

Winter Edition 2013

# Combat Edge

AIR COM

AND'S SAFETY MAGAZINE

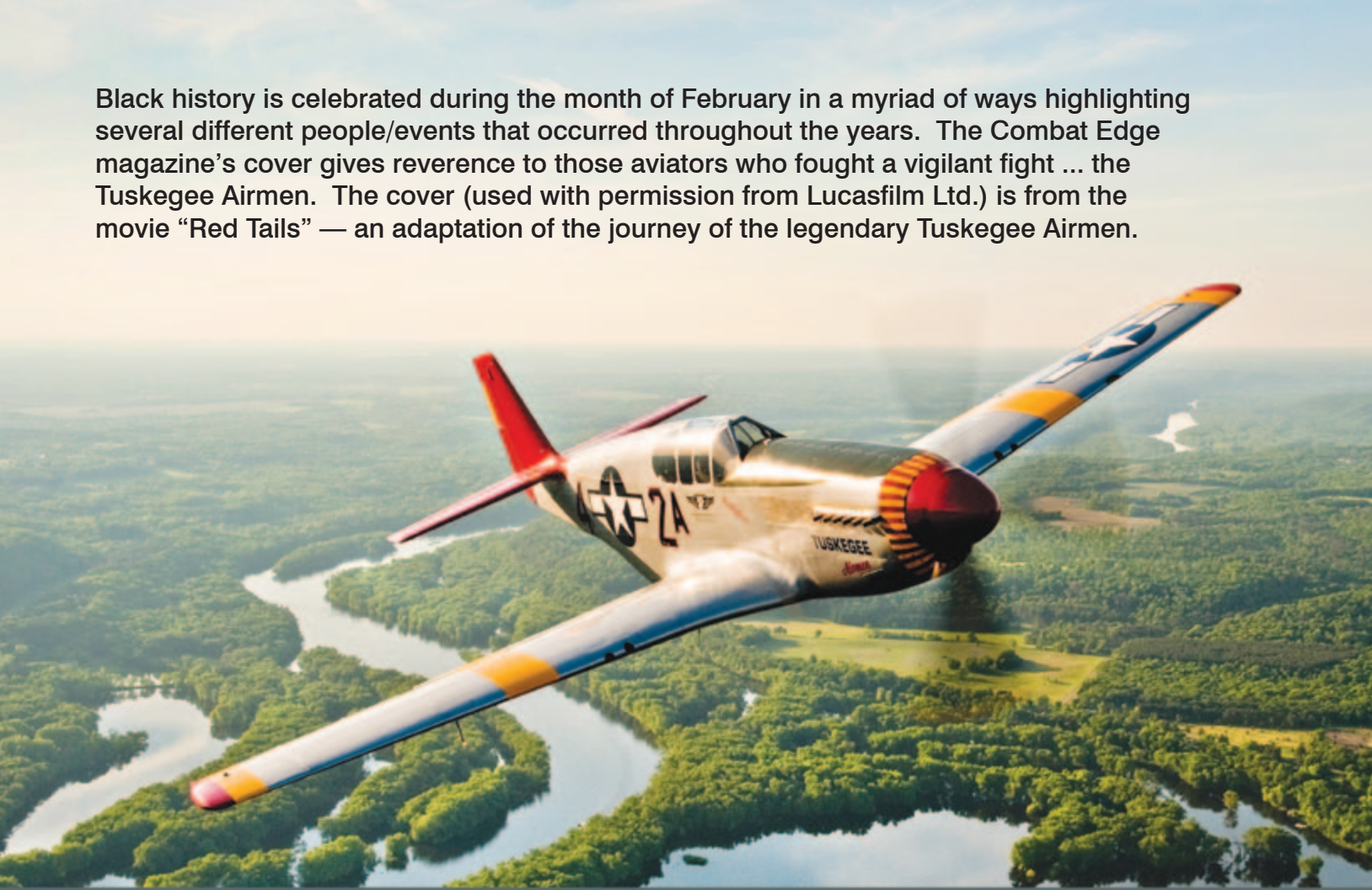


THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A  
**TUSKEGEE  
AIRMAN**

PAGE 4



Black history is celebrated during the month of February in a myriad of ways highlighting several different people/events that occurred throughout the years. The Combat Edge magazine’s cover gives reverence to those aviators who fought a vigilant fight ... the Tuskegee Airmen. The cover (used with permission from Lucasfilm Ltd.) is from the movie “Red Tails” — an adaptation of the journey of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen.



On page 4, we continue our tribute with a story about the life and times of Tuskegee Airman Col. (ret.) Charles E. McGee who was a consultant for the movie.

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# ACCent

## ON SAFETY

### Don’t hurt yourself.

That is my holiday safety message to all ACC Airmen: Don’t hurt yourself. As we approach the holidays, we will all face situations that require us to make wise choices so we don’t hurt ourselves or others. As commanders and supervisors at all levels concentrate on risk management, the Wingman culture and Comprehensive Airman Fitness, their leadership alone won’t prevent mishaps and ensure a safe holiday season — it also takes personal discipline and making smart decisions.

The powerful combination of involved leadership and personal discipline is the best formula we have for the safety and well-being of our Air Combat Command team.

Involved leaders help Airmen think through their travel plans to account for plenty of rest and changing weather conditions. Involved leaders care about their people and know what’s going on in their lives, finding help for those who face situations that seem insurmountable. Involved leaders also encourage their teams to stay mentally, physically, socially and spiritually healthy — Comprehensive Airman Fitness increases resiliency and mission effectiveness.

Commanders and supervisors are committed to giving ACC Airmen every resource possible to prevent mishaps and minimize risk ... but they can’t be everywhere all the time. Through our individual discipline and wise decision making, we continue our leaders’ efforts when they’re not around.

Risk management requires participation — it’s not a spectator sport. Going into this holiday season, I encourage you to deliberately schedule your leave and travel plans. If driving, get plenty of rest, wear your seatbelts and watch your speed ... and don’t drink and drive; just don’t do it.

This is perhaps the most emotionally-sensitive time of the year — have the courage to ask for help and have the courage to help each other ... holding each other accountable and being a good Wingman is part of our duty and it helps prevent self-defeating behaviors like suicide.

Have a joyous holiday season celebrating the things important to you and your families. And look out for yourselves and each other to stay safe and healthy ... your families and our Nation are counting on it.

I am honored to serve with you and I look forward to seeing you ... ALL of you ... in 2013.



Gen. Gilmary M. Hostage III  
Commander

# Combat Edge

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# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

*The month of February is a celebration of Black History — a time used to emphasize the significant roles African Americans played in U.S. history. This quarter, The Combat Edge magazine pays homage to one individual in particular — Tuskegee Airman Col. (ret.) Charles E. McGee — one who is close to this editor's heart (he just happens to be my cousin).*

*In an effort to open doors, civil rights organizations and the black press exerted pressure that ultimately resulted in the formation of an all African-American pursuit squadron based in Tuskegee, Ala. in 1941. McGee was one of many who participated in the Tuskegee Airmen Project, demonstrating that African Americans were capable of becoming qualified pilots.*



**BY MRS. BARBARA TAYLOR** *(Editor, The Combat Edge Magazine)*

**C**harles McGee was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on December 7, 1919, to Lewis Allen and Ruth Elizabeth Lewis

McGee who died shortly after the birth of his sister. His father was a teacher, social worker and an African Methodist Episcopal church minister.

During his youth, he was a member of the Boy Scouts of America and earned the Eagle Scout award. Later,

he served in district and regional positions in the BSA. At the 2010 National Scout Jamboree, he was recognized with the Distinguished Eagle Scout Award.

In March 1942, McGee was a sophomore at the University of Illinois studying engineering. After enlisting in the U.S. Army on October 26, 1942, he became a part of the Tuskegee Airmen having earned his pilot's wings, and graduating from

Class 43-F on June 30, 1943. The very next day he was sworn in to the enlisted reserve, and a few weeks later, got the call to go to Tuskegee.

He entered preflight training as part of Class 43-G, but skipped upper preflight, and ended up graduating in Class 43-F. His primary training was at Moton Field, near Tuskegee, in the Stearman PT-17. His basic training was in the Vultee BT-13a and advanced training in the AT-6.





By February 1944, he was stationed in Italy with the 302d Fighter Squadron, 332d Fighter Group, flying his first mission on February 14. McGee flew the Bell P-39Q Airacobra, Republic P-47D Thunderbolt and North American P-51 Mustang fighter aircraft (nicknamed “Kitten” after his wife), escorting Consolidated B-24 Liberator and Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers over Germany, Austria and the Balkans. During missions, he also engaged in low-level attacks over enemy airfields and rail yards.

On August 23, 1944, while escorting B-17s over Czechoslovakia, he engaged a formation of Luftwaffe fighters and downed a Focke Wulf Fw 190.

Promoted to Captain, McGee had flown a total of 137 combat missions, and had returned to the United States on December 1, 1944, to become an instructor on the North

American B-25 Mitchell bombers that another unit of the Tuskegee Airmen was working up. He remained at Tuskegee Army Air Field until 1946, when the base was closed.

After World War II, McGee was sent to Lockbourne Air Field to become the base operation and training officer; later in 1948, he was posted to an Aircraft Maintenance Technical Course and was assigned to an air refueling unit. When the Korean War broke out, he flew P-51 Mustangs again in the 67th Fighter Bomber Squadron, completed 100 missions, and earned a promotion to major. Continuing his service with the United States Air Force during the post-Korean war, McGee continued to serve as a fighter pilot, flying Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star and Northrop F-89 Scorpion aircraft.

In January 1967, McGee reported to Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, Tactical Air Command (pre-

cursor to Air Combat Command) for reconnaissance ground school in Class 67-4R. After Shaw he was transferred to Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho for aircraft checkout. During the Vietnam War as a Lt. Col., McGee flew 172 combat missions in a McDonnell RF-4 photo-reconnaissance aircraft. In a 30-year active service career, he achieved the highest three-war fighter mission total, 409 fighter combat missions, of any Air Force aviator.

Fast forward years later and after a series of other appointments both in the United States as well as in Italy and Germany, and promotion to colonel, McGee retired on January 31, 1973. He ended his military career with 6,308 flying hours.

After his military service, McGee held many prestigious functional and honorary positions around the field of aviation. In 1978, at the age of 58, he completed his college degree at

Columbia College in Kansas City, over 30 years after his initial enrollment at the University of Illinois. Though interrupted by World War II, attaining a college degree had been a lifelong goal.

McGee served as the director of the Kansas City Airport and as a member of the Aviation Advisory Commission. For over 30 years, he functioned as an ambassador of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., giving numerous public addresses and has received accolades including the National Aeronautical Associations “Elder Statesman of Aviation.” McGee served as National President of the association from 1983 to 1985, and is currently serving as its president.

In 2005, McGee was part of a group of former Tuskegee Airmen who flew to Balad, Iraq, to speak to active-duty Airmen serving in the 332d Air Expeditionary Wing, the current incarnation of the 332d Fighter Group.

He was recognized for his combat and military service with a number of awards including: Distinguished Flying Cross with two Oak Leaf Clusters, Legion of Merit with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star, Air Medal with 25 Oak Leaf Clusters, Army Commendation Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Korean Presidential Unit Citation, Hellenic Republic World War II Commemorative Medal along with related campaign and service ribbons.

In 2007, President George Bush awarded him and the surviving Airmen the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, the nation’s highest civilian award, and in 2011, he was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, Ohio. He also served as a consultant to the 2012 George Lucas film, Red Tails.

McGee lived in Kansas City for many years; after his wife passed away in 1994, he moved east to live with his daughter. His approach to life has been and still is: “Do while you can.”

*The well-trained and highly motivated Tuskegee Airmen were able to overcome obstacles posed by segregation. They flew 15,500 missions, destroyed over 260 enemy aircraft, sank one enemy destroyer, and demolished numerous enemy installations. These Airmen also established an enviable record throughout the action they saw. Their achievements proved conclusively that the Tuskegee Airmen were highly disciplined and capable fighters. Having proven themselves in combat, they earned the respect of fellow crews and military leaders. **The Combat Edge** salutes the Tuskegee Airmen and all who continue to fight for our freedom — thank you! ✪*

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# A Portrait in Spiritual Resilience



BY CHAPLAIN (COL.) SCOTT A. OFSDAHL

Our “Comprehensive Airman Fitness” (CAF) program emphasizes four pillars that are needed to maintain a state of total well-being. The synergy of these four pillars helps sustain the fortitude for bouncing back from difficult life experiences.

Most of us understand the mental, physical and social parts; but what does it mean or look like to be “spiritually” resilient?

We can learn answers to these important questions by examining the life of a “spiritually” resilient giant — Chaplain Preston Taylor. His life offers a menu of suggestions on how to develop spiritual resilience for all of us. Much of what follows is quoted directly from Taylor’s official bio or from author Billy Keith’s book, *Days of Anguish, Days of Hope*, and his article in the Baptist Press titled, *Fourth of July: POW Chaplain Redeemed His Agonies*.

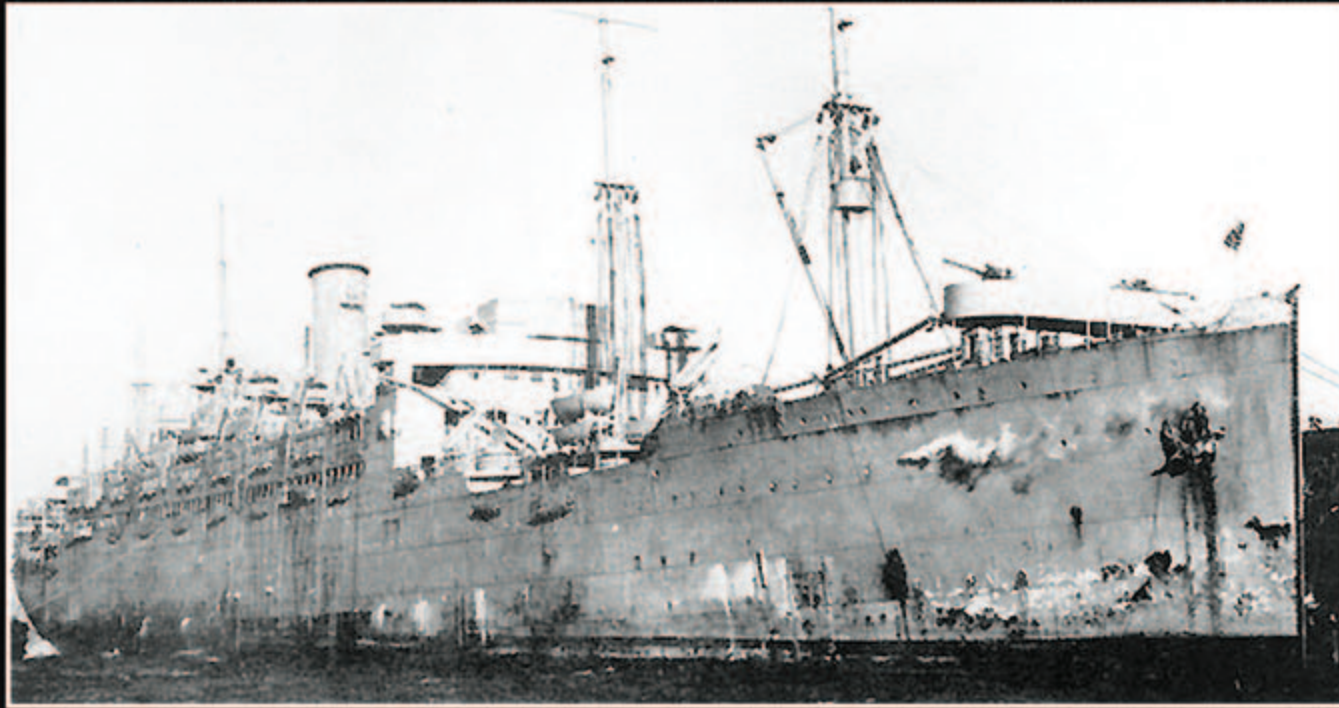
So who was Chaplain Preston Taylor? He married his beautiful wife, Ione, after seminary and then he served as the pastor of two churches in Texas where he joined the reserves. In 1941 he received a call from the War Department asking him to spend a year as an Army Air Corps Chaplain in the Philippines. His congregation approved. He departed knowing that the most difficult

part would be his separation from his wonderful wife Ione. She had been the only one in the family to bid him bon voyage at the port of San Francisco when the USAT Washington sailed for the Orient.

Taylor arrived in Manila in May 1941. With the declaration of war on Japan after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, his 31st Infantry Regiment, Philippine Division headed to the front lines on the Peninsula of Bataan. Taylor would later be cited for bravery and he was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action for his services in the Battle of Bataan.

At the surrender of the American forces in the Philippines, he became a member of the “Death March” which led from Bataan through the streets of Manila, to the prison camp approximately eight miles east of Cabanatuan. He served as the chaplain in the prison camp hospital at Cabanatuan where he ministered to more than 10,000 patients. In the summer of 1944, he spent 14 weeks in solitary confinement for smuggling food and medicine to the patients. Taylor would be the only chaplain to survive the horrors of 42 months in Japanese prison camps. Toward the end of the war, he was taken to Japan and Manchuria on one of the infamous “hell ships,” which was bombed twice by American planes with a loss of more than 1,000 lives. During the second bombing, Taylor was struck in the wrist and leg by flying fragments. Ironically, he wasn’t awarded a Purple Heart since he was wounded by our own forces.





Following his liberation, Taylor was assigned in January 1946 as deputy staff chaplain, HQ Army Air Forces Training Command at Barksdale Field, La. ... the base he had left five and a half years earlier for the Philippines. In 1962, upon recommendation of Gen. Curtis LeMay, President John F. Kennedy named him Air Force Chief of Chaplains, with the rank of major general.

What an incredible tale. I highly recommend reading the book, *Days of Anguish, Days of Hope* for the full story of his sufferings, courage and service. You won't be disappointed. Let's go back to the questions at the beginning of this article — how can this help ME? I offer two suggestions (of many), learned from the life of Taylor that can encourage "spiritual" resilience. This "spiritual" resilience, along with the other three dimensions, may help us thrive through tough times.

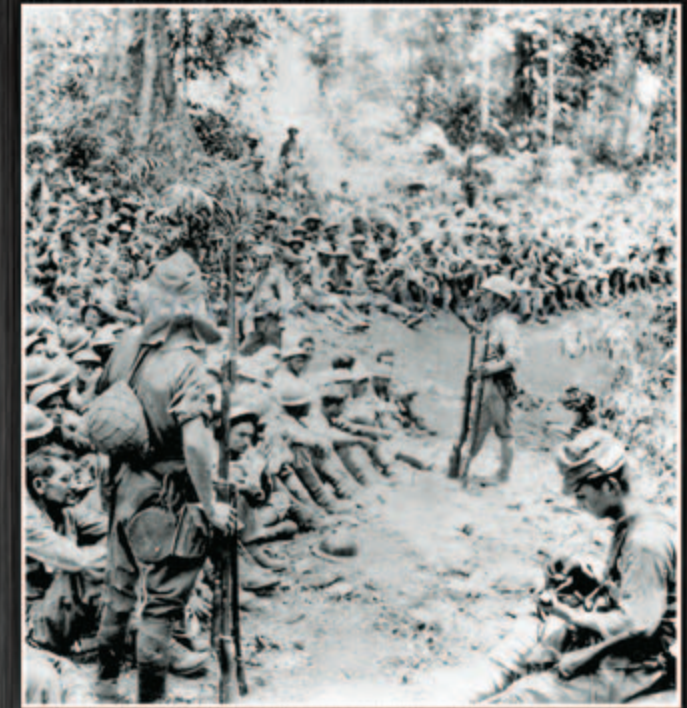
First, Taylor had a strong sense of purpose and meaning in his life. In the first eight months at the Cabanatuan POW camp, more than 8,000 prisoners were stuffed into the overcrowded compound and over 2,500 died from sickness, maltreatment and starvation. In the first nine months at Camp O'Donnell, 40,000 American and Filipino prisoners died. This was Taylor's world of death. Billy Keith, in an article for the Baptist Press, stated that Taylor would never forget Independence Day, 1943. While in the Cabanatuan POW Camp, on the Fourth of July, "the Japanese prison guards placed Taylor in a so-called 'heat box' to punish him for attempting to have medicine smuggled into the camp to save American lives. He and several other prisoners languished in the boxes, often without food or water, where the temperature reached 110 degrees as the sun beamed through the split bamboo walls." His survival was a miracle. Later after being freed from the 'heat box,' Taylor was weak and he required a cane to stand or walk. He gathered a

group of prisoners around him and said, "Ask me about my condition. I'm dirty, nasty and all I have on is my underwear. Can you smell the stench of my rotting teeth? Listen to me, listen without pity, I'm not going to die. I'm going to live and you are too, because God is going to give us strength."

Taylor drew strength from a purpose and meaning outside of himself. An important question for the development of our own "spiritual resilience" is finding an answer to the same question: where do WE go to find the strength to overcome? For Taylor, a devout Christian, his strength came through religious faith and hope. A "non-religious" source of meaning came from his unconditional and deep love for his wife Lone. Taylor is quoted over and over in the retelling of his experience to author Billy Keith that his thoughts and longings for his wife Lone were a significant lifeline for him. His hope of being reunited with her gave him the strength he needed to get through some of his darkest days. Regardless of our religious background or lack thereof, asking this same question and seeking an answer is important to the development of our spiritual resiliency.



Second, Taylor's profound example of forgiveness laid a powerful foundation for his "spiritual resilience." Tragically, Taylor faced one of his most difficult hours when the war ended and he returned home. He learned that the love of his life, the one for whom he 'lived' and the one who meant everything to his future ... had remarried. Lone, his precious wife, was mistakenly told that Preston didn't survive the "hell ships." Since Preston was dead, she moved on with her life. She remarried a month before he returned home. Taylor told Billy Keith that "when he heard the sad news, he thought God had deserted him. But, in time, he realized that God had been with him all through the years of imprisonment and would always be with him." Taylor sacrificed so much for his "band of brothers." Now he had to grieve the loss of Lone and he had to sacrifice his hopes and dreams for a family with her. This experience was devastating. Yet he forgave her and he gave her the freedom to begin a life with a different man. It was that same attitude and power of forgiveness that led him to forgive his persecutors. Billy Keith described Taylor as a man of great humility. He quoted Taylor in his later years as the



Chief of Chaplains, "We don't want to be bitter toward the Japanese. It was a great tragedy for that nation to undergo such a trauma, just as it was for the prisoners of war in their camps. I learned to forgive them a long time ago." An important question for the development of our own "spiritual resilience," based on the life of Taylor, involves struggling with the same difficult question: "is there someone in MY life that I need to forgive? If we are able to forgive, and sometimes that involves forgiving ourselves first, a huge burden can be lifted from our hearts and life can have a new beginning.

We started this article by asking what "spiritual resilience" might look like. The life of Preston Taylor gives us a clear picture of the power and strength embodied within the spiritual pillar. Wrestling with two important questions can go a long way in developing our own spiritual resilience ("Where do I go to find the strength to overcome?" and "Is there someone in MY life that I need to forgive?"). Meaning and purpose along with love and forgiveness are just a few of the many "spiritual" skill sets important to the development of spiritual resilience. Other "spiritual resilience" themes highlighted in Taylor's life could include the importance of "gratitude," "practicing kindness and compassion," "the power of mediation and prayer," and the "importance of community or connection." All of these aspects of "spiritual resilience," seen in Taylor's life, if applied to our own lives, can enable us to grow spiritually. To mine the rest of these treasures, you'll need to read the book, *Days of Anguish, Days of Hope* by Billy Keith! If Taylor were here today, I think he would agree that "spiritual" resilience, along with the other three dimensions, can help all of us thrive through tough times! ✦



# Standards, Discipline, Decision Making, Resiliency

BY CHIEF MASTER SGT.  
GARY B. CARTER

During my 25 years of service, I have followed the Air Force Academy football program with a keen eye. Although, not a perennial national power, they are an elite college football program that has developed 77 All-Americans, including Academic All-Americans. Granted they don't have a team full of five and four star recruits like Alabama Crimson Tide or the Florida State Seminoles, but they have represented the Air Force very well on the national stage. Additionally, our Falcons have been to a bowl game the last five years. I believe Coach Troy Calhoun, just like many successful leaders of elite college football programs share a similar philosophy. Teams like the Air Force Academy, first, recruit and develop personnel which are talented, disciplined, outstanding decision makers who have performed well in the face of adversity. Second, they build a support system that facilitates personnel and professional growth. Third, they hire excellent position coaches who also relate well to the elite high school football players and their families. Fourth, they recruit high character individuals and when a player displays character flaws or does not follow team rules they are disciplined. Repeat violators are dismissed from the program. Hopefully some of this sounds familiar.

# THE BEDROCK OF EXCELLENCE





Photo by: Tech. Sgt. Raymond Hoy



Photo by: John Van Winkle



Photo by: Rachel Boettcher



Photo by: Kemberly Groue



Photo by: Rachel Boettcher



Photo by: Mike Kaplan



I think it is safe to say these elite coaches are not only concerned about results, but I have heard them say on numerous occasions that the process is just as important as the result. In the case of college football, practice and preparation is just as important as game day.

Elite football programs and high performance organizations within our Air Force share some commonalities. High performance organizations adhere to standards and set high expectations. They follow Department of Defense Instructions, Air Force Instructions, Operational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards and technical order data. High performance organizations are disciplined. Airmen follow the rules all the time and the organization's climate and culture incentivizes

performing tasks the right way and negatively reinforces those members who don't. High performance organizations are learning environments. They replicate and war-game complex actions and practice before executing in real time. High performance organizations mitigate risk by routinely identifying the hazard, assessing the risk, analyze risk control measures, make controlled decisions, implement risk controls, and supervise and review the actions. High performance organizations consistently challenge the decision making of their members. These organizations have a robust after-action review process. They have a vibrant and challenging certification program and consistently promote a high ethical environment. High performance

organizations are resilient. No organization has the stars align every day. Some days, activities go according to plan while other days take a little ingenuity. It is this organizational elasticity that determines whether an organization can sustain superior performance.

Coaches don't play the game, players do. Each one of us is counted on to play our role—to achieve excellence. We are counted on to make the plays necessary to win the game. Make no mistake about it, in order to make plays you must leverage the process and support structure to prepare. You see it is not about the result, but how you arrived at the result. If the process is sound the result will take care of itself. If the process is not sound you may get lucky, but luck will only last so long. We know we must

follow tech data and/or Air Force Instructions, but why don't we ... trust maybe or we may feel pressured to produce the widget right now or the mission will fail? Well, have we ever thought the mission will fail if we don't do the task correctly? I had a mentor tell me, "What is the use of doing an activity fast if we have to go back and correct the mistakes." We know what the standards are. Can you imagine an Air Force where everyone follows the standard ... everyone follows rules? I can. I do my part to ensure my teammates will also. I am doing my part to develop resilient Airmen who persevere. Airmen who are balanced both emotionally and spiritually ... Airmen who are physically fit and who understand the value of social relationships. I am doing my part to ensure my teammates are disciplined and eliminate mental mistakes. I can tolerate physical mistakes, but knowing the rules and not following them just eats at my core. How can we sit back and not do anything when safety and standards are compromised? Remember our core values of *Integrity First, Service before Self and Excellence in All We Do*.

Make no mistake, we are a great fighting force ... this is the best Air Force the world has ever seen, but we can be better. We are maybe a block away from breaking the game wide open. As Tony Dungy stated, "Do the routine things better than anyone else."

Developing Airmen and managing organizations is a process. The team that blocks and tackles the best will win.

Good luck to our Air Force Fighting Falcons! 🦅



Photo by: John Van Winkle



Nothing is more important than keeping your loved ones safe. Yet, every minute, 17 children go to the emergency room with unintentional injuries – that's 9.2 million accidents that didn't have to happen every year.

It's often small decisions – a candle left burning, a dry Christmas tree or child left alone even for a moment – that could have life-changing consequences. When it comes to holiday dangers, the numbers are more startling than you might think:



**1,650**  
the number  
of Americans  
injured in  
fires each  
year during  
the holidays.

**15,000** the  
number of candle-related  
fires each year.



**\$990M** the  
cost in damage due  
to fire during the  
holiday season.



**400** the number  
of American lives lost  
each year to fire during  
the holiday season.



**5,800** the number  
of Americans treated in  
emergency departments for  
fall-related injuries sustained  
while decorating during the  
holiday season.

By taking simple steps, we have an opportunity to help change these statistics together. Committing a minute to safety can be as quick and easy as testing your smoke alarm, taking pillows out of the crib or simply using a cabinet lock. Imagine if every mom committed just one minute to safety every day? Thousands, perhaps millions of injuries could be avoided. Moms today have a powerful opportunity to raise a safer generation of children, and it can all start by committing just one minute to safety.

For more than 116 years, UL has been an independent safety certification organization that tests, inspects, validates and inspects products for safety.

Sources:

USAF December and Holiday Fires – 2006

NFPA – June 2010

CDC Fall-Related Injuries During the Holiday Season – 2004

NFPA Home Christmas Tree and Holiday Light fires – 2009



1. Water, water, water your tree. Dry trees pose a fire risk — make a fresh cut on the base before putting your tree into a sturdy stand, and water frequently.
2. Check your lights; check them twice. Inspect all of your electric lights and decorations for damage or wear. Cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires and loose connections may pose a fire or shock hazard.
3. Plan your fire escape. Use the holidays as a good time to practice a fire escape plan with your loved ones. Identify at least two exits from every room in the house.
4. Sleep safe. Install carbon monoxide alarms. Be sure that at least one carbon monoxide alarm is installed on each floor of your home, and always close to sleeping areas.
5. Be flame aware. Always blow out unattended candles and teach your children to stay away from lit candles or fireplaces.
6. Give wrapping paper a second life. Don't burn used wrapping paper as it may cause intense flash fires; throwing it out adds waste. Consider recycling or repurposing it instead.
7. Know your lights and cords. Do not connect more than three miniature light strings together. Also, be sure to check the rating on your extension cords and do not plug in more than the recommended wattage.
8. Steer your tree clear. Your tree should be positioned at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources. It should also not block any doorways or exits.
9. Decorate with a safe eye. Cords should not be run under carpets or tacked-up with metal nails or staples. Small decorations can be choking hazards so keep them out of the reach of toddlers.
10. Look for UL. The UL mark appears on products that have been tested for safety. Make sure to look for it to help keep your holidays safe and bright.



# AWARDS OF DISTINCTION

## Aircrew Safety



**Maj. Jeffery Simmons, Capt. Zachary Martin, Master Sgt. William Nabakowski, Staff Sgt. Zachary Gyokeres, 66 RQS, Nellis AFB, Nev.** The crew of Jolly 64 was airborne en route to the Nevada Test and Training Range. While in cruise flight, the flight engineer noticed a crack in the 308 beam on the right side of their HH-60G helicopter. The crack in the vital structural beam of the aircraft was large enough to see daylight through and had extended through a section that had been previously patched. The decisive actions of the crew prevented the possible loss of their aircraft and/or injury to the crew had the crack gone unnoticed. *(awarded Aug 2012)*

**Lt. Col. Ted Wertzberger, Capt. Randell Yi, Staff Sgt. Mary Johnson, 18 RS, Creech AFB, Nev.** This crew successfully prevented a midair collision between two MQ-1B aircraft. Immediately after getting into their seats, the supported unit approved the previous crew's request for a 1,000' descent to improve the targeting pod picture. While completing her post-crew changeover checks, Staff Sgt. Johnson noticed a Link-16 track from another MQ-1B operating co-altitude in the same airspace as her own aircraft. The crew's timely, decisive action and seamless Crew Resource Management (CRM) were instrumental in preserving two \$4.5M combat assets. *(awarded Sep 2012)*

**Majs. James Ellis, Eric Sobecki and Krisalyn Vaughn and Capt. Charles Armstrong, 37 EBS, Al Udeid AB, Qatar.** Three hours after departing their deployed base airfield, Bone 23's number two hydraulic systems failed indicated by zero hydraulic pressure and quantity in conjunction with a hydraulic and Master Caution light. Six hours into their sortie, the primary of two fuel management systems failed. Following completion of the fuel emergency checklist, the number four hydraulic system also failed. Outstanding CRM subsequently saved a \$283 million AF asset without loss of life or injury. This marked the B-1's first-ever simultaneous failure of hydraulic systems two and four while airborne. *(awarded Oct 2012)*

## Crew Chief Safety



**A1C Isaiah Jones and Nicholas M. Landi, 4 MXS, Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C.** While performing a recovery on an F-15E, both Amn noticed a substantial amount of smoke coming from the RMLG brake. Upon aircraft shutdown, a fire developed on the right brake assembly. A1C Jones immediately evacuated the area of all ground personnel and raced to the fire extinguisher. With the halon fire extinguisher charged, Amn Jones extended the hose and proceeded to battle the fire. AIC Landi quickly informed the aircraft crew of the dangerous situation, and focused his attention on evacuating both crew members from the area. Their actions prevented further damage to a \$52 million asset. *(awarded Aug 2012)*

**Staff Sgt. Richard Eady, 455 EAMXS, Bagram AB, Afghanistan.** The HH-60 aircrew and EHMU maintenance personnel raced to the flight line for a personnel recovery mission. The second aircraft's tail wheel lock pin failed to disengage preventing the aircraft from turning. The marshaller signaled the aircraft into a hover. As soon as the aircraft lifted off the ground the left side landing gear drag beam snapped in half. Sgt. Eady motioned the marshaller to keep the aircraft in a hover while he found something for the aircraft to land on. He re-positioned the two tires under the cabin section of the aircraft for stabilization. The mission was a success and two survivors were recovered from hostile territory. *(awarded Sep 2012)*

**SrA Joshua T. Brown, 23 AMXS, Moody AFB, Ga.** SrA Brown was in charge of "last look" inspections when he noticed a trail of hydraulic fluid behind one of the running aircraft. He followed the trail to discover that the left main landing gear brake piston was leaking profusely. Amn Brown instructed the pilot to shutdown while he notified the EOR supervisor to contact the owning AMU to recover their aircraft. He called for spill pads to clean up the leak before it reached a storm drain or contaminated a water runoff. His quick actions averted potential damage to an A-10C and possible loss of life. *(awarded Oct 2012)*

## Flight Line Safety



**A1C Jonathan Byerly, 4 AMXS, Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C.** While performing a recovery on an F-15E, A1C Byerly noticed a substantial amount of smoke coming from the right main landing gear brake. Upon aircraft shutdown, a fire developed on the right brake assembly. He evacuated the area of all non-essential personnel and raced to the fire extinguisher assisting with extending the fire extinguisher hose and proceeded to pull the pins, charge the handle, and man the fire bottle. While the fire was being extinguished, he continued to monitor the situation and ensured no other personnel unknowingly put themselves in harm's way. The actions of A1C Byerly prevented further aircraft damage. *(awarded Aug 2012)*

**SrA Daniel Ubence and A1C Richard Lewis, 552 AMXS, Tinker AFB, Okla.** Airmen Ubence and Lewis were conducting an equipment inventory of all assigned equipment items on an E-3 AWACS. During the inspection, Amn Lewis heard an unusual sound coming from the forward section of the lobe. Upon further investigation, they found the safety relief valve on the forward section of the LOX converter leaking. The valve was stuck in the open position, venting pressures in excess of 400 psi, allowing liquid and gaseous oxygen to leak into the aft lobe. Attention to detail corrected a serious hazard. *(awarded Oct 2012)*

## Ground Safety



**Mr. Michael Lugo, 4 FW, Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C.** Mr. Lugo noticed smoke emanating from a recycling bin outside the rear of his workplace. Upon seeing this, he rushed inside the building and directed Master Sgt. Dove-Alston to call 911. He then retrieved a fire extinguisher and returned to the recycle bin to combat/contain the fire until the fire department could arrive. The extinguisher did not have enough retardant to completely put the fire out. The fire department was able to fully extinguish the blaze. They then determined that the cause of the fire was 5-6 cigarette butts that someone had thrown into the paper recycle bin rather than into the butt can. *(awarded Sep 2012)*

**Staff Sgt. David M. Mitchell, 41 RQS, Moody AFB, Ga.** Jolly 21, an HH-60G helicopter, experienced an electrical malfunction that dictated a precautionary landing at the nearest airfield. As Sgt. Mitchell performed a visual inspection of the running helicopter, he noticed that the stabilator was moving. Closer inspection revealed the stabilator was flapping up and down several inches. Continued flight with the loose stabilator could have resulted in material failure of the main bolt or its mounting bracket and may have resulted in the stabilator departing the aircraft. Sgt. Mitchell's vigilance averted the potential for a major in-flight mishap. *(awarded Oct 2012)*



Pilot Safety



**Col. Philip W. Wielhouwer, 357 FS, Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz.** Col. Wielhouwer, an A-10 senior officer course upgrade pilot, safely and expertly assisted in the recovery of a \$13 million aircraft with a pilot experiencing severe hypoxia symptoms. While flying as student during a local area ACBT sortie, call sign “Possum 01,” his wingman, “Possum 02” noticed a tingling in his fingers and a self-described “dreamlike state.” While the nearly incapacitated instructor pilot struggled to maintain situational awareness and basic aircraft control, Col. Wielhouwer took charge. The decisive actions of Col. Wielhouwer saved a critical Air Force asset and prevented a possible loss of life. *(awarded Aug 2012)*

**Maj. Dylan Thorpe, 75 FS, Moody AFB, Ga.** Maj. Thorpe was flying as Bucko 54, #4 in a 4-Ship A-10 flight to Townsend Range, when his weapon’s computer indicated successful release but was contradicted by the RCO’s “no spot” call. Maj. Thorpe initiated KIO procedures, safed his switches and ran the hung ordnance checklist. Unable to subsequently release the bomb in the impact area, the flight was soon forced to depart the range due to rapidly deteriorating weather conditions with the hung weapon. His attentive flight discipline and quick action prevented a catastrophic situation ensuring the safe return of a damaged Hog while protecting southern Georgia from an unsecure bomb! *(awarded Sep 2012)*

**Capt. James T. Christensen, 75 FS, Moody AFB, Ga.** After completing the CSAR training, Capt. Christensen directed his flight to conduct continuation weapons delivery training. While max performing his A-10 through its first safe escape maneuver at approx. 500’ AGO and nearly 90 degrees of right bank, he heard a loud “Bang” and felt a significant loss of thrust. He attempted to roll wings level; however, the adverse yaw induced severe nose oscillation. Capt. Christensen’s flight discipline and quick action to maneuver his A-10 in a high yaw, thrust deficient and low altitude prevented a catastrophic ejection into a populated countryside and the potential loss of two national assets. *(awarded Oct 2012)*

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Unit Safety



**28th Medical Operations Squadron, Ellsworth AFB, S.D.** The EAFB Command Post was notified of a C-130 crash in the Black Hills of S.D. with four fatalities and two seriously injured survivors. The EMTs procured a building of opportunity and set-up a site clinic complete with exam rooms capable of providing “sick-call” to 41 crash-recovery specialists. The medical mgt team, along with the survivors’ home stations, obtained safe aero vac transfer to hospitals nearer to home. The combined efforts of this unit solidified teamwork and promoted safe practices that guaranteed medical coverage and averted negative health issues with zero mishaps during the crash recovery. *(awarded Aug 2012)*

**28th Civil Engineer Squadron, Ellsworth AFB, S.D.** The 28 CES played a significant role in the recovery of a downed C-130 aircraft in Edgemont, S.D. that was eradicating wildfires in a remote area of the Black Hills National Forest. They provided first responders for medical assistance, extinguishment of 10 spot fires, and establishment of a crash recovery grid. The squadron also erected two shelters, a Command Post and medical tent outfitted with generator power, air conditioning, and drinking water. This provided relief for 250-plus site recovery workers from a hostile environment which aided teams in combating dehydration and fatigue in 100-plus degree temperatures. *(awarded Sep 2012)*

**4th Operations Support Squadron, Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C.** A ground controller at Seymour Johnson Tower identified a dump truck approaching Taxiway Charlie operating on the wrong part of the airfield. The controller notified the flight of two F-15Es that were on takeoff roll. Hulky 12, who was still in the early phases of their departure roll aborted their takeoff while the dump truck continued head on towards the aircraft. The quick and decisive actions of the controllers raised the awareness of the aircrew and prevented the loss of \$108M in assets and five lives. *(awarded Oct 2012)*

Flight Safety



**Capt. Matthew Austin, 77 FS, Shaw AFB, S.C.** As number one of four F-16 aircraft on a night training mission, Capt. Austin’s wingman had an engine transfer to Secondary Engine Control while flying to the working airspace. Realizing the critical nature of the emergency, Capt. Austin swiftly gained clearance for the remaining element to continue their mission and proceeded to clear airspace with the ailing aircraft to troubleshoot the issue. Utilizing his superior aircraft systems knowledge, Capt. Austin completed a battle damage check, supported his wingman by confirming all applicable checklist steps were accomplished, and secured the holding pattern to burn down fuel prior to landing. While holding in the chase position, Capt. Austin successfully informed all concerned agencies about the safety issue, relayed the intent of both aircraft, coordinated for recovery, and sequenced the ailing aircraft around traffic for an uneventful landing and shutdown in the End of Runway. The following day, Capt. Austin was again required to use his outstanding flight leadership skills at night to aid in the recovery of four aircraft during a weather recall. With little time to spare and at heavy gross weight, Capt. Austin directed the recovery with a fuel strategy perfectly adapted to the time-critical situation. Aircraft sequencing was yet again a difficult process with multiple formations proceeding to home station at the same time. Capt. Austin managed the situation flawlessly to ensure the safe recovery of all his flight members. Aided by his impeccable systems knowledge and superior flight leadership, Capt. Austin safely recovered his formations at night in the weather ensuring four \$25M Combat Air Force assets safely landed with no casualties.

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Ground Safety



**Staff Sgt. Patrick J. Mackey, 366 LRS, Mt Home AFB, Idaho.** Sgt. developed, implemented, and maintained the squadron’s Near-Miss Program that facilitates continued safety practices. If not corrected, these near-misses could result in a serious mishap, causing bodily injury or death. The database is used to develop trend analyses and reports which are utilized to brief the squadron commander. During this period, 18 near-miss incidents were reported and corrected. There were two major life threatening situations — two potential property and vehicle damage, seven general safety/tripping hazards and a variety of minor off-duty/sports-related incidents. In preparation for the annual safety inspection, he performed over 150 inspections throughout the squadron and ensured all findings were identified and corrected prior to the inspection, resulting in LRS receiving zero discrepancies. He also developed a tracking tool to monitor the high risk activities throughout the squadron, clearly identifying what types of activities and their associated risks should be briefed to squadron personnel at flight stand ups and Commander’s Calls. Sgt. Mackey keeps 366 LRS leadership fully aware of all safety-related issues by providing monthly briefings that ensure all findings are permanently resolved. His dedicated efforts have heightened the awareness of 329 squadron personnel and recalibrated the entire safety program into an efficient, effective and functional tool. Sgt. Mackey’s acute attention to detail and corrective actions ensured LRS is not only in compliance with all wing safety requirements, but also a safe place to work.

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Weapons Safety



**A1C Daniel L. Colon-Medina, 28 MXS, Ellsworth AFB, S.D.** During this quarter, A1C Colon-Medina performed 24 weapons safety spot inspections which are used to identify and negate unsafe conditions in the work center environment. During one of the inspections, he identified a shop utility locker that had been causing interference with the work center static grounding system. He corrected the situation and mentored the section personnel to prevent future occurrences. He also performed, with distinction, during a bottom bailout rocket motor installation. His extensive knowledge of this explosive component led him to notice a severed explosive line which exposed an unstable explosive compound and created an extremely hazardous condition for both the aircraft and personnel in the immediate area. This critical component supplies the energy necessary to sequence the removal of the crew entry ladder, allowing for emergency egress of the cockpit. By quickly disconnecting the severed explosive line, he neutralized the situation and prevented the accidental detonation of the connected 1.2 class explosive, a potentially catastrophic incident. A1C Colon-Medina discovered a severed bottom bailout interlock cable during the installation of another component. By repairing the damaged cable, he averted a safety of flight issue that would have inhibited the operation of the bottom bailout system in the event of an emergency egress event. His actions not only restored the bottom bailout system integrity, but allowed the aircraft to be utilized in the flying schedule the very next day.



FY12 Flight			
As of September 30, 2012			
	Fatal	Aircraft Destroyed	Class A Aircraft Damage
1 AF			**
9 AF			
12 AF		x2  x3	x2
USAFWC			
ANG (ACC-gained)			
AFRC (ACC-gained)			

FY12 Ground			
As of September 30, 2012			
	Fatal	Class A	Class B
9 AF		3	2
12 AF		8	2
DRU's		2	0

FY12 Weapons		
As of September 30, 2012		
	Class A	Class B
9 AF	0	0
12 AF	0	0
AWFC	0	0

**Legend**

Class A - Permanent Total Disability; Property Damage \$2,000,000 or more  
Class B - Permanent Partial Disability; Property Damage between \$500,000 and \$2,000,000  
Class C - Lost Workday; Property Damage between \$50,000 and \$500,000  
(Class Description Effective October 1, 2009)

\*\* Non-rate Producing      \* Fatality

= Fatal      = Fatal due to misconduct

Flight Notes

ACC finished the FY12 flying program on a high note. We experienced no rate producing Class A flight mishaps over the final two months. Our goal is to continue this positive trend into FY13. In FY12, many of our preventable aviation mishaps involved highly experienced aircrew members who failed to follow established procedures or made errors in basic airmanship. In FY13, ACC aircrews will have even fewer flying hours to maintain basic proficiency levels, making organizational and flight leadership and discipline even more crucial. Follow your guidelines; they've been written in blood!

Ground Notes

ACC finished the fiscal year with a mishap record slightly worse than the last few years. Class A mishaps went from nine in FY11 to 13 in FY12. PMV4 and PMV2 were the main categories with a total of 11 mishaps, and sports and rec experienced two fatal mishaps. The 13 mishaps resulted in 15 fatalities and one permanent total disability. Contributing factors in the majority of the mishaps included alcohol, speed and lack of PPE. As we start FY13, supervisors and leaders need to be involved with their Airmen, in attempts to change this adverse trend of self-defeating behaviors. We need everyone working in concert to instill a way of life where reckless behaviors are not tolerated.

Weapons Notes

We are pleased to see that mishap rates dropped during the months of August and September! We had zero Class A, B, C and D mishaps during that time span; however, we did have one Class E event. As you know, technical data violations continue to be causal for a large portion of our historical mishaps. One mishap is too many so continue to strive for excellence by following procedures and instructions to the letter. Winter is fast approaching, which brings new challenges during explosives operations. Proper grounding techniques should be re-emphasized during the cold dry winter months. Thanks for your continued efforts in keeping our explosive operations safe throughout ACC.

Symbols for Mishap Aircraft



Statement of Annual Ownership

We are authorized by the U.S. Postal Service to use Periodicals postage to distribute *The Combat Edge* magazine. Certain users of this rating are required to publish their Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation annually.

–The Combat Edge

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation form for THE COMBAT EDGE, Winter 2013 issue, dated October 1, 2012. The form includes sections for publication information, ownership details, and circulation data. It is signed by Barbara J. Taylor, Editor.

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# OVER the Edge MAGAZINE



What Was I  
Thinking?

**PAGE 10**





You were only buzzed? Then this is only a sprain.

Don't let a little buzz ruin your holidays.

**buzzed  
drunk**  
driving is  
driving  
designate a sober driver

## OVER the Edge MAGAZINE

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by Chaplain (Col.) Jimmy M. Browning,  
ACC/HC, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va.

### 8 | WINGMAN CHARLIE

by Senior Airman Brigitte N. Brantley,  
8 AF/PA, Kunsan AB, South Korea

### 10 | WHAT WAS I THINKING

by Anonymous

# Heating Safety

There is something about the winter months and curling up with a good book by the fireplace. But did you know that heating equipment is one of the leading causes of home fire deaths? With a few simple safety tips and precautions you can prevent most heating fires from happening.

## BE WARM AND SAFE THIS WINTER!

- » Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from heating equipment, like the furnace, fireplace, wood stove or portable space heater.
- » Have a three-foot "kid-free zone" around open fires and space heaters.
- » Never use your oven to heat your home.
- » Have a qualified professional install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters or central heating equipment according to the local codes and manufacturer's instructions.
- » Have heating equipment and chimneys cleaned and inspected every year by a qualified professional.
- » Remember to turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.
- » Always use the right kind of fuel, specified by the manufacturer, for fuel burning space heaters.
- » Make sure the fireplace has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Ashes should be cool before putting them in a metal container. Keep the container a safe distance away from your home.
- » Test smoke alarms monthly.



## Heating Equipment Smarts

**Install** wood burning stoves following manufacturer's instructions or have a professional do the installation. All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

**Install** and maintain CO alarms to avoid the risk of CO poisoning. If you **smell** gas in your gas heater, do not light the appliance. Leave the home immediately and call your local fire department or gas company.



## FACT

Roughly half of home heating fires are reported during the months of **December, January, and February.**



Your Source for **SAFETY** Information

NFPA Public Education Division • 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169



# Life's Plumb-Line

BY CHAPLAIN (COL.) JIMMY M. BROWNING

**E**ver since my grown kids exposed me to and convinced me of the ease of a smart-phone, I have been discovering and swapping apps. A recent discovery was an app that gives me several tools useful for my hobby of woodworking. One in particular is a "plumb bob." It is an electronic version of an ancient and very simple tool called a plumb line. A plumb line is nothing more than a piece of string with a pointed weight on the end. By holding up the string, the weighted pointer will hang straight down (being drawn vertical by the earth's gravity.) Therefore, it does not matter the angle of the handler, the plumb line will be vertical. By using a plumb line, a builder can check whether a post or wall is properly vertical. This electronic app, once calibrated, highlights a point on an X/Y axis indicating if an object is "plumb."

Like pilots who use instrument indicators like altimeter, attitude and air speed to keep situational awareness of their plane's position relative to the earth, we need some instrumentation for our lives. We can become overly fixated in one area of our lives and enter a danger zone in other areas without even realizing it. We need a plumb line to help us have situational awareness to determine if our lives are off-balanced or out of kilter. Sometimes we easily know when we are off-balanced. Other times, we are moving so gradually off-centered, we can reach a tipping point unexpectedly.

A few years back, I was listening to a senior enlisted leader's story as he was nearing retirement. While I listened to him for 45 minutes, he told me one thing I hope never to forget for my own life. Without knowing it, he was holding up to me a plumb line. After recounting so many of his military successes and achievements, he said with deep sadness, "I have done everything the Air Force has asked of me. I have exceeded their expectations and have done my job very well. I am proud of what I have accomplished as an Airman. However, it has cost me my family. I am retiring alone." Unfortunately, since then, I have heard that same story multiple times.





A quick Google search on “keeping balance in your life” revealed over 53 million results! Obviously, we do not need another article on “you need to keep balance in your life.” If the message is so prevalent, then why is it so hard to keep that balance?

Obviously, both external and internal factors can throw us out of balance. External factors are typically unexpected when they catch us ill prepared: unexpected baby, unexpected health issue, unexpected financial challenge, unexpected tragedy, unexpected

relationship loss, etc. Other less obvious factors are inward: a perfectionist personality, being overdriven for professional success to overcome personal insecurities, an unwillingness to let others share in the responsibilities and accolades, unnecessarily blaming yourself when you bear no fault, inability to forgive yourself and others, etc. Thus, we could protect our life balance by doing early preparation for unexpected possibilities. In addition, we should become more aware of our own

personality issues and needs in order to avoid driving others and ourselves crazy!

Yet, I sense this answer is insufficient for developing and maintaining balance. What if you could drop a plumb line that would highlight what is ultimately and substantially important in your life. What if it would clearly identify what is at the core of your being? In other words, what centers you? What is ultimately significant to you? What keeps all other relationships or things in proper perspective? What truly matters? What is your “one thing” using the classic line of Jack Palance, a tough taskmaster in the movie

“City Slickers”? This “one thing” is what your plumb line would indicate as your life’s pivotal point.

Take a moment and reflect on your own plumb line indications. Ask a significant other to reflect with you as you seek answers to the following questions: What is critically or substantively important to you? Around what do you orchestrate your life? Is it lasting? Has it changed? If so when and why? Will it withstand the struggles and trials of living and death? Will it center you when life unexpectedly or tragically happens? Are your life choices and actions consistent with your “one thing?” At the end of your life, will you still value your choice? How will it define your legacy?

These are tough questions. But, so is putting a plumb line against a wall. The plumb line will reveal an honest answer without bias.

Finally, after you define what is central in your life by which all other things encircle, you should stop from time to time to see if your plumb line is still pointing to that core importance. Or, have you let yourself become distracted again? If you center and balance your life, then your plumb line will consistently point to your life’s “one thing.” If not, then, your plumb line will indicate your ever-changing priority.

What a handy life app it would be to have a “life’s plumb line” to show easily and quickly what we have allowed either intentionally or randomly to become the center of our life. Then, if needed, we could adjust in order to maintain our life’s balance. ✨



Photo by: Carol Lawrence



# Wingman Charlie

BY SENIOR AIRMAN  
BRIGITTE N. BRANTLEY

**W**ingman 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." ★





# What Was I Thinking?

BY ANONYMOUS

**I**t's hard to believe, but summer is behind us and boy will I miss it. I really enjoyed getting out of the house and working in the yard; although my yard doesn't show it; playing golf, although my score doesn't show it, and having plenty of daylight to do the things after work without being rushed to get it in before the sun goes down.

On the bright side, the fall and winter months offer lots to look forward to. I enjoy watching football, going snow skiing or snowboarding, driving in the mountains and looking at all the trees and leaves turning colors, and of course playing golf. My only problem is that I still try to accomplish as much in the fall and winter as I did in the summer. I don't know about you, but I just can't seem to get it all done; however, it's not from a lack of trying. I'm the type of guy that thinks I can do anything and often pushes the envelope in order to get everything done.

A great example of this was a ski trip that I took with my and my wife's sister's family. Normally, every Christmas vacation we try to go skiing in the Poconos, which is about a three- and-a-half hour drive from my in-laws house (where we usually celebrate the holidays). Unfortunately last year, the day we were planning on going skiing, they were calling for a blizzard. I'm not the sharpest bowling ball on the rack, so I looked at this as a chance to get some fresh powder. A little snow was not going to deter me ... we were going skiing! I failed to utilize good risk management when I decided to take the family out in a blizzard. I didn't think about how my decision would possible affect the safety and lives of 10 other people.



We headed out about 4 a.m. (what a great idea) in two cars. I was driving our van and my wife was driving our other car. My first mistake was allowing my wife to drive in the dark ... she has trouble seeing at night. We were on the road heading north when I decided to turn on the radio to listen to the forecast (a little late ... you think?). They were calling for snow and lots of it up and down the East Coast. My thought was, great since we were going skiing; never giving any thought to the return trip home. The trip up was great ... little to no traffic.

We were there just in time to get in a full day of skiing. I picked this particular ski slope because they did not offer night skiing and I did not want to be tempted to stay too long. It started snowing around 9 a.m. and had gotten really bad around lunchtime. I still wasn't too concerned but did start to question my decision to go

skiing. We continued skiing and around 5 p.m. we were all a little tired. As we took a brief rest in the chalet, we noticed it was becoming dark and snowing sideways with little visibility.

We hit the road heading home around 5:30 p.m. in a driving snow storm ... another bad decision on my part. It took almost two-and-a-half hours to get off the back roads and onto the interstate — normally a 45-minute ride. By this time, the snow was so deep I could barely see where I was going. When we finally reached the interstate, the roads were not much better. Tire tracks identified where we were supposed to drive since you couldn't see the lines on the highway ... this was not good ... the next five or so hours seemed like we were traveling in slow motion. Not only was I having trouble seeing the road, I had a car full of backseat drivers and my wife (who had trouble

seeing at night) was driving behind me. Between trying to stay focused on the road, listening to the backseat drivers and everyone calling my cell phone to see if we were okay, I didn't have time to drift off.

We finally made it home after midnight ... safe and sound. The next morning when I awoke, I questioned (albeit too late) my decision to go skiing. I was able to quickly answer myself with a resounding NO ... shouldn't have done it! Even though we all made it home safe and sound, I think if I had to do it all over again, we would have stayed home and enjoyed each other's company around a roaring fire, instead of risking our lives and limbs to go skiing. Too often we don't think about others who rely on us to make good risk management decisions.

Each year, thousands of people take chances doing things that may not be safe or are very risky. When they look back, after the fact, they question why they actual did it. As we enter the winter season, we all need to make sure we look at what we are doing and ensure we are not only prepared to do the activity, but that it is the right thing to do. Many of you will be hitting the road for a holiday vacation. Now is the time to take a look at your car and make sure it can make the trip. Take a good look at your tires, lights, belts and cooling system to be sure you're prepared for the road. Don't forget your survival kit: blankets, phone charger, flashlight w/extra batteries, first aid kit, high-calorie, non-perishable food, extra clothing, sack of sand or kitty litter, jumper cables, ice scraper, snow shovel and waterproof matches.



Last, but not least, ensure you're ready for the trip. Did you get the proper rest; do you have a backup plan and does someone else know where you are going? Don't let your guard down just because you're driving on roads that you have traveled many times before. This goes for all activities that you'll be doing. Make sure you take a good look at what it takes to do it safely. Something that seems as safe as going fishing in a lake could have huge consequences if you are not properly prepared. Remember, if you see someone doing something unsafe, step up and get involved ... be a good wingman. 🦅

