, the F-35 will provide air dominance to the U.S. and its coalition partners for the next several decades, he said. As the world's first multi-role stealth fighter, the F-35 is known for its superior range, cutting-edge avionics and next-generation sensor fusion. Each model shares breakthroughs in combat performance, survivability and support, while each is specifically tailored for unique service needs.

As for Smith, he'll continue to support the Air Force test mission at Edwards temporarily and return to Eglin as a senior leader for a squadron to which he personally delivered the first aircraft.

Ms. Cuttita is with the 96th Air Base Wing public affairs office at Eglin AFB, Fla.



Courtesy photo

Pararescuemen Staff Sgts. Mark Houghton (left) and Scott Dowd, from Detachment 1, 342nd Training Squadron, escort Lashaye Westbrook from the HH-60 Pave Hawk used in the recovery to the waiting ambulance at Archuleta County Airport at Stevens Field in Pagosa Springs, Colo., Aug. 1. Westbrook, a Farmington, N.M., native, became separated from a group hiking near Pagosa Springs and was lost in the rugged wilderness for two days.

PARARESCUEMEN SAVE LOST HIKER

KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. (AETCNS) — A helicopter crew and pararescuemen assigned to Kirtland Air Force Base recovered a hiker Aug. 1 who had been lost in Colorado since July 30.

The HH-60 Pave Hawk crew of four Airmen from Air Education and Training Command's 58th Special Operations Wing, and two pararescuemen from Detachment 1, 342nd Training Squadron, recovered Lashaye Westbrook, a 22-year-old from Farmington, N.M.

She had become separated from a group hiking near Pagosa Springs, Colo., and was reported missing at 5 p.m., July 30. Local civil authorities were notified and assembled a group of approximately 50 people to search for her on the ground.

On July 31, search coordination authorities requested support from the 58th SOW to help with one of their Pave Hawk helicopters. The first crew and pararescuemen launched from Kirtland at approximately 1:30 p.m.

Westbrook, dressed in shorts and a red top, had been reported missing in rugged terrain about 11 miles north of Pagosa Springs, Colo. The first crew conducted an airborne search for four hours before nightfall halted their efforts. They reported no sign of Westbrook during the search.

On Aug. 1, a second helicopter crew was launched to relieve the first, arriving at 7:30 a.m. to rendezvous with the ground team and continue the search. At approximately 10:20 a.m., pararescueman Staff Sgt. Mark Houghton spotted a person on the ground, although her clothing didn't match the description they'd been given of Westbrook. The crew decided to make a closer investigation. After a few overhead passes, they observed Westbrook waving a stick to

let them know she was the one they were looking for. Then the crew went to work figuring out a safe way to extract her.

Lt. Col. Brandon Deacon, the mission commander for this recovery, operated from a ground site near Pagosa Springs. Maj. Ryan Kay, the mission pilot, and Maj. Adam Rudolphi, the co-pilot, executed a precision hover in the steep terrain, as the flight engineer, Master Sgt. Jamie Karmann, lowered a pararescueman, Staff Sgt. Scott Dowd, on the rescue hoist to retrieve Westbrook. Dowd secured the hiker to the hoist and Karmann lifted them up 180 feet to the helicopter, where Houghton wrapped her in his jacket, assessed her for initial injuries and gave her water. The 512th Rescue Squadron helicopter crew also included Tech. Sgt. Rick Casto, aerial gunner.

After the recovery, the helicopter was just five minutes away from Stevens Airport, where the crew radioed ahead for an ambulance to provide medical treatment when they landed.

Westbrook was reported to be in good condition after being stranded for two days without shelter, food and water. During the ordeal, she also endured rain along with overnight low temperatures in the 40s. The recovery crew said she told them she was relieved, tired and cold, and just wanted to sleep.

Kirtland AFB is the home of Detachment 1, 342nd Training Squadron, the only pararescue training mission in the Air Force. The 24-week Pararescue Recovery Specialist Course includes field medical care and extrication basics, field tactics, mountaineering, combat tactics, advanced parachuting and helicopter insertion/extraction.

Pararescuemen are among the most highly trained emergency trauma specialists in the U.S. military. With their medical and rescue expertise, along with their deployment capabilities, pararescuemen are able to perform life-saving missions in the world's most remote areas.

— Connie Rankin
377th Air Base Wing public affairs

'CULTURE OF RISK TOLERANCE' CITED IN T-38 CRASH PROBE

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas — Investigators found that the Feb. 11 T-38C Talon crash landing at Ellington Field, Texas, resulted from a series of mistakes by a fatigued pilot during landing, and they admonished the pilot's squadron for creating a "culture of risk tolerance."

The pilot, from the 14th Flying Training Wing at Columbus Air Force Base, Miss., became disoriented and misjudged the landing runway, lost altitude too quickly and allowed his airspeed to fall below a safe level, according to the Air Education and Training Command accident investigation report. This resulted in catastrophic damage to the T-38's landing gear and right wing.

The mishap occurred during the fourth sortie of the day as a night solo continuations-training mission into Ellington Field, near Houston, on a squadron cross-country sortie. The pilot safely departed the aircraft when it came to rest on the ground, and he sustained only minor injuries.

In addition to the culture of risk tolerance, the report cited inadequate operational risk management of the cross-country weekend plan.

"Inappropriate supervisory policy, combined with inadequate

ORM, led to the mishap pilot flying a high-risk mission profile," the report said. The board further found that the pilot's fatigue, resulting from the aggressive flight plan approved by his squadron, substantially contributed to the mishap.

"The sortie was (the mishap pilot's) fourth sortie of the day and was flown entirely at night. ... This mishap was caused by the authorization and execution of a mission having an unnecessarily high level of risk relative to the real benefits."

"Outside of these cross-country weekends, it was rare for an (instructor pilot) to fly four sorties in one day. There was a mindset that a day consisting of four continuation training sorties was generally less risky than a day consisting of three student pilot instructional sorties," the report said. "The sortie was (the mishap pilot's) fourth sortie of the day and was flown entirely at night. ... This mishap was caused by the authorization and execution of a mission having an unnecessarily high level of risk relative to the real benefits."

Damage to the T-38 — landing gear, engines, right wing and tail section — was assessed at \$2.1 million. The impact also caused minor damage to the runway, but no damage to private property, the report said.

According to Col. Creig A. Rice, AETC director of safety, risk mitigations were put in place to address the issues outlined in the accident investigation report.



When he became disoriented and misjudged the runway, a pilot with the 14th Flying Training Wing at Columbus AFB, Miss., crashed a T-38 Talon at Ellington Field, Texas. The crash landing caused \$2.1 million in damage to the landing gear, engines, right wing and tail section of the twin-engine supersonic jet.

By Master Sgt. Dale C. Hanson III