

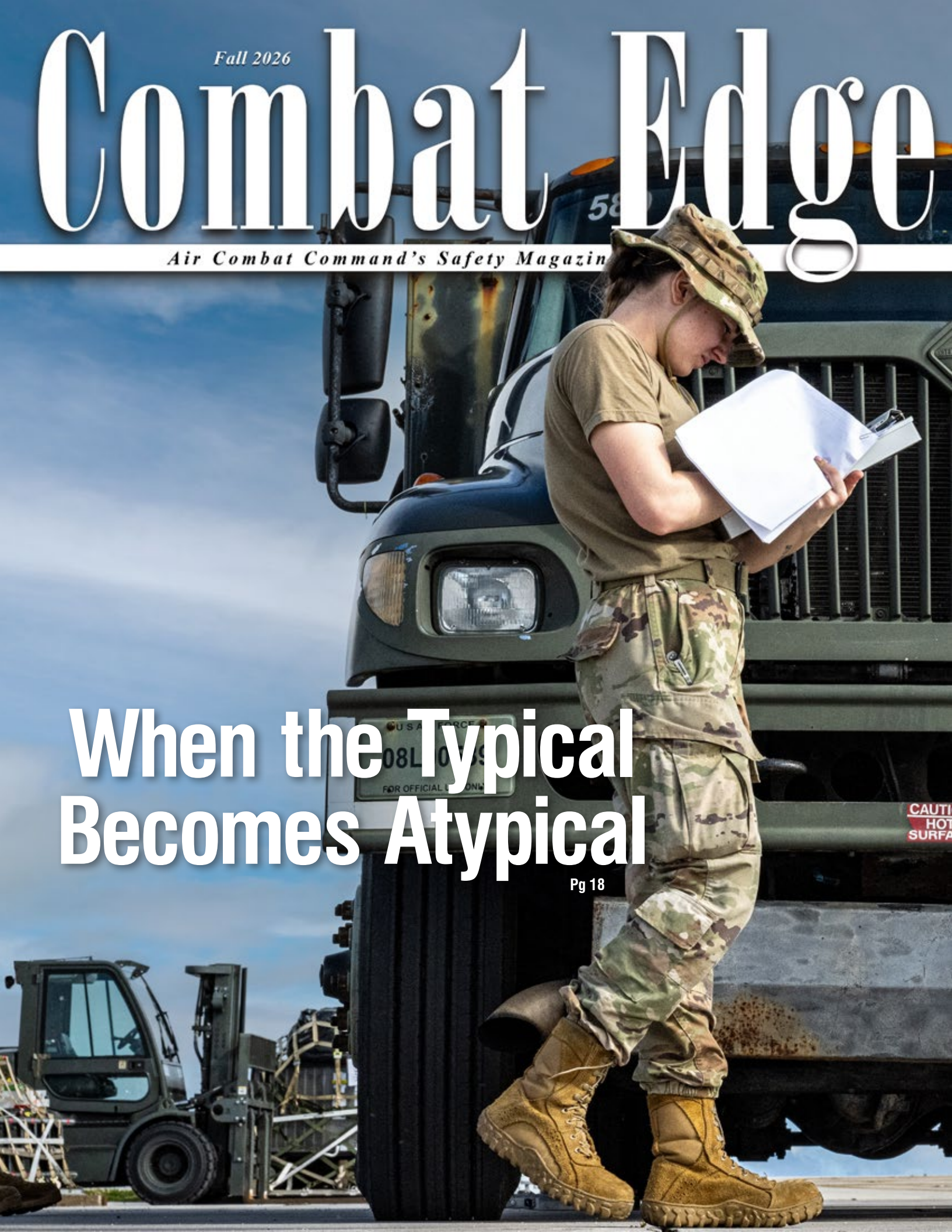
Fall 2026

Combat Edge

Air Combat Command's Safety Magazine

When the Typical Becomes Atypical

Pg 18



Aviation Safety Action Program

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(i.e., AMC or AETC Form 97) ...

File a HATR ...

Report a birdstrike ...

Or submit an identity-protected ASAP



Report it on
SAFEREP

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COVER PHOTO BY TSGT CURT BEACH

ACCent



In the United States Air Force, executing the mission to fly, fight, and win relies on multi-million-dollar systems, but the Airmen remain the most precious resource. That does not preclude Airmen from also being the greatest risk to safety not only on the flightline, but also off duty. The human element is the most volatile variable in the safety equation, whether executing a mission or enjoying well-deserved downtime.

On duty, people are the ultimate force multiplier. A crew chief's exacting eye during a pre-flight inspection or a wingman calling "knock-it-off" during a high-stress training exercise protects assets and preserves lives. Airmen have an incredible capacity for adaptability, situational awareness, and proactive leadership; however, this same human nature is also the greatest vulnerability. In a high-tempo environment, fatigue, complacency, and distraction can lead to breakdowns in discipline, and result in poor risk management. A single split-second error can compromise a critical weapon system or cost an irreplaceable life.

This paradox of being our own best asset as well as our own worst enemy doesn't end when the duty day does. In fact, off-duty hours often present the highest risks. Away from the structured discipline of the squadron, complacency can easily slip into our personal lives. Whether it's speeding on the highway, driving under the influence, neglecting proper safety gear on a motorcycle, or pushing physical limits without planning, off-duty decisions can be just as lethal as operational errors. A mishap off duty still takes a critical Airman out of the fight, impacting unit readiness and devastating families.

To bridge this gap, our culture must extend beyond the work environment. Risk management isn't isolated to on-the-job execution; it is an enduring practice that can be applied anytime and anywhere. Airmen must look out for each other off duty just as fiercely as they do during a deployment. Risk is ever present, and continuously seeking out ways to avoid it, reduce it, or appropriately accept it remains vital. By recognizing that we are both our greatest shield and our greatest hazard, we can empower each other to make smart decisions around the clock, keeping our force safe, ready, and lethal.



Col Jesse Doyle
Director of Safety

A person wearing safety glasses and a dark shirt is holding a flashlight, illuminating a dark area. The scene is dimly lit, with the flashlight beam creating a bright spot on a surface. The person's face is partially visible, and they appear to be focused on the task at hand.

“A significant danger looms within our aircraft, creeping silently . . .”

Seeing the Unseeable: How NDI Keeps the Air Force Flying

By SMSgt Matthew R. Baker

While the roar of a jet engine and the visual might of military aircraft project undeniable strength, the foundation of that power lies in a silent, unseen effort. For every hour an aircraft spends in the sky, a team of highly-skilled technicians has already spent countless hours on the ground ensuring its structural integrity. This is the world of Nondestructive Inspection (NDI), whose unseen work provides the crucial confidence that allows pilots to fly and the U.S. Air Force to operate an aging, yet formidable, fleet safely and effectively.

A significant danger looms within our aircraft, creeping silently within a structural or non-structural component. This danger is just hours, days, or months away from becoming critical. Defects like cracks can emerge in the early stages of part manufacturing, or develop in-service from conditions like operational stress and material strain. If left unchecked, these defects can grow in severity over time, leading to catastrophic failure.

The average age of aircraft in the U.S. Air Force is estimated to be 30 years, and some of the oldest, like the KC-135 tankers, have been in service for over 60 years. These aircraft are continuously pushed well past their original service lives, and for good reason. The U.S. Air Force is the world's premier air force, and it cannot wait for the delivery of newer platforms. We must continue to operate these tried-and-true military aircraft, but with a safety-minded approach.

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joshua Fernandez, 52nd Maintenance Squadron nondestructive inspection craftsman, checks for cracks on a travel pod lug with a UV light during a fluorescent penetrant inspection at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, Sept. 23, 2025. The UV light makes fluorescent dye glow, allowing hidden cracks or defects to be detected during inspection. Photo by A1C Sydney Franklin



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Zachary Pierce, 86th Maintenance Squadron non-commissioned officer in charge of nondestructive inspections, inspects the interior of a C-130J Super Hercules tail at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Feb. 4, 2021. Photo by A1C Taylor D. Slater



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Riley McDonald, 56th Equipment Maintenance Squadron non-destructive inspection journeyman, prepares for an inspection on a F-35A Lightning II, Feb. 17, 2026, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The F-35 undergoes repeated takeoffs, landings, and high-performance maneuvers during daily training operations. Routine and specialized inspections conducted by NDI Airmen help to detect early signs of material fatigue before they become major structural issues. Photo by A1C Tekorey Watkins

It's no secret: The United States Air Force has a powerful weapon to combat and prevent system failure. Enter Nondestructive Inspection technicians and their techniques.

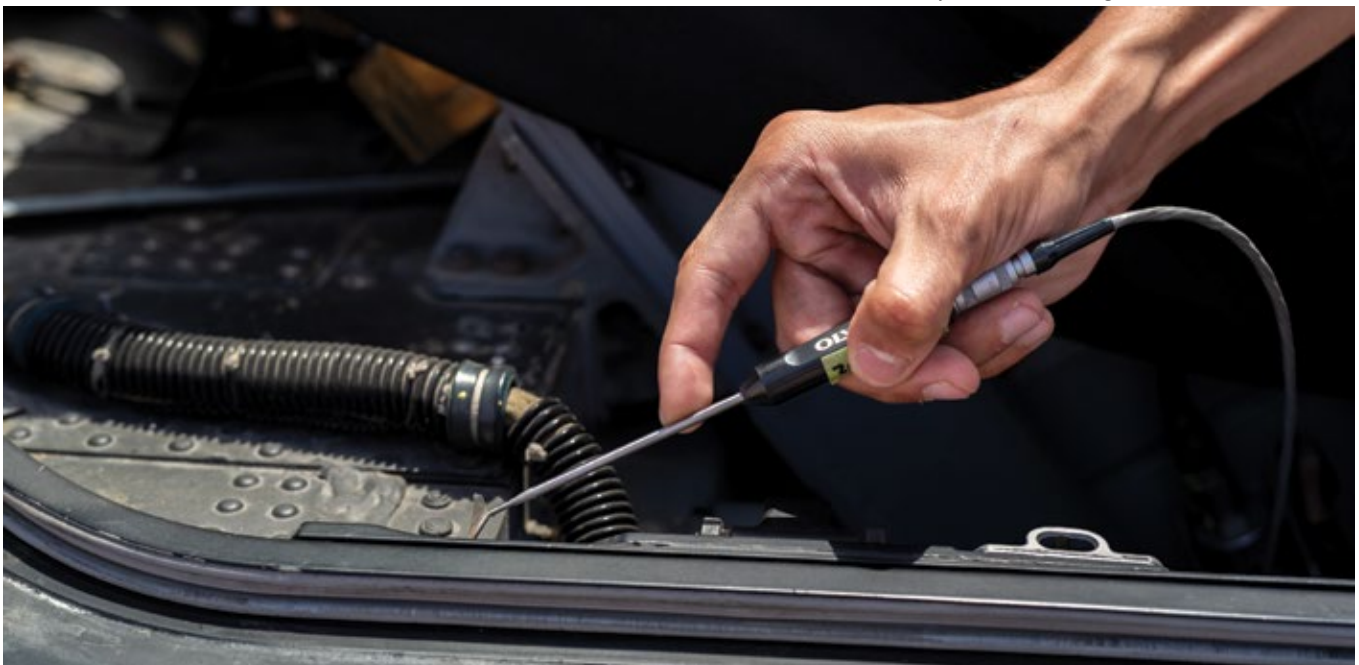
The First Line of Defense

Nondestructive Inspection, commonly known as NDI within the Air Force maintenance community, provides a powerful and proactive defense against the slow march of material fatigue and stress. Far from being a simple checkbox, it is a critical enabler of airpower, delivering tangible benefits across the entire spectrum of military aviation. For every hour an aircraft is in the sky, it is the unseen work of NDI that provides confidence that it will return safely. By identifying potential issues early, NDI ensures more aircraft are structurally sound, safe, and available for training and operational missions. This directly translates to increased readiness and the ability to project airpower whenever and wherever it is needed.

A Toolkit for Seeing the Unseeable

To find these hidden threats, NDI technicians employ a variety of techniques, each suited for different materials and potential defects. These methods allow us to see the unseeable,

U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Dylan Alcantara, 378th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron non-destructive inspection journeyman, uses a probe attached to an eddy current machine to inspect for cracks along the canopy seal of an F-16C Fighting Falcon within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, May 12, 2025. The canopy seal ensures an airtight closure over the cockpit of the aircraft to enable pilots to conduct aerial combat maneuvers at an altitude of up to 50,000 ft. Photo by SrA Erin Dunkleberger



confirming the structural integrity of a component without causing any damage. Think of it as a team of specialists, each with a unique way of examining a patient; together, they create a complete picture of its health. The primary methods used across the Air Force are:

- Liquid Penetrant Inspection
- Magnetic Particle Inspection
- Eddy Current Testing
- Ultrasonic Testing
- Radiographic Testing (X-ray)

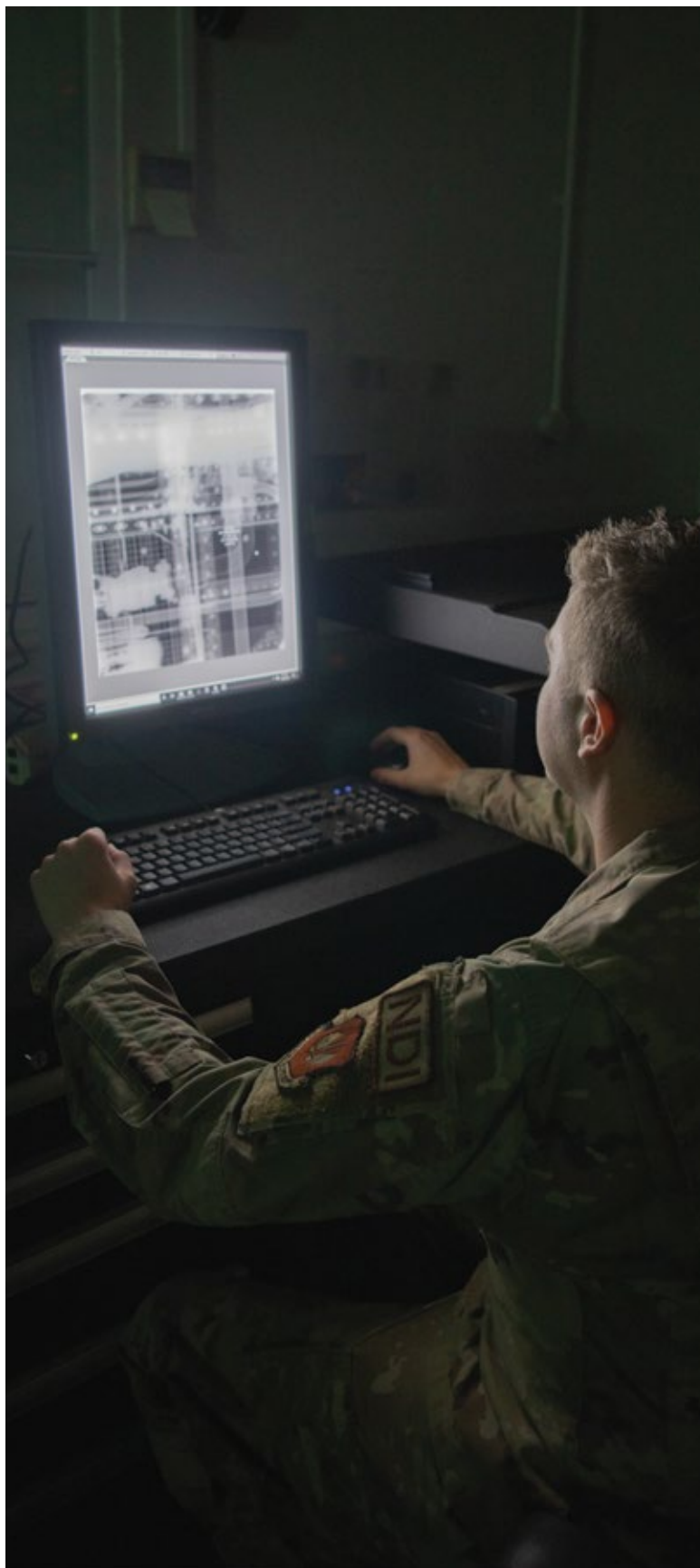
Some lesser-known, specialized technologies like Thermography and Laser Shearography are also employed for specific inspections across many different aircraft and support equipment. Each of these methods requires extensive training and a keen eye for detail. The decision of which technique to use depends on the material, the type of defect suspected, and the part's geometry. By mastering this diverse toolkit, NDI technicians ensure that every component, from a simple bolt to a critical wing spar, is fit for flight.

Fueling Future Safety

This data serves a vital purpose beyond immediate repair; it feeds a continuous cycle of improvement. The information gathered from countless inspections provides invaluable real-world data to engineers. This data on wear patterns, stress points, and material performance informs future maintenance schedules and even influences the design and material choices for new aircraft, creating a safer and more durable future fleet.

A Personal Reflection

On a personal note, I have spent the last twenty-three years within the aircraft maintenance community. After my first six years as an aircraft electrician, I was given the opportunity to cross-train into the NDI career field, and it has been very rewarding. Specifically, I was given the opportunity to assist Northrop Grumman with improving the KC-10 Horizontal Stabilizer Inspection (HSPI) process before the aircraft's eventual retirement. I found numerous discontinuities and defects throughout my career that have all led to a readier and safer fleet. I'm humbled to carry this knowledge on in my current role as the Command Inspector General's Fabrication Superintendent, where I have the privilege of evaluating ACC's NDI, and fabrications, combat readiness. ✈️



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Kyle Effertz, 48th Equipment Maintenance Squadron non-destructive inspector, inspects an x-ray film from an aircraft ramp at RAF Lakenheath, England, July 26, 2023. NDI Airmen are tasked with ensuring aircraft and weapons systems parts are structurally safe with no damage, flaws or stress fractures. Photo by A1C Renee Nicole S.N. Finona

Safety at the End of the World

By MSgt Dillon J. Neth

The building groans under the force of a wind that sounds like a freight train. You look out the window to see nothing but a churning white vortex. The street, the next building, the entire world, has vanished. A quick check shows sustained winds at 80 mph, with gusts hitting 112 mph. It's just another Tuesday at Pituffik Space Base, Greenland.

Every Airman and Guardian stationed here understands this reality. At the Top of the World, the environment itself is an adversary, turning simple tasks into complex, high-risk evolutions. A quick five-minute fix on a piece of equipment can easily become a 30-minute struggle against the elements when you factor in 24-hour winter darkness and soul-crushing cold. Our Extreme Cold Weather Gear is lifesaving, but it presents a paradox; the bulky gloves and layers needed to prevent frostbite severely reduce dexterity. A routine task requiring fine motor skills becomes a fumbling, frustrating challenge, in which dropping a small screw means it's lost to the ice and snow forever.

Then there's the daily commute, which is perhaps the most deceptive hazard. With no trees to block the wind, loose snow is constantly scoured from the ice cap, creating ground blizzards that can plunge you from perfect clarity to zero visibility in the space of a few feet. The ground

and sky merge into a single, disorienting void. There is no "pulling over" when you can't see the edge of a road that may have a 10-foot drop-off. The roads themselves, hard-packed gravel in the summer, become sheathed in a permanent layer of wind-polished ice, waiting for a moment of overconfidence to send a vehicle sliding into the unforgiving landscape.

Finally, there is the local wildlife, a threat far beyond the typical BASH program.

We don't just deal with birds; we contend with 900-pound Musk Ox blocking runways, and Arctic Foxes that treat our mission-critical cables like chew toys. Then there is the apex predator: the Polar Bear. This is not a shy animal you can scare away by yelling. It is the largest land carnivore on Earth. Weighing 2,000lbs and standing over 10ft tall on its hind legs, they view our area as their personal hunting ground. They are silent, fast, and lethal. The danger is so profound



A polar bear watches the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Healy (WAGB 20) on Sep 22, 2023. The Coast Guard operates America's fleet of icebreakers and is the sole source of year-round capability to provide a surface presence in the Arctic. Photo by Sgt Carter Acton

Map by shutterstock.com

PITUFFIK SPACE BASE

The Top of the World




that their mere presence dictates operational procedures and strict rules of movement for all personnel.

So...How do you keep everyone safe when the environment is actively hostile, the nearest Air Force base is over 2,000 miles away, and the local wildlife can end you in a heartbeat?

Ultimately, the single most effective weapon system in our Arctic arsenal isn't a radar or a satellite dish; it's our culture. No amount of Extreme Cold Weather Gear, no line item in a local operating instruction, and no pre-season storm brief can, by itself, defend against the relentless hazards of Pituffik. True safety is forged in the space between our people. It's the seasoned NCO who halts a job not to chastise, but to teach the right way. It's the junior Guardian who feels empowered to respectfully challenge unsafe driving practices without fear of reprisal. It's the wingman who recognizes the signs of fatigue in a teammate and intervenes. This shared, unwavering commitment to procedural discipline and mutual protection is what turns a group of individuals into a hardened unit, capable of operating in the most unforgiving environment on Earth.

Here at the Top of the World, a culture of safety isn't just a program—it is the bedrock of our readiness, and the guarantee that we all go home safe. 🗡️



North American Aerospace Defense Command F-35 Lightning II fighter aircraft from the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing lands at Pituffik Space Force Base, Greenland, Oct. 7, 2025. Operating in the Arctic provides the flexibility and adaptability needed to overcome logistical hurdles in a dynamic and unforgiving environment. Greenland as part of the Kingdom of Denmark has long played an important role in the defense of North America, which strengthens NORAD's ability to protect the continent from today's threats and emerging challenges from all approaches. Photo by SrA Erica Paculan



A member of the United States Air Force prepares a Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker for takeoff to refuel a CF-188 Hornet assigned to Air Task Force (ATF) at Pituffik Space Base, Greenland, on January 26, 2026, in support of Operation NOBLE DEFENDER, an air defense mission conducted under the direction of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The operation is designed to validate NORAD's ability to defend Canada and the United States against threats from all avenues of approach through sustained, dispersed operations across the Alaska, Canada, and Continental United States NORAD regions. Photo by Master Corporal Bélynda Casse, Imaging Services, 3 Wing Bagotville



The Culture Shift Behind the Strategy: The Power of *Safety First, Safety Always!*

By TSgt Mark A. Carter

The 99th Logistics Readiness Squadron (LRS) has engineered a paradigm shift in operational management, proving that a deeply-integrated, leadership-driven safety culture is a strategic force multiplier rather than a bureaucratic impediment. Through a visionary overhaul of its safety framework, the squadron has forged a more resilient, effective, and mission-ready force, establishing a compelling business case that human capital preservation is the most direct path to mission assurance.

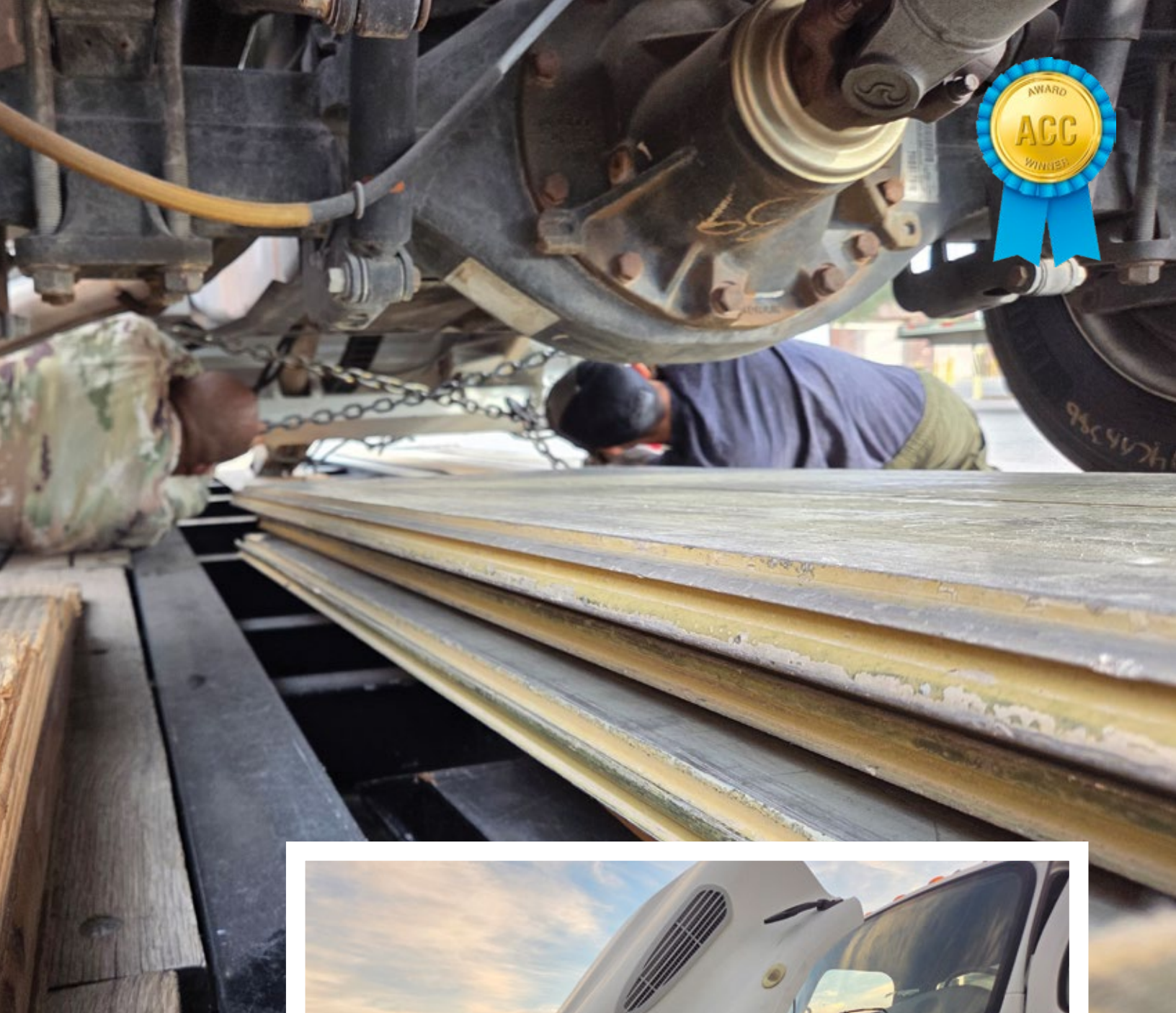
The transformation began with a strategic re-envisioning of the Unit Safety Representative role, responsible for oversight of 600 personnel across seven diverse functional areas. Leadership moved beyond a compliance-oriented posture, and initiated a proactive,

enterprise-wide approach by creating a decentralized network of 24 Flight Safety Representatives. This shift placed ownership of safety from a single office to every corner of the unit, empowering Airmen to identify hazards early and intervene before risks escalated. The impact was immediate: Systemic deficiencies tracked in the Air Force Safety Automated System dropped by 75%, signaling a profound cultural shift.

This shift was rooted in a simple truth: “Safety First, Safety Always” isn’t meant to be a tagline or filler tossed out during briefings. It represents a mindset, one that demands Airmen look at everything they do through a safety lens. The squadron recognized how easy it is to develop tunnel vision when locked in on the task at hand, pushing to get the job done. Focus is good, but unchecked focus can narrow awareness. That’s

when potential mishaps hide just outside the blinders. By teaching Airmen to widen their field of view, the 99 LRS built a culture in which vigilance is instinctive, and risk awareness is second nature.

Another breakthrough came from re-engineering the incident reporting and analysis workflow. The legacy system, long recognized as a bottleneck, was replaced with a streamlined, dedicated reporting channel that provided senior leaders with near real-time situational



99 LRS photos provided by
TSgt Mark A. Carter



“Protecting Airmen is the surest way to protect the mission”

awareness. This improvement strengthened operational resilience and ensured rapid response to emerging hazards. Its effectiveness was proven during the government shutdown, when the squadron maintained flawless continuity in mishap and high-risk activity reporting despite external pressures.

The squadron's new safety culture faced its most demanding test during high-stakes convoy operations supporting presidential logistics. In an environment with zero tolerance for error, every mile of the 2,100-mile mission required precision, discipline, and a

shared commitment to risk management. The result was the safe transit of all personnel and assets without a single safety incident, an outcome made possible by a team that had fully internalized safety as an operational imperative.

The return on investment has been both quantifiable and remarkable. Across the 99th Air Base Wing, open safety findings in the Airman Performance Management System fell from 86 to just three, a dramatic indicator of accountability and continuous improvement. Senior leadership took notice, awarding the team ten challenge coins in recognition of its innovation and impact.

The 99 LRS has set a new benchmark for what a modern, mission-aligned safety culture can achieve. Its model is scalable, its results undeniable, and its message unmistakable: Protecting Airmen is the surest way to protect the mission. “Safety First, Safety Always” is not a slogan; it is a strategy, and for the 99 LRS, it has become a defining advantage. ✈️







A Flicker on the Flightline

By MSgt Armando E. "Manny" Ramirez



The night was quiet at Balad Air Base, as it often is at 0200. I was a Dedicated Crew Chief with an F-16 unit, working the midnight-to-noon shift. My jet was loaded and ready, parked in front of its Hardened Aircraft Shelter (HAS). Armed with two AIM-120s and a few GBUs, it was awaiting its pilot for a scheduled sortie. The pre-launch routine was just that—routine...or so I thought.

As I was opening the canopy, a fuel truck rumbled up, its driver ready to top off my jet. I walked over and explained that the aircraft was already fueled and moments from launch. As he radioed his dispatch, my Production Superintendent (Pro Super) pulled up. "What's going on?" he asked. I explained the fuel truck mix-up and asked if he knew of another jet needing fuel. As he scanned his status board, a flicker of orange caught my eye. It was across the taxiway, next to the adjacent HAS where two more fully loaded Vipers were parked, also prepped for launch within the hour. I leaned over the bed of the Pro Super's truck to get a better look. It wasn't just a flicker: A tree was on fire.

"Fire!" The word shot out of my mouth before I could even think. I didn't wait for a response; I just ran. The Pro Super told me later that my immediate reaction was so fast that, even though he was in a truck, I beat him to the scene on foot.

When I reached the fire, the source was immediately apparent. A pile of old, used wheel chocks, soaked in a career's worth of hydraulic fluid, oil, and fuel, formed the base of the blaze. The previous unit, in their haste to redeploy, had simply left them there, a pile of combustible waste waiting for a spark. The ignition source? Our designated smoke pit was right next to it. Someone had carelessly flicked a cigarette butt into the pile.

My focus shifted to the two F-16s. Each had a 150 lb Halon fire bottle positioned nearby—standard

procedure. I knew those bottles had to remain available for the aircraft themselves. I scanned the area. Inside the HAS, I spotted a third, unused fire bottle. I grabbed it and, with adrenaline fueling me, towed the heavy bottle over to the flames. At that moment, the Pro Super arrived and helped me deploy the Halon. We directed the agent at the base of the fire, fighting to keep the flames from spreading toward the live-loaded jets. He was on the radio, calling for an emergency tow team to get the aircraft out of the danger zone, while also notifying Maintenance Operations Control, who in turn scrambled the fire department.

The first aircraft was towed to safety, then the second. Just as the last of the Halon sputtered from our extinguisher, the fire trucks rolled up. The immediate danger was over. No one was hurt, and not a single aircraft was damaged. In the quiet aftermath, I had a moment to reflect. I had always wondered if I were a fight-or-flight person. In that instant, with millions of dollars of warfighting assets and lives on the line, I was relieved to know the answer.

The Pro Super submitted my actions for a safety award, which I was honored to receive from the base Wing Commander. But the real reward was the lesson reinforced that night: Vigilance is not a part-time job. A single act of carelessness, improperly disposing of waste, a thoughtless flick of a cigarette, combined to create a chain of events that could have ended in catastrophe. On the flightline, even in the dead of night, the next emergency is only a flicker away. ✈️



An F-16 Fighting Falcon waits in front of a hardened aircraft shelter at Joint Base Balad, Iraq. Photo by SrA Jason Epley



“... familiarity can create a false sense of security, particularly when gradual changes make hazardous conditions feel normal over time.”

A Twelve-Inch Drop That Changed Everything

By TSgt Wesley J. Carrel

The day on the flightline was normal, but the environment was far from it. We were in the middle of a major construction project—replacing sections of the aircraft apron—and the work had significantly altered an area that usually was familiar and predictable. Temporary driving lanes, uneven surfaces, and exposed edges had become part of daily operations. Over time, those conditions began to feel routine rather than hazardous.

A foreign military member who was permanently assigned to the base was operating a jammer (bomb loading vehicle) on the flightline, and was driving along one of the temporary paved lanes that ran alongside the construction area. The difference in height between the driving surface and the ground next to it was approximately twelve inches. At a glance, the difference did not appear significant, but created a clear hazard in an environment where vehicles were in constant motion.

As the jammer moved forward, one of the rear wheels slipped off the edge of the driving lane, causing the vehicle to tilt suddenly and throw the driver from the seat. Within seconds, the jammer tipped over and landed on the Airman's ankle, leaving no opportunity for him or anyone nearby to react before the damage was done.

Recognizing the severity of the situation, I contacted the Maintenance Operations Center via radio, declared a ground emergency, and requested first responders to the scene. The area was secured while emergency personnel responded, and due to the extent of the injury, the injured member was transported off base to the nearest hospital via Life Flight. Despite the best efforts of medical personnel, the Airman lost his leg below the knee.

The incident was a powerful reminder of how quickly routine operations can turn into life-altering events. The accident was not caused by a single error, but rather by several contributing factors that came together at the wrong time, including construction-related changes to the environment and insufficient controls to mitigate the hazards those changes introduced. A twelve-inch drop didn't seem

significant on its own, but, when combined with vehicle movement and a lack of edge protection, it became enough to cause a catastrophic outcome.

There were no physical barriers, warning markers, or edge protections in place to prevent a vehicle from leaving the driving lane, and those simple controls could have stopped the jammer from slipping off the surface entirely. This experience reinforced the importance of treating temporary conditions with the same level of risk management as permanent infrastructure, especially on a flightline where the margin for error is already small.

The takeaway from this experience is that familiarity can create a false sense of security, particularly when gradual changes make hazardous conditions feel normal over time. Construction environments demand constant reassessment, deliberate communication, and proactive hazard identification to ensure risks are addressed before they result in irreversible consequences.

One small drop and one overlooked risk changed someone's life forever. ✈️



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Megan Lehto, weapon specialist for the 148th Fighter Wing, is giving a thumbs up to Staff Sgt. Macy Sunnarborg, weapon specialist for the 148th Fighter Wing, as she operates a weapon loading vehicle "jammer" during a weapons load competition at Joe Foss Field, South Dakota, June 7 2025. Weapons load competitions allow Airmen to showcase their efficiency, readiness, precision, and teamwork loading munitions onto a F-16 Fighting Falcon in a fast paced environment. Photo by SrA Kyle St. Pierre



When the Typical Becomes Atypical

By TSgt Devon M. Capsouto

On a seemingly normal summer day in May of 2025, I arrived at my job as a fuels distribution supervisor in Petroleum, Oils, and Lubricants. I expected my day to be a standard one consisting of spot-checks, paperwork, and the typical smoke-pit group chats. What happened later that day was a stark reminder of the risk involved with driving a 70,000 lb tank truck, along with a sudden, rapid exercise of real-time risk management.

From May 19th through 23rd, Tyndall AFB was home to the inaugural Chief Initial Mission Command Training. This exercise sought to bring together several Chief Master Sergeants from the Air Force to simulate the speed and unpredictability of real-world taskings. The event included various exercises for the chiefs, one of which involved my shop. Our unit was to provide a C-300 (smaller set tank truck containing diesel or Mogas fuels) along with an R-11 (heavy set tank truck used for aircraft refueling). All we had to do was drive both trucks from point A to point B, along a somewhat busy highway to our destination 8 miles away.

Simple, right? Preparation was a piece of cake. The C-300 goes off-installation all the time, so there was no problem there. To mitigate unnecessary risk, the R-11 would be empty for this presentation, and would be followed by an expeditor in a bread van.

We were taught always to review the paperwork when we are handed a refueling unit. The forms for my R-11 said it was completely empty, which was what we had requested from the Fuels Service Center (FSC). We got our trucks and hit the road, thinking this would be an easy kill. We all expected to be heading home by 1500.





Fifteen minutes into my drive with the R-11, I noticed things felt sluggish. While it is typical to drive this type of truck under the speed limit to allow for greater braking distance (and because we were hauling hazardous materials) this was different. Considering how much I was trying to accelerate, things felt unusually slow. Less than a minute later, my gut feeling was proven correct by an extremely loud “BANG!” on the front driver’s side. Before I knew it, the truck’s cab was filled with smoke and the smell of cooked rubber.

The sound was scary. If you’ve had a blow-out on a regular car, multiply that experience by 1,000, and you have the sound of a blown tire on a semi-truck. I checked the steering and assessed the hazard as quickly as possible. Was I losing control of the



“the risk was never mitigated because we trusted—but did not verify—the information”

truck? No, thankfully, I still had a degree of control. Also, there were no civilian vehicles in front of me, and the expeditor following me was able to brake and get other vehicles to stay back. With those details in mind, I slammed on the air brakes (which were completely destroyed on the driver’s side after the blowout) like my life depended on it. Stopping seemed to take forever. Knowing that losing control was not an option, I was able to pull the truck over to the side of the road with no injuries to myself or anyone on the road.

Afterward, we discovered the paperwork I had trusted had been wrong. Despite being listed as empty, my truck was completely full. Therefore, the risk was never mitigated because we trusted—but did not verify—the information. The tires also

were a point of contention. After a discussion with Refueler Maintenance, they had admitted to having put tires on the truck that were not intended to be used on public roads, but had been used in order to avoid the expense of purchasing new ones.

Overall, this was a reminder to take risk mitigation seriously every day, and to keep in mind that the need to exercise real-time risk management can occur when you least expect it. We owe it to ourselves and others always to do our due diligence. Without it this story could have ended differently. ✈️

U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Jacob Rosales and Airman 1st Class Kwaku Owusu, 475th Expeditionary Air Base Squadron Vehicle Maintenance section, work beneath an R-11 fuel truck at Camp Simba, Kenya, Oct. 20, 2025. Their efforts help sustain the daily operations that support flightline and base-wide missions. Photo by SrA Carl Good



2nd Quarter FY26 Awards



Flight Line Safety

Maj Joshua D. Dotson, Maj Thomas C. Davis
Capt Cole A. Allison (not pictured), Capt Samuel K. Drake (not pictured)
482 ATKS, 25 ATKW
Shaw AFB, SC



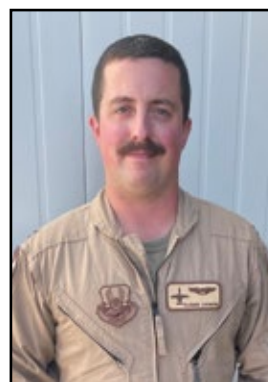
Aviation Maintenance Safety

TSgt David T. Schutz
25 ATKW/SE
Shaw AFB, SC



Weapons Safety Professional

TSgt Max R. Engstrom
366 FW/SEW
Mountain Home AFB, ID



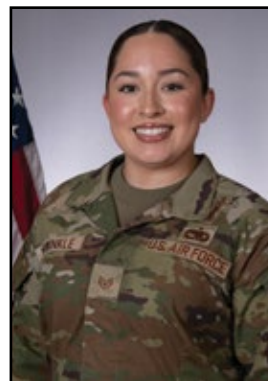
Pilot Safety

Capt Ryan D. Laymon
74 FS, 23 WG
Moody AFB, GA



Safety Career Professional

TSgt Sarah L. Gonzalez
99 ABW/SEG
Nellis AFB, NV



Unit Safety Representative

SSgt Maya E. VanWinkle
388 MSG, 388 FW
Hill AFB, UT



Aircrew Safety Award

Lt Col Brent C. Stevens,
Capt Dillon D. Freitag, Capt Darren C. Tidwell
 472 ECS, 319 RW
 Robins AFB, GA



Unit Safety

482 Attack Squadron
 482 ATKS, 25 ATKW
 Shaw AFB, SC



Explosives Safety

332 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Flight
 332 ECES, 332 AEW
 Undisclosed Location

Congratulations



FY26 Flight

Thru 30 Jun 2026

	Fatal	Aircraft Destroyed	Class A Aircraft Damage
15 AF	0		0
16 AF	0	0	0
USAFWC	0		
ANG	0	0	0
AFRC	0	0	0
CONTRACT	0	0	0
COCOM	0	0	0

FY26 Occupational

Thru 30 Jun 2026

	Class A Fatal	Class A Non-Fatal	Class B
AFCENT	0	0	0
USAFWC	1	0	0
12 AF	0	0	0
15 AF	7, 1	0	1
16 AF	2	0	1

FY26 Weapons

Thru 30 Jun 2026

	Class A	Class B	Class C	Class D	Class E
ACC	0	0	2	5	2

Legend

Class A - Fatality; permanent total disability; property damage \$2.5 million or more
Class B - Permanent partial disability; property damage between \$600,000 and \$2.5 million
Class C - Lost workday; property damage between \$60,000 and \$600,000
(Class description effective Oct. 1, 2019)

(RED) = On-duty

(BLACK) = Off-duty

Symbols for Mishap Aircraft



Flight Notes

ACC experienced three Class A mishaps in Q3 FY 2026: 2 MQ-9A (15 AF, both destroyed) and 1 F-35A (15 AF, engine-confined) bird strike. This mishap is currently under the scrutiny of a Safety Investigation Board (SIB), developing recommendations to mitigate avian hazards. Additionally, ACC experienced one Q2 FY 2026, F-22 mishap upgrade from a Class B to a Class A, (15 AF, Aviation Ground Operation). Throughout all flight safety programs and initiatives, ACC Safety emphasizes checklist discipline and operational risk management.

Occupational Notes

During the third quarter of FY26, ACC experienced six Class A fatal mishaps, bringing our total to eleven for this FY. Five of the six were off duty, with four of them involving 2WL PMVs. The other off-duty fatality involved an Airmen walking along side the road and was struck by a car. The on-duty fatality involved a member, while at a squadron picnic drowned at a recreation area. Mishaps can occur at any time and any place. We need to be alert to our surroundings at all times and use good decision making at all times. Plan for the unexpected, stay alert and be safe!

Weapons Notes

The third quarter of FY26 saw a drop in reported mishaps. There were 2 Class D mishaps, both involving personnel injuries caused by lack of situational awareness. It is important not to become complacent, but rather to stay vigilant while working with and around explosives.

HOW TO STAY SAFE WHEN A HURRICANE THREATENS

Prepare NOW

Know your area's risk of hurricanes and consider your personal risk of experiencing impacts.

Review your insurance policy for hurricane-related hazard coverage. Standard insurance policies do not cover flooding — you may need to purchase additional policies.

Sign up to receive emergency alerts and notifications from your local emergency management office. Learn what common alerts and warnings mean before you are impacted by a hurricane.

Monitor weather reports and updates from the National Hurricane Center. Be on alert for heavy rain.

Practice going to a safe shelter for high winds, such as a FEMA safe room, an International Code Council (ICC) 500 storm shelter or a small, interior windowless room in a sturdy building. Make sure your safe shelter is on the lowest level that will not be affected by floodwater.

Develop an emergency communication plan that you can use to contact family, friends and neighbors during a hurricane. Plan to text or message because you may not be able to make or receive phone calls.

Develop an evacuation plan based on your evacuation zone. Consider where you will evacuate to and how you will get there. Practice your plan using your evacuation route.

Gather enough food, water and emergency supplies to last you several days. Keep in mind each person's specific needs, including medication. Don't forget the needs of pets.

Keep important documents in a dry, safe place such as a fireproof and waterproof box, and create password-protected digital copies.

Protect your property. Install hurricane shutters or reinforce windows. Declutter drains and gutters. Secure outdoor items and furniture or move them indoors.

Survive DURING

Evacuate immediately if ordered to do so. Take critical supplies and documents with you. Follow evacuation routes and directions from local officials. Do not drive around barricades. Drive carefully and be cautious of strong winds and heavy rain.

If you do not evacuate, take shelter indoors and stay away from windows and doors.

- **If there is no flooding, make sure your safe shelter is on the lowest level** that will not be affected by floodwater. Take shelter in a FEMA safe room, an International Code Council (ICC) 500 storm shelter or a small, interior windowless room in a sturdy building.
- **If you experience flooding, go to the highest level of the building** to avoid becoming trapped by rising floodwater but do not climb into a closed attic.

Get inside a safe shelter or a sturdy building as soon as possible if you are outdoors, in a vehicle, in a manufactured or mobile home, or in a temporary structure during a hurricane.

Pay attention to updates from weather stations and news sources to stay informed. Follow advice from local authorities. Take action when advised to do so.

Use a generator, grill or camp stove ONLY outdoors and at least 20 feet away from any building openings like windows, doors or garages to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

Turn around, don't drown! Do not walk, swim or drive through floodwaters. Just six inches of fast-moving water can knock you down and one foot of moving water can sweep your vehicle away.

Do not drive during a hurricane. Wind gusts can overturn vehicles and roads and bridges could collapse.

Conserve mobile device batteries for emergency use.

Be Safe AFTER

Follow reentry guidance from local authorities and return home from an evacuation only when it is safe to do so.

Have a professional inspect your damaged property before attempting to clean up or repair any damage. Wear protective clothing and use caution during cleanup.

Stay away from floodwater.

Floodwater can contain a variety of hazards, including sharp objects, downed power lines, sewage, bacteria, chemicals and wild or stray animals.

Save phone calls for emergencies.

Phone systems are often down or busy after a disaster. Use text messages or social media to communicate with family and friends.

Document any property damage with photographs. Contact your insurance company to file an insurance claim. Register with FEMA for additional assistance.

You are the help until help arrives.

Be careful when helping people who may be trapped or injured. Floodwaters may contain hazards and buildings may be unstable.

Take an Active Role in Your Safety

Go to **Ready.gov/hurricanes** and use FEMA's **Guide for Alerts and Warnings** to learn more about hurricane watches and warnings. Download the **FEMA app** to get more information about how to prepare.



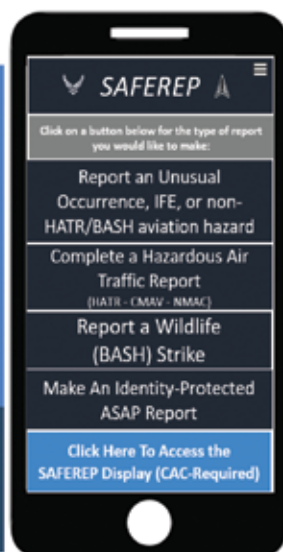
Safety Reporting ... All In One Place

SAFEREP APP!

Why Safety Reporting?

Quickly and easily tell safety about safety issues you see

- In the dorms
- At work
- Anywhere on base
- In flight
- While maintaining aircraft
- On the ramp



What to report?

- Dangerous conditions
- "Near miss" events
- Aviation specific reporting
- Cultural issues that could lead to an accident, damage, or injury
- Supervisor mishap report

Report anonymously
Reports go direct to the safety office



New name, new website, new app, and a whole new look

SAFEREP is a web- and app-based way for members from every career field to identify hazards and report near-misses and even some mishaps directly to their safety offices using any computer or mobile device.



Download to your mobile device
from your preferred App Store

Or

Go to
<https://saferep.safety.af.mil>



BEFORE PLAN AHEAD (IF YOU CAN) ...



Freeze **containers of water and gel packs** to help keep food cold if the power goes out.



Put **appliance thermometers** in your refrigerator and freezer.

Keep **freezer 0°F** or below

Refrigerator **40°F** or below



Freeze refrigerated items such as leftovers, milk, and fresh meat and poultry that you do not need immediately.

Group foods together in the freezer to help food stay colder longer.

If you think power will be out for more than 4 hours, consider moving food to a cooler with ice. If available, buy dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator or freezer cold.



Store non-perishable foods on higher shelves to avoid flood water.

DURING WHILE THE POWER IS OUT ...



Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed **to maintain cold temperature.**



IF DOORS STAY CLOSED ...

... a full freezer will hold its temperature for

48 HOURS

24 HOURS

if half-full

... a fridge will keep food safe for

4 HOURS

Place perishable foods in a cooler with ice before food starts to go bad

AFTER ONCE THE POWER IS BACK ON ...



Check the temperature inside your refrigerator and freezer. If they're still at safe temperatures, your food should be fine. Discard perishable foods that have been at an unsafe temperature.



Never taste food to **determine its safety!**

WHAT CAN I KEEP?



WHAT SHOULD I THROW OUT?



WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!

AFTER A FLOOD

FOLLOW THESE STEPS AFTER A FLOOD:

- DO NOT EAT** any food that may have touched flood water.
- DISCARD FOOD** not in waterproof containers; screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped tops are not waterproof.
- DISCARD** cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods.
- DISCARD** any damaged cans that have swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening.

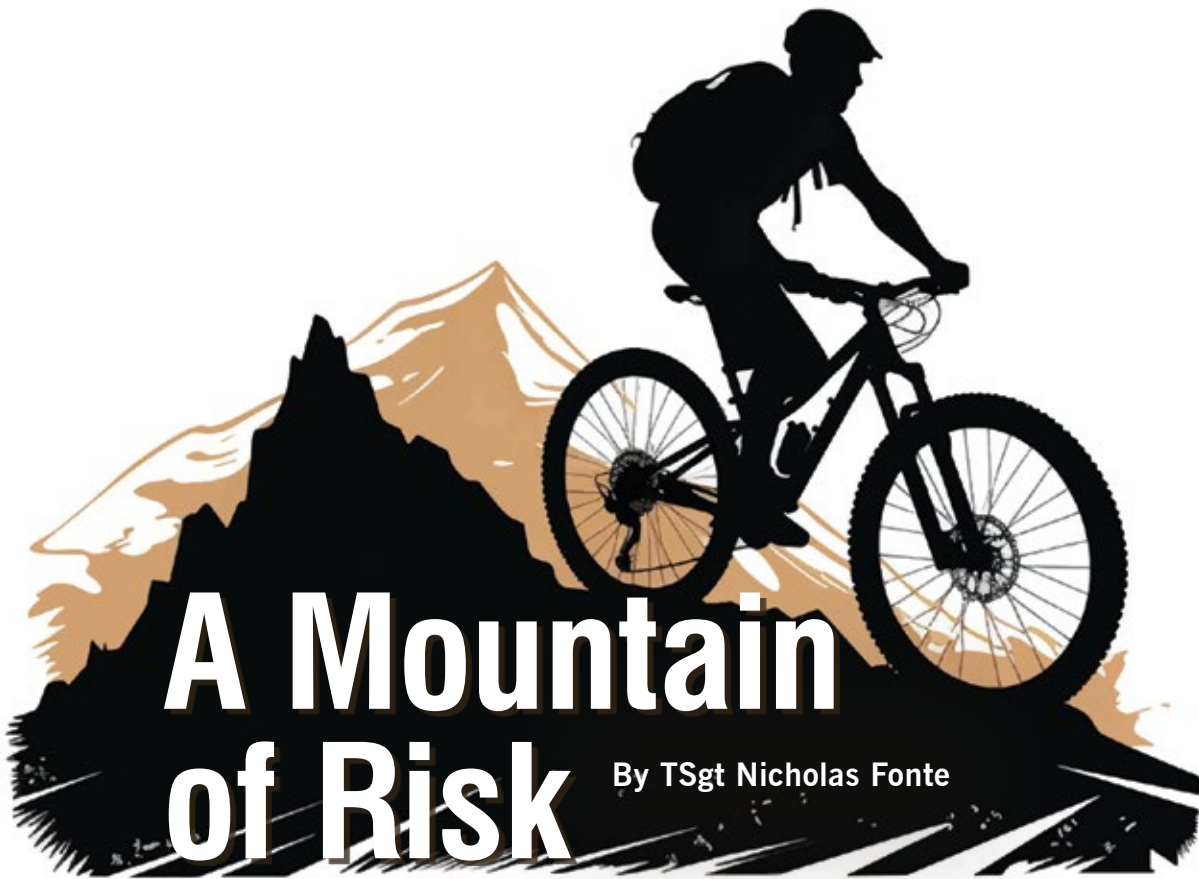


Pots, pans, dishes and utensils

Undamaged all-metal cans after removing labels

A1C Brody Schneider, 28th Operations Support Squadron air traffic control technician, soars off a jump while mountain biking at Storm Mountain, S.D. Prior to every run, Schneider and his fellow cyclists scouted and planned out their path to ensure it was within their skill level. Photo by A1C Alystria Maurer.





By TSgt Nicholas Fonte

Illustration by Vecteezy.com

Many folk have heard of a man walking on water, but have you heard of a man walking on fire? The event took place in Florida, where the weather can be very unpredictable. One minute it can be stormy, the next it can be sunny. It also can be muggy, which means we often have fog.

As a new Airman at Fairchild AFB, I was eager to explore the expansive Washington outdoors. I considered myself athletic and, having spent plenty of time jumping curbs around town on my bike growing up, I figured I was a decent rider. When a coworker, an experienced BMX and mountain biker, invited me to a local trail, I was excited. I accepted his invitation and rented a bike from Outdoor Recreation later that week. I recall thinking mountain biking would be like a fast dirt-track with a few hilly ramps, maybe something akin to a dirt-style skatepark.

My mistake became clear the moment we arrived at the mountain. Just the path up was a steep gravel trail buried deep in the forest. It was so steep we had to push, not ride, our bikes up the initial ascent. Once we reached the top, despite my weariness, I let my ego take the lead. I figured I could still pace myself, and it was just the two of us. I wouldn't feel pressured by a group behind me forcing me along.

As we began the descent, I pushed myself further and further beyond my riding abilities in order to keep pace with my friend. We eventually reached a dirt platform where I watched him effortlessly clear a small drop-down and a small ramp. Not wanting to be the guy who walks the bike down the drop, I followed.

The speed was much faster than I expected. I hit the ramp, caught air, and landed poorly. My hand slipped from the handlebars, and only my

forearms catching the grip prevented a serious, over-the-bars crash. I stayed upright, but I was rattled. It was at that moment I realized exactly how far out of my depth I was. I rode the brakes the rest of the way down, thoroughly "scared straight."

Ever since that day, I've had more respect for the limits of my own abilities. My overconfidence nearly resulted in a hospital visit, all because I tried to keep up with an expert while being a total beginner.

Whether it's biking down a mountain, picking a snowboarding route, or leaning into high-speed twisties on a motorcycle, good risk management requires an honest self-assessment. Before you take the plunge—literally or figuratively—take a moment to assess your limits, and ensure the choices you make are within them. 🌟

WHEN THE MOUNTAIN ROARED

By SSgt Christopher D. Sepulveda

The air in the mountains north of Boise was crisp and clean on that October afternoon in 2021. My friend and I were five miles deep in the Idaho backcountry, far from any road or cell service. The hike up had taken us through a dense pine forest, but as we gained elevation, the trees gave way to a barren, rocky peak covered in tall, dry grass. When we reached the summit, it was cold and still, and we were quiet and entirely focused. Perched on top of the mountain, we glassed the opposite slope for any sign of deer, engulfed in the wild beauty and silence. The feeling of being that far out is a kind of freedom, but as I would soon learn, it comes with a heavy dose of responsibility.

All at once, the sky turned on us. A sudden, violent wind shattered the stillness, and the world went dark as if a switch had been flipped. What began as a few harmless clouds on the horizon quickly boiled into a menacing wall. A distant rumble of thunder, like far-off artillery, was the first warning shot. We looked at each other, the same thought in our eyes. We were on the highest, most exposed point for miles around, holding excellent conductors of electricity—our rifles.

Panic is a luxury you can't afford in the backcountry. We knew we had to move, and we had to move now. Our rifles were on the ground, but everything else—packs, binos, spotting scopes—was on us. We quickly secured our rifles to our packs and scrambled down into the saddle between the two mountains, heading for the thicker stand of trees below. Every flash of lightning lit up the sky, and the smell of rain was thick in the air. What truly scared

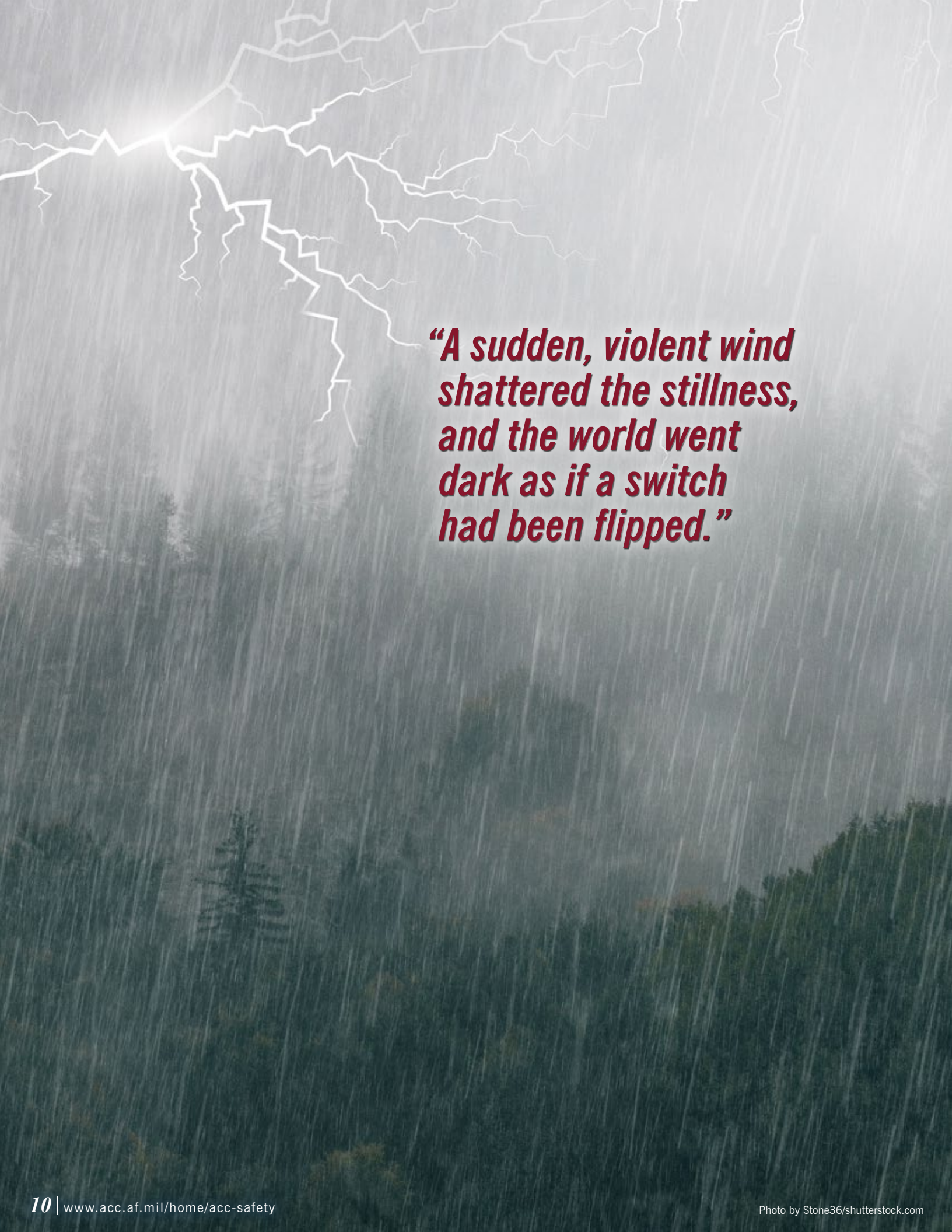
us were the booms; they weren't distant rumbles anymore, but deafening cracks so loud they signified the storm was directly overhead.

We reached the relative safety of the lower-elevation trees and just waited. Hunkered down, the feeling was pure dread. It was miserable being soaking wet and cold, but the worst part was the uncertainty—not knowing how long it would last or how close the next strike would be. We felt tiny as the storm raged around us.

The storm eventually moved on, leaving a heavy silence in its wake. The walk back to our base camp was quiet, each of us lost in our own thoughts. We changed out of our wet clothes and just sat there for a long time, reflecting on how fast everything had changed. One minute we were hunters on a mountain, and the next we were just two men trying to survive. We weren't struck by lightning, not because of some special skill, but because we made one good decision at the right time.

That day taught me a simple but powerful lesson: Nature doesn't care about your plans. I now understand that you have to approach the wild with the same seriousness you would bring to any mission. Now, before I head out, I don't just glance at the weather; I study the hourly forecast for my exact location. I always have an exit plan, and I identify the fastest route to lower ground before I even take the first step. It's about applying the same risk management we use on duty to our personal adventures.

We got lucky that day, but I'll never rely on luck again. I hope that by sharing this story, you won't have to, either. 🌩️



***“A sudden, violent wind
shattered the stillness,
and the world went
dark as if a switch
had been flipped.”***

HALLOWEEN SAFETY



#1

ALWAYS WALK ON SIDEWALKS OR PATHS. If there is no path or sidewalks, walk in the street **FACING** traffic as **CLOSE** to the **CURB** as possible.

#2

CROSS THE STREET AT CORNERS, using **TRAFFIC SIGNALS** and **CROSSWALKS**. Parents should remind children to watch for cars.

#3

CHILDREN UNDER 12 SHOULD TRICK-OR-TREAT and **CROSS STREETS** with an **ADULT**. Parents should help children plan their candy route, and ensure kids travel in groups.

#4

DRIVERS SHOULD SLOW DOWN and be especially **ALERT** in residential neighborhoods. Children are excited on Halloween and may move in **UNPREDICTABLE** ways.

Talk with your witches and goblins about Halloween safety. Decorate costumes and bags with reflective tape or stickers and have them carry glow sticks or flashlights to help them see and to be seen.

DRIVING HOME

Was the Most Dangerous Part of My Shift

By TSgt Florisel Felton

During my assignment in Security Forces, long shifts were normal. Most of the time, I worked anywhere from twelve to fourteen hours a day. My shift often started very early in the morning, which meant waking up before sunrise and preparing myself mentally and physically for a long day ahead. At the time, I accepted this as part of the job, and rarely thought about how much fatigue was affecting me.

At the end of every shift, I was exhausted. My body felt heavy, my reaction time was slower, and my focus was not what it had been at the beginning of the day. Despite this, I still had to drive myself home. There were many times when I caught myself struggling to keep my eyes open while driving. I would turn up the radio, roll down the windows, or drink an energy drink—anything to keep me alert. Looking back, I realized those were warning signs that I was already too tired to be behind the wheel.

One evening, after an especially long shift, I remember driving home and realizing I could not recall the last few minutes of the drive. I had stayed in my lane and arrived safely, but the fact that I could not remember portions of the trip home was alarming. That moment made me realize how dangerous fatigue can be. I had spent my entire shift

focused on keeping myself and others safe, yet the most dangerous part of my day was the drive home.

Fatigue does not always feel dramatic or obvious. It builds up slowly, especially in jobs with long hours and high stress. Over time, being tired starts to feel normal. That mindset is dangerous. Fatigue affects decision-making, reaction time, and situational awareness in much the same way as alcohol. If something unexpected had happened on the road during those moments, I would not have been able to react in time.

The safety lesson I learned is that fatigue must be treated as a serious hazard, not just an inconvenience. Long hours, early mornings, and high-stress jobs require proper rest and recovery. Everyone should learn to recognize the signs of fatigue and act before it leads to a mishap. Simple steps such as getting proper rest at night, taking breaks, or asking for support can make a significant difference.

This experience taught me that risk management does not stop when the shift ends. The mission is not complete until everyone makes it home safely. By acknowledging fatigue and addressing it early, we can prevent accidents and protect ourselves and those around us. ✈️



Photo by StockMediaSeller/shutterstock.com

How This Helps Others

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, approximately 344,000 residential building fires occur each year in the United States. That averages nearly 940 fires per day.

Heating equipment is one of the leading causes of home fires during colder months. House fires can spread in less than five minutes, leaving little time to react.

Key safety takeaways

- Maintenance alone does not fully eliminate risk.
- Combustible building materials increase the spread of fire.
- Drowsiness makes reacting to night-time fires difficult.
- Evacuation planning is critical.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home.
- Test alarms monthly.
- Keep fire extinguishers accessible.
- Have an evacuation plan, and practice it.
- Clear debris from roofs and gutters.
- If you use compressed logs, ensure your chimney system includes a properly-rated spark arrestor, and check that your roofing materials are fire resistant.

This fire was not caused by negligence. The system was maintained, fire extinguishers were present, and the homeowner reacted quickly and prioritized life over property. Such disasters rarely are caused by one large mistake. Usually, a combination of small factors align at the wrong time. Understanding how quickly fire can spread, and how small risks can combine, can help prevent situations like these. 🔥

What Could Have Been Done Differently

While this was ruled an accident, there are preventive measures that might reduce risk in similar situations:

- Spark Arrestors and Ember Protection—A properly-rated spark arrestor on the chimney can reduce the chance of embers escaping.
- Fire-Resistant Roofing—Using metal, tile, or treated fire-resistant roofing instead of cedar can slow the spread of fire.
- Alternative Heat at Night—Using a controlled heating system overnight instead of an active wood stove may reduce unattended ember risk.
- Exterior Monitoring—Motion lighting or exterior heat detection systems can help identify roof ignition sooner.

For more information

U.S. Fire Administration. (2023). Residential building fire statistics. <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/statistics/>



National Fire Protection Association. (2023). Home structure fires. <https://www.nfpa.org>



He ran back inside immediately, got his two dogs out, and moved to the truck. He called 911, and waited down the road for the fire trucks to arrive. Within 15 minutes, the cedar house was fully engulfed and destroyed.

A fire inspector later concluded the fire was a freak accident. The chimney pipe was clear. There was no soot or creosote buildup. The system had been properly maintained. Despite the routine care, a single ember had found a way to ignite the cedar roof.

Even though there were fire extinguishers inside the home, the fire spread too quickly for them to make a difference.

Several factors made this fire more dangerous:

Cedar construction: Cedar siding and roofing burn much faster than many other building materials.

- High-heat compressed log: The log used was a compressed log, which burns hotter than traditional firewood. The higher temperature may have increased the likelihood of embers escaping the chimney.
- Active heat source: The wood stove was still hot and capable of producing embers.
- Possible wind conditions: Even light wind can carry embers onto dry roofing material.
- Once the roof caught fire, there was no safe way for him to fight it from inside the home.



15 Minutes

That Changed Everything: A Real House Fire Story

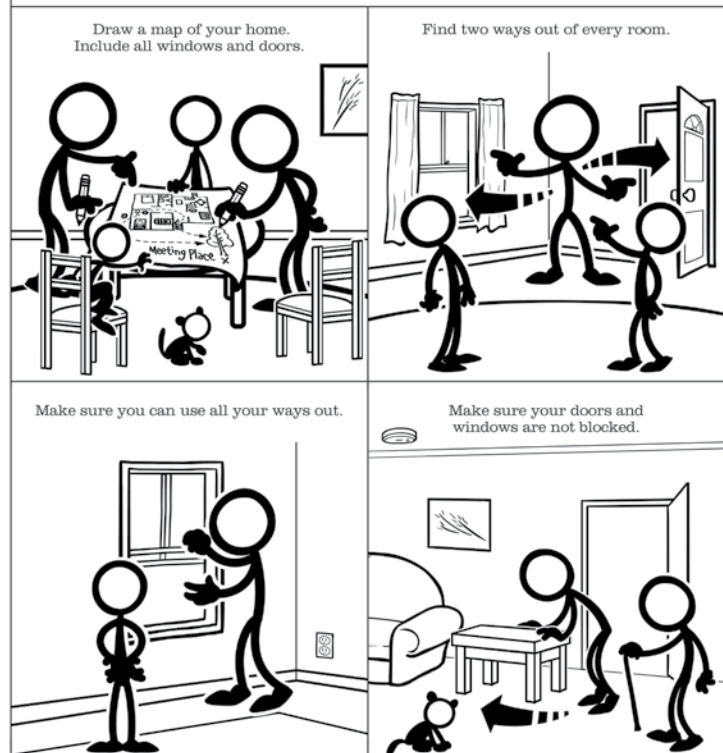
By SSgt Jacob B. Wood



In the early morning hours of March 4, 2021, a quiet winter night turned into a life-changing moment for one family.

At about 1:00 a.m., a homeowner went to add a compressed log to the wood stove in his home. Manufactured logs are designed to burn longer and hotter than traditional split firewood. While they are efficient and convenient, they also produce intense heat and strong airflow through the chimney. After he stepped outside, he heard what sounded like a herd of elk running nearby. He went back inside to grab a flashlight. When he returned outside and looked toward the house, he realized it wasn't elk at all. Sparks and embers from the wood stove had landed on the roof and set it on fire.

Plan Your Home Fire Escape



NATIONAL FIRE
PROTECTION ASSOCIATION
The leading information and knowledge resource
on fire, electrical and related hazards

www.nfpa.org/education ©NFPA 2017

Title icons by vecteezy.com



THE WORLD IS READING US

Each quarter, The Combat Edge is shipped to over 1,400 USAF addresses around the world. Its pages are filled with articles from Airmen who share their first-hand accounts of mishaps to over 63,000 readers. Copies of the magazine are found everywhere from back shops to front offices.

It doesn't stop there.

Since 2022, articles from The Combat Edge have appeared in the safety magazines of the following:

Hungarian Defense Forces
Air Operation Command and Control Center

UK Royal Air Force Safety Center
HQ Air Command

Royal New Zealand Air Force
Directorate of Air Force Safety and & Health

Canadian Armed Forces
Directorate of Flight Safety

That's right: The Air Forces of other nations contact our office for permission to reprint your excellent articles. Would you like your story to be appreciated at home and abroad?

It begins here.
Send it in.

Dr. Richard E. Cook
Chief Editor, The Combat Edge



Back to School

Many students rely on school buses to get them to and from school safely.



SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Did You Know: School buses are the most regulated vehicles on the road; they're designed to be safer than passenger vehicles in preventing crashes and injuries; and in every state, stop-arm laws exist to protect children from other motorists.

If you are driving, remember these simple rules:

- Yellow flashing lights indicate the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. You should slow down and prepare to stop your vehicle.
- Red flashing lights and extended stop arms indicate the bus has stopped and children are getting on or off. You must stop your car and wait until the red lights stop flashing, the extended stop-arm is withdrawn, and the bus begins moving, before you can start driving again.
- Even when lights aren't flashing, watch for children, particularly in the morning or mid-afternoon, around school arrival and dismissal times. Be alert as you back out of a driveway, or drive through a neighborhood, school zone or bus stop.



Parents - talk bus safety with your children:

- Your child should arrive at the bus stop at least 5 minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive. Teach them to play it **SAFE**:
- Stay at least ten feet — five giant steps — away from the curb.
- Always wait until the bus comes to a complete stop and the bus driver signals for you to board.
- Face forward after finding a seat on the bus.
- Exit the bus after it stops and look left-right-left for cars before crossing a street.

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688 CW/SE, Lackland AFB, TX

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