

Wingman Charlie



BY SENIOR AIRMAN
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Wingman Charlie is just a guy with a backpack, but he's become a local hero at Kunsan Air Base, South Korea.

He roams the base nightlife scene with his survival-kit backpack, prepared to help however he can, whether it's assisting a fellow Airman home or "super gluing" a girl's broken heel.

Parched? He has water. Bug bitten? He has bug spray and itch cream. Injured? He has bandages in his first aid kit.

He's ready for any situation, typical or far-fetched — rope, a signal mirror, Midol, roach spray, Gorilla Glue and much more.

A quiet and unassuming guy, Senior Airman Charles Sothikhoun, 8th Maintenance Squadron nondestructive inspector, is hesitant to take credit for his good deeds. When asked whether he once dug through a sandpit for eight hours to help a stranger find his wedding band, he responded, "Oh, that? It was only six hours."

Although "Charlie," as he's known around the Wolf Pack, wouldn't talk about all the ways he has helped people, there was an outpouring of witnesses willing to vouch for this ultimate wingman.

"Charlie is everyone's best friend here, whether they realize it or not," said Senior Airman Justin Ogburn, 8th MXS precision-guided munitions crew chief. "It's almost like he has a sixth sense for someone in need. I don't know how many times I have needed him for bug spray, and he just shows up out of nowhere.

"I had a bike wreck a few weeks ago and posted about it on Facebook," Ogburn continued. "Charlie came and found me after work to see if I needed first aid. He is always concerned for his fellow Airmen, and that is what makes Charlie the greatest wingman ever."

Bug spray is one of the most requested items from Charlie's arsenal, but he's also prepared for any situation that might arise — rubber gloves, flashlights, umbrellas, beef jerky, a sewing kit and much, much more. And, if a comrade's blues uniform ever needs spiffing up on a Monday, he carries a lint brush and shoe polish as well.

So what leads him to voluntarily carry around his 20- to 30-pound backpack on a daily basis? Was there some event that sparked the creation of his store of random, yet useful, supplies? Does he feel like a superhero helping so many people?

Getting Charlie to divulge these details took some coaxing.

"I'm not a vigilante who has a specific reason I decided to start doing this," said Charlie. "I just do what I believe is right. People are trying to have a good time, and I want to make sure no one gets in trouble or is forgotten or left alone. I do it to the best of my ability.

"I do it every night because there is always someone else working, too," he added. "Cops, civil engineers, the air traffic controllers, flight line workers, officers ... they are all working."

Although a quiet person, he's not shy about approaching any situation to make sure everyone is alright.

"Charlie once stopped to make sure I was okay walking home with the group I was with," said Senior Airman Kelli Brown, previously with the 8th MXS but now stationed in England. "I'm a girl and a mechanic, so most of my friends are men. It was very sweet of him to make sure it was the right circumstance.

"He is such a truly caring, responsible and kind person. I don't know how he is always so prepared, no matter what situation you're in, but it's a blessing," Brown added. "We should all aim to be better wingmen like Charlie. This would be a much better Air Force if we took half as good of care of everyone as he has his Kunsan family."

Charlie's efforts have been recognized at all levels, from the wing commander when he earned Kunsan AB's "Pride of the Pack," to group commanders at softball games and, most importantly, all the Airmen he helps.

"He personifies the wingman concept," said Chief Master Sgt. Todd Boyle, 8th MXS superintendent. "At a base like Kunsan, it's

reassuring to know someone like him is looking out for friends and families. He's given me bug repellent at the Loring Club before, and I've seen him give someone medicated ointment for their rash. He's not in it for the recognition ... he really cares about the Wolf Pack."

There were many accounts of his kindness: providing Neosporin and Band-aids, helping a friend spackle up holes in his dorm room wall, countless times he handed out water bottles.

"I have no doubt Charlie would give you the shirt off of his back in a blinding blizzard," said Staff Sgt. Alfonso Vigil, 8th MXS. "Scratch that ... he wouldn't have to. I'm sure that bag of his has an emergency blanket and hand warmers in it." ❖

