Winter Edition 2015

Combat Edge

ACC's Full-Spectrum Safety Magazine

THESE THINGS WE DO ...

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Congratulations

Mark A. Welsh III
General, USAF
Chief of Staff

To the safety officers, non-commissioned officers and civilians throughout our Air Force, I want to say thank you for your incredible efforts over the last year. Due to your vigilance, the 2014 fiscal year was the safest ground safety year in 10 years and the safest flight safety year in the history of our service.

I want you to know I firmly believe your efforts had a significant impact on these impressive statistics. An 18 percent reduction in motor vehicle accidents doesn't just happen. A 32 percent reduction in overall Class A aviation mishaps doesn't just happen. These remarkable figures represent the hard work you've undertaken to manage risk and instill a safety ethos into our Airmen.

And that's what this is all about. Even as we celebrate the statistics, we must remember this is about the Airmen—not just the numbers. These figures represent more Airmen returning home safely to their family after a long day's work. They represent more aircraft being available to carry out the mission our nation asks of us. These statistics represent more Airmen being ready to deploy to defend this great nation.

Again, thank you for your hard work and commitment and congratulations on a job well done!

General Herbert J. Carlisle
Commander

Colonel Lawrence A. Nixon
Director of Safety

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Art Director

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COVER PHOTO BY: SCOTT DUNHAM

ACCent

Know Your Limitations

Col. Lawrence A. Nixon
Director of Safety

Let's examine an aspect of our lives which affects everyone reading this magazine. This is always ensuring you know your own personal limits and abilities in everything which you do. To steal (and slightly modify) a line from an old movie, a person has "gotta know their limitations."

This isn't meant to say you should limit trying to excel or max perform in an activity. Rather, it is saying to realistically assess your skills and abilities in any activity you do and don't exceed these limits to the point you may hurt yourself or others. Whether the activity is driving, flying, or hiking—and regardless if it is on or off-duty—the action or equipment you are using doesn't care if you are inexperienced or have been doing the activity for years. The action or equipment also doesn't care if you are a brand new recruit or a seasoned professional with over 20 years of service. It will react to whatever inputs or direction you give it and the normal physical laws of the universe, such as gravity and the laws of motion, will always come into play. In effect, the outcome will not "know" this is not supposed to happen to someone with your rank, experience, title, etc.

An experienced pilot I encountered early in my career would advise all new instructor pilots to thoroughly understand their personal skills and abilities in flying and recovering their aircraft from an adverse situation. This would allow them to understand where in the flight regime they could allow student pilots to place the aircraft and still allow safe recovery by themselves, the instructor, in any maneuver. If they allowed the student to exceed their ability, the outcome would likely not be good in many cases. As new instructor pilots gradually became more experienced instructors they would likely gain better abilities and could allow students more latitude in maneuvers while still maintaining the ability to recover the aircraft if needed.
Similarly, as you become more experienced in any activity, your limits will also probably increase based on your increased knowledge and abilities. However, even the most experienced folks have limits and must always keep them in mind. Never let a title, designation, or duty position create a false sense of ability. "Know your limitations" and always act accordingly. Keep up the great efforts in all you do!

Members of Pedro 83 Flight, from left to right Capt. Vincent Powell, Capt. Brion Stroud, Chief Master Sgt. Norman Callahan, and Tech. Sgt. John Ballard. *(U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Carlin Leslie)*

In January of 2012, Pedro 83 Flight was the dedicated rescue force for a Joint Special Operations Task Force. Pedro 83's unit was by-name-requested by the SEALs for this high priority mission near Mazar-e-Sharif, AFG. Pedro 83 Flight sat on-call MEDEVAC alert at Mazar-e-Sharif as the first assault helicopter departed the area. US Special Forces and ANA commandos were inserted into an LZ adjacent to the village to begin clearing ops. Shortly after their insertion, the team was engaged by heavy enemy fire, severely wounding an ANA commando. Recognizing his wounds were life-threatening, SEALs on scene attempted to treat and ready him for evacuation.
The SEALs requested an urgent MEDEVAC to the location to immediately ex-filtrate the wounded commando. Upon receiving the request, Pedro 83 Flight launched on the mission with visibility in the area as low as 2NM. The aircraft arrived to find an active fire fight in the target area, with an LZ at the bottom of a 1000 foot ravine. Marginal visibility forced a low altitude pass over the hostile village in order to identify the patient's location. After assessing the threat in the area, Pedro 83 Flight determined a hoist was required due to the rocky terrain. Upon sighting the LZ, Pedro 84 aggressively maneuvered the aircraft into position minimizing threat exposure. Once the PJ team was inserted on the ground, they provided immediate critical care to the wounded commando. Pedro 83 provided defensive over watch from an overhead gun pattern as the PJ team secured the ANA patient.
While hovering, Pedro 84 identified a small LZ, allowing for a more expedient evacuation of the team/patient. As village clearing ops continued in the cliffs above them, Pedro 84 carefully landed in the rocky, confined LZ. PJs used expert lifesaving skills to stabilize the patient and were able to move him quickly to the waiting helo. After less than 5 minutes on the ground, the Pararescuemen rapidly loaded the patient for immediate departure. Pedro 84 executed a hazardous downwind takeoff to avoid overflying the ongoing firefight in the target village. Pedro 83/84's presence in the area allowed the Task Force to continue assault operations in the target village. Due to Pedro 83 Flight's valiant efforts, the patient reached higher care within the "golden hour" and survived. As a result of the vigilant alert posture maintained by Pedro 83/84, the SEAL mission that night was successful. The efforts of this mission earned the prestigious Mackay Trophy for 2012.

THESE THINGS WE DO ...

BY MAJ. VINCENT B. POWELL

I was the flight lead, call sign PEDRO 83, for this mission, and as our two helicopters departed the airfield two challenging aspects of the environment quickly became apparent. First, the gathering dusk would make flying in the mountainous terrain of Northern Afghanistan difficult. The daylight was fading making it tough to see, but at the same time, it was still too bright to use NVGs. This period makes for some tricky flying, especially at the low altitudes, 50 – 100 feet above the ground, we prefer to fly. The second challenge was created by the terrain itself. The objective location for the on-going operation was in a valley surrounded on all sides by mountains. Because we do nearly all of our flying at such low altitudes, there was a mountain range between us and the village where the task force was operating. This made radio communication directly with the controller on the ground impossible. Having good radio contact with the controller was necessary because there were many other aircraft, including Army attack helicopters, fighters, and numerous reconnaissance assets supporting the operations. The controller would have specific instructions concerning how we could safely enter and exit the airspace over the village, and we needed to get that information quickly. Fortunately, we were able to utilize the F-15Es overhead as a radio relay for us to the ground controller, but doing so took extra time and diverted some of the fighter pilot's attention to us. The controller informed us the attack helicopters would have to hold away from the area in order to allow us to operate, adding extra imperative to the need for us to get in and out quickly.

After receiving our instructions from the controller, my flight entered the objective area valley and we got our first look at the actual situation. The sides of the valley were quite steep, and the valley itself was narrow which would limit our ability to position the helicopters in an advantageous way. Additionally, there were pockets and teams of personnel scattered around the valley making it difficult to identify who was friendly and who might be an enemy. Because of the number of people on the ground, it took us some time to find the team that had the wounded Afghan soldier. We first asked for smoke and were told it was unavailable. Next we asked for a VS-17 panel and saw four or five different panels show up on the ground. We radioed that the multiple panels were not very helpful and we still didn't have the patient's actual location. At this point the team with the patient found a smoke grenade, and we were finally able to identify his position.

I decided to have my wingman, PEDRO 84, execute the recovery of the wounded soldier. When they called they had the smoke in sight I directed them to make the pick-up. At this point the crew of PEDRO 84 had a decision to make. If they made their approach into the wind, as all pilots like to do, they would be flying directly towards steeply rising terrain. This would make a go-around difficult if they should come under fire. The crew elected to make a downwind landing in order to keep their go-around options open, but doing so required a more time-consuming, controlled approach. As they completed their approach to the team, the crew determined there was no safe place to land the helicopter. They decided the best option was to keep the aircraft in a hover and lower the PJs to the ground with the hoist. Once on the ground, the PJs moved to the patient and began to check his status. The crew in the hovering helicopter continued to search for a place to land and found a suitable area approximately 50 yards away. Even though it would mean a short hike for the PJs, landing there would still be quicker than getting the patient on a litter and hoisting him into the aircraft. Meanwhile,

I remained overhead providing close-in cover to the more vulnerable helicopter below and continued coordinating with the controller how we would quickly and safely exit the valley without interfering with the other aircraft operations.

The crew and PJs on the ground were able to quickly get the patient on board their aircraft and took off. As we departed the valley, visibility was at its lowest point due to the fading light. However, our flight returned without any further incident to base. We completed the mission in less than an hour, meeting our requirement; more importantly, the wounded soldier survived.

Photo by: Staff Sgt. Cherie A. Thurlby

There were a few things I learned during the course of this mission and debriefing afterword. First, knowing who else is operating in the same area you are and having at least a basic understanding of their capabilities is important. During this mission we utilized the F-15Es as a radio relay, which allowed us to enter the airspace safely. Also, through the controller on the ground, we knew where the attack helicopters would be and if they could provide fire support for us as well. Unfortunately, because of the narrowness of the canyon they were not able to effectively cover our helicopters. Other than quickly extracting the wounded personnel, getting into and out of the area without disrupting the overall mission is one of our main goals during a mission like this one. Properly integrating with the forces on-scene is critical, especially when space is as tight as it was on this day. As our military becomes more and more joint this capability will become more and more crucial. Second, the problems we had communicating with the ground controller could have been lessened if we had foreseen the radio issues the mountains would cause and planned for them beforehand. In a sense, we got lucky by having the F-15Es overhead, who could not only be a radio relay, but also knew enough of our requirements that they could effectively interface between us and the controller. While the integration worked out well on this day, if we'd already had a plan on how to communicate with the controller, or pre-planned ingress and egress instructions, we wouldn't have had to 'wing it' in the middle of the mission.

Remembering this mission makes me proud to have been a part of it. There were certainly things that I, as PEDRO flight lead, should have done differently, and I'd like to think I learned something from what I did wrong. In the end, however, I was impressed with the level of integrations the entire task force demonstrated; I saw firsthand how knowing the players and what capabilities each provides can make a significant difference in the outcome of the mission. Overall, the operation killed or captured more than 40 enemy fighters, and our part, while small, saved someone's life.

... That other's may live!

Are We Becoming Over-Reliant on Automation?

BY S. A. CANYON

Imagine this scenario: You've just picked your parents up from the airport and are driving them to your house for a visit. Everything is going great … your family, Mom, and Dad are laughing; telling stories. It's going to be a great visit. As you approach an intersection, everybody starts laughing hysterically at a point in the conversation—but you don't. You missed part of the story. You notice the traffic light is green while someone in the car says to you, "Hey, didn't you think that was funny"? As you drive through the intersection (without visually clearing left and right), your car is struck by a fast-moving SUV running a red-light. Temporal distortion sets in and you see everything happening in slow motion. You see airbags inflating. You hear people screaming. Then you go unconscious. Two weeks later, you awake from your coma. Your Mom is there … but she's the only one. You find out what happened. It's not good news.

Back in the "good ol days" when there were very few cars on the road, we didn't have traffic lights—drivers just "looked both ways" and often avoided stories like the one above by seeing an oncoming vehicle. As the roads became more congested, the need for traffic lights arose as an efficient way to get large numbers of vehicles from point A to point B. Soon, generations of drivers lost the "look both ways" habit, now often solely relying on traffic lights or automation to prevent collisions. As depicted in the fictional scenario above, automation sometimes just doesn't keep us out of trouble or harm's way.

Automation is good—if we don't over-rely on it. As an example, let's look at the GPS navigation system found in many cars. Can this convenient tool also become a source of automation over-reliance? It depends. How many times have you been in a car with someone using an onboard navigation system and they are going the completely wrong way because they inadvertently selected the wrong destination in the GPS? Back in the days before GPS, we knew that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West and studied routes on paper maps for general awareness of the drive. Drivers used this information to assist in getting from point A to point B. As technology evolved allowing transition to digital maps and instant directional guidance in cars, many people started losing big picture situational awareness (SA) and became solely reliant on the navigation system's immediate turn guidance. Eventually, we ended up with too many people who don't know or were never taught facts like "If I'm going north and make a right turn, I'll be going east." The car navigation system is a great tool—until you input the wrong address or the map is outdated and does not depict a new road or exit ramp. If you don't have basic SA such as, "I need to travel to the west side of the city," your incorrect address and lack of basic orientation could lead to a significant travel delay (versus a loss of just a few minutes).

Today, with our ever evolving technologies, we have to ask ourselves, "Are we developing generations that are over-reliant on automation?" After leaving full-time active duty, I became a FAA Aviation Safety Inspector. One of my duties is to give those who want to be an FAA Certified Flight Instructor their very first flight instructor check ride. Often, these instructor candidates are fairly young and the majority of the time the check rides are given in aircraft equipped with advanced-avionics. Having administered many check rides, I've often been surprised by the lack of SA during the instrument flight. For instance, the instructor candidate may know how to operate the avionics inside and out but when asked questions like "do you know about where we are" or "which side of the holding pattern are we on," on many occasions I've received quizzical looks and other indications of a loss of positional awareness, a dangerous situation in mountainous terrain areas such as Utah or Colorado. Many of you may be thinking, "Yea, but that's some new instructor applicant flying around in a little ol' Cessna." True … but recall the tragic crash of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 on July 6, 2013. As the NTSB stated in their accident report, "The Boeing 777 is one of the most sophisticated and automated aircraft in service. Automation has unquestionably made aviation safer and more efficient. But the more complex automation becomes, the more challenging it is to ensure that the pilots adequately understand it … the flight crew over-relied on automated systems that they did not fully understand."

I remember when the Inertial Navigation System (INS) first hit the street on Air Force aircraft. At the time, one of my flying instructors hammered into me to not select the next navigation steer point on the INS until I looked at the map and made an approximate mental estimate on the next heading. So, I followed that guidance … "Looks like the next heading is southwest … toggling to next steer point … cool … pretty close." That single method of predicting what the automation should do, engaging the automation, then verifying the automation's detailed assistance was a great technique to use advanced navigation systems as an aid, while still allowing the pilot to maintain general awareness of the aircraft's location and heading. Unfortunately, it seems as if we've deviated from techniques such as these and have generally become over-reliant on automation.

As an example, let's look at a real-world situation of a formation flight lead becoming over-reliant on automation while leading a four-ship of F-16s back to the base. The squadron had recently gained an advanced avionics data link system, called Gateway, which permitted Air Traffic Control to relay radar tracks of other aircraft directly to the fighter pilot's cockpit displays. This great capability enables fighter aircraft to detect traffic and airborne threats which might not otherwise have been detected via the fighter's onboard systems. During the flight, civilian air traffic ended up being a potential mid-air collision conflict for the four-ship of fighters. After landing, during the mission debrief with the other F-16 pilots, the flight lead brought the topic up saying "I don't know what the deal was with that traffic. Why didn't ATC have that guy on the Gateway?" Across the room, the unspoken thought of the other flight members was, "Well, you've got radar … and eyes." These basic tools have been used since the early 1970s to detect traffic and threats in fighter aircraft. Yes, data link is a great tool … but, it is only a tool. In other words, automation systems should enhance our SA but not become our sole source of awareness.

As technology evolves, it's likely newer generations will continue to become even more reliant … and more over-reliant … on automation for many facets of both our personal and professional lives. So, what can we do about it? Consider the following (clearly not an all-inclusive list):

1. ***Commit ourselves individually*** to avoiding over-reliance on automation. Make it an individual personal goal to have "zero automation surprise" in everything we do.
2. ***Peer-lead*** (and "lead from the back" if you have to). Become a role model for "zero automation surprise" so that others will follow our lead.

Now let's return to our original scenario. You're on that same drive home from the airport and everything went exactly the same as in the opening story except that the following happens: As you approach the next intersection, everybody starts laughing hysterically. You see the traffic light is green and then someone says "Hey, didn't you think that was funny?" You hold your finger up giving them the visual "standby one" signal, clear to the left, then clear to the right ***(before getting to the intersection)***, and then see a car from the right that doesn't look like it's going to stop. You start to slow down, keeping your eye on the car. Someone says, "Why are you slowing down … the light's green." At that point, you see the SUV pass right in front of you running a red traffic light. You've narrowly avoided a catastrophic accident. Lead my friends. Reverse the trend. Avoid over-reliance on automation.

Photo by: Staff Sgt. Richard Ebensberger

THE GREEN HORNET

BY CHAPLAIN (LT. COL.) J. DANIEL BRANTINGHAM

On May 27, 1943, the crew of the B-24 Green Hornet set off from Hickam Field, Hawaii, to search for a sister B-24 crew lost in the Pacific Ocean.

The B-24 Green Hornet, a "musher," was notorious for underperformance and many thought the bomber wasn't airworthy. But there was only one choice for the Green Hornet's crew: their familiar B-24, Superman, had been rendered not airworthy by thick enemy flak and a swarm of Japanese Zeroes during the raid on Nauru. Their Superman remained on the airfield with 594 holes.

Scanning the ocean for wreckage and survivors, the Green Hornet fell from the sky after one engine inexplicably failed and a second was mistakenly feathered. Of the eleven souls that began the rescue mission only three survived: pilot Lt. Russell Allen "Phil" Philips; bombardier, Lt. Louise "Louie" Zamperini; and the tail-gunner, Sgt. Francis "Mac" McNamara. The survivors find themselves battered, bruised, and bleeding, in two life rafts they had hurriedly lashed together.

Day 1 "We're going to die," shouts Mac. After reason fails, Louie silences Mac with a backhand to the face. Inventory is taken. Only nine items: a flare gun with only a handful flares, a signaling mirror, a dye marker, a fishing kit, two air pumps in canvas cases, a patching kit, a pair of pliers, eight half-pints of water, and six thick, high calorie, melt-resistant, bitter chocolate Hershey bars.

There is no shade tarp, no bailing bucket, no sea anchor, no mast and sail, no sun screen, no first aid kit, no knife, no radio transmitter, no navigation instruments, nor water still. There is bitter chocolate though.

Day 2 All the chocolate is gone. The affable and good humored tail-gunner falters. In Mac's panic, he ate all the Hershey bars during the night. Louie and Phil barely contain their frustration. Louie expresses his disappointment to Mac. Mac says nothing.

High overhead a B-25 in transit rumbles. Louie fires a flare and then tosses the dye pack into the water. The B-25 maintains course disappearing beyond the horizon.

Day 3 The crew of the *Daisy Mae* scans the ocean hoping to find the Green Hornet's crew. Louie spots the B-24 and fires three flares. The *Daisy Mae* searching diligently for their friends, rumbles on, missing the flares and the rafts.

Day 4 The eight half-pints of water are now empty. All their water is gone.

Day 5 "We're going to die," screams Mac for a second time. Again, reason fails and Louie is forced to silence him with another backhand to the face. For the second time in his life, Louie silently and humbly prays. He had only prayed once before: when his mother was very ill.

Day 7 The rain comes. The survivors celebrate by opening their mouths wide soaking in the precious water. They hold up their empty half-pints, hoping to capture the precious liquid, but the openings are too small to collect more than a few drops.

Scrambling, Louie pulls out the two air pumps and transforms their canvass carrying cases into bowls. The water catchers work. Some two pints are collected.

Suddenly a stormy whitecap rolls over the rafts, spoiling the survivors' harvest. Refusing to surrender, Louie rinses a saltwater soaked canvass, sucks the fresh water from it and spits the recycled water into the half-pints.

Success! Now they have rain catchers and two head covers to share.

Day 10 An albatross lands on Louie's canvass-covered head. The starving man moves with a patience that belies his hunger. Slowly … slowly; success! Louie grabs the fowl, the men's first food in nine days. Taking the pliers the bird is dismembered for their meal. The smell and taste however is foul and their gag reflexes prevent them from swallowing. But the men are not deterred … perhaps the fish will eat the remains. Getting the bait past the ever-present circling sharks proves difficult, but they are finally successful. A 10-inch pilot fish becomes a feast for the three starving survivors.

Day 10 and beyond Louie recalls how survivors of Eddie Rickenbacker's B-17 ditching in the Pacific sank into delirium after drifting for 21 days. He also remembers his USC physiology professor's instruction to think of the mind as muscle requiring exercise. The memories drive him to action. Louie begins peppering Phil and Mac with questions.

Phil takes to the conversation accepting the challenge to exercise his mind. Mac is reserved … fading. They continue the ritual three times a day … sharing memories and future plans, humorous tales and jokes, popular songs, hymns, and recollections of home cooking … down to each ingredient. All three savored their imagined meals.

Day 14 Talk of cannibalism … but only talk. They agree it is NOT an option. Later in the day another albatross is caught and is actually edible. Finding small fish in the bird's belly they have a bit more bait as well. The periodic rains stop.

Day 21 Still no rain. They celebrate breaking Rickenbacker's record. Louie continues to innovate turning his hand into a fishing claw by tying the remaining larger hooks onto his fingers with fishing line. Catching a fish they enjoy a small feast for record breaking day. Another day passes. Still no rain. The men pray together. Rain falls the next day.

Day 27 At perhaps half their original body weight, blistered, dehydrated, and starving, the survivors hear distant engines in the sky. After debating whether or not to signal, they shoot a flare and are spotted. The Japanese Bomber strafes them seven times and drops a depth charge, shredding one of their two rafts and puncturing the second. They work desperately to keep the remaining raft afloat, with Phil pumping, Louie patching, and Mac manning an oar to fight off the sharks, which begin to lunge into the sinking raft.

Day 29 Exhausted and crammed into one raft, Phil and Mac sleep while Louie keeps watch. He was admiring two circling sharks. Curious about their disappearance, he leans over the edge to look closer. As he does a shark lunges for his head; while he fights the shark off, a second one lunges. Thump. Mac is suddenly standing over Louie, oar in-hand, beating the second one back. Mac, who was fading, found himself again. Louie shares his thanks. Mac slips back into the raft exhausted and smiling.

Day 28 After a day and half they have patched and saved their only raft. But now they must pump water out of it 15 minutes twice a day to keep it afloat. A new daily routine is born. The sharks return to their routine of circling. The shredded raft now offers some shade from the pounding sun.

Day 30 THUMP. The survivors bounce in the air. A great white shark is toying with their life raft bumping and splashing it. They remain silent. After a time, the great white loses interest and disappears into the deep.

Day 33 Mac dies. Phil and Louie realize that without him, they would not have survived to this point.

Day 47 Phil and Louie are picked up by a Japanese patrol boat. They remain prisoners of war till Japan surrenders in September 1945.

Lt. Russell Allen "Phil" Philips died in December 1998. Lt. Louise "Louie" Zamperini died in July 2014. Both outlived their raft and prisoner of war experiences. Both were in the habit of exercising their minds, their bodies, and their spirits. Both accepted the challenge to live even under the most oppressive conditions.

As author Laura Hillenbrand recounts in her book on their experience, Unbroken, "It remains a mystery why these three young men, veterans of the same training and same crash, differed so radically in their perceptions of their plight."[1]

Dr. Viktor Frankl, M.D., Ph.D., and survivor of Germany's World War II concentration camps, illuminates the mystery Hillenbrand points out, when recalling his camp experience in Man's Search for Meaning. During his time in the camps he observed that his fellow prisoners had greater chances of survival if they had someone or something to live for outside of the camps.

"The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself become subject to mental and physical decay."[2] In other words, without hope, the oppression of present circumstances could overwhelm a prisoner's will to live. Tragically, Mac had reached his limit, unable to hold any longer dying on day 33 in the life raft.

Reflecting on their 47-day life raft experience, I can see Phil and Louie regularly exercising their spirits. They spoke of the past and the future, but rarely of their present difficulties. They told humorous stories. They established routines. They cared for one another, often giving Mac the best portions of food. They challenged one another with navigation problems. They sang songs and hymns. They prayed. They innovated. They fought for one another. They gave thanks for the smallest victories and minutest reprieves. They allowed nature to inspire them including the circling sharks. Indeed, they exercised hope in the midst of their days of anguish.

[1]Hillenbrand 2010, 147.
[2]Frankl 1976, 117. Dr. Frankl was sentenced to the camps for being a Jew.

Lt. Russell Allen "Phil" Philips

Lt. Louise "Louie" Zamperini

Sgt. Francis "Mac" McNamara

MONTHLY AWARDS

Aircrew Safety Awards of Distinction

1LT. TYLER K. HAZEL AND 1LT. SCOTT G. SUDDERTH – 389 FS, 366 FW, Mt Home AFB ID *(August 2014)*
CREW OF COBRA 55 – 45 RS, 55 WG, Offutt AFB NE *(September 2014)*
MR. MATTHEW LACOURSE AND MR. WALLACE BLEYL – 82 ATS, 53 WG, Tyndall AFB FL *(October 2014)*

Crew Chief Safety Awards of Distinction

STAFF SGT. RYAN J. MAZURE – 7 AMXS, 7 BW, Dyess AFB TX *(August 2014)*
STAFF SGT. KENNETH J. REBER – 388 AMXS, 388 FW, Hill AFB UT *(September 2014)*
A1C KAITLYNE M. LAROCQUE – 451 EAMXS, 451 AEG, Kandahar AF, Afghanistan *(October 2014)*

Flight Line Safety Awards of Distinction

TECH. SGT. OMAR I. ANTUNA – 407 EOSS, 407 AEG, 380 AEW, Al Dhafra AB, U.A.E. *(August 2014)*
STAFF SGT. PHILLIP J. IRWIN – 380 EOSS, 380 AEW, Al Dhafra AB, U.A.E. *(September 2014)*
MASTER SGT. DUSTIN D. DUVALL – 379 EMXS, 379 AEW, Al Udeid AB, Qatar *(October 2014)*

Ground Safety Awards of Distinction

STAFF SGT. GABRIEL L. PULLEN – 355 OSS, 355 FW, Davis-Monthan AFB AZ *(September 2014)*
STAFF SGT. JAMIE L. DROOGER – 11 RS, 432 WG, Creech AFB NV *(October 2014)*

Pilot Safety Awards of Distinction

MAJ. GREGORY M. MANSFIELD – 99 RS, 9 RW, Beale AFB CA *(August 2014)*
CAPT. PEDRO M. ESQUIVEL – 65 AGRS, 57 WG, Nellis AFB NV *(September 2014)*
CAPT. COLIN P. MARSHALL – 31 TES, 53 WG, Edwards AFB CA *(October 2014)*

Weapons Safety Awards of Distinction

STAFF SGT. JOSEPH A. MANN – 355 CES, 355 FW, Davis-Monthan AFB AZ *(August 2014)*
TECH. SGT. GREGORY M. THOMAS – 355 AMXS, 355 FW, Davis-Monthan AFB AZ *(September 2014)*
A1C AUSTIN R. BURKE – 4 EMS, 4 FW, Seymour Johnson AFB NC *(October 2014)*

Unit Safety Awards of Distinction

380 EMXS – 380 AEW, Al Dhafra AB, U.A.E. *(August 2014)*
46 ERS – 386 AEW, Ali Al Salem, Kuwait *(September 2014)*
73 EACS – 451 AEG, Kandahar AF, Afghanistan *(October 2014)*

QUARTERLY AWARDS

Flight Safety

LT. COL. JOHN P. MARKS, 303 EFS, 455 AEW, BAGRAM AB, AFGHANISTAN. On 24 Apr 2014, Lt. Col. Marks safely recovered an A-10C after an anti-skid failure during landing rollout. As he applied brake pressure after landing, a brake system failure caused the aircraft to yaw severely to the right. Using his skill and experience, Lt. Col. Marks immediately recognized the problem, released brake pressure, finessed the aircraft away from the runway edge, and managed to stop clear of the active runway. His decisive actions prevented a tire blowout and subsequent damage to his aircraft; and ensured the active runway remained open for use by numerous airborne aircraft during critical combat operations. Additionally, on 2 May 2014, he safely recovered an A-10C after losing oil pressure on the #2 engine. During the FCF profile, he noticed the #2 engine oil pressure did not recover to normal limits following a negative-G pushover. He quickly analyzed the malfunction, shut down the engine, and recovered the aircraft with a flawless single engine approach and landing in challenging crosswind conditions. As part of his additional duty as the only 303 EFS FCF pilot, he has skillfully conducted nine critical CAS FCFs during the first 90 days of this OEF rotation. Lt. Col. Marks conducted numerous spot inspections ensuring safety standard compliance and acted as an investigating officer on Class D/E incidents, lending expertise to the investigative process, ensuring root causes and effective remedies are applied.

Ground Safety

STAFF SGT. ASHLEY T. HICKS, 4 FW, SEYMOUR JOHNSON AFB NC. Staff Sgt. Hicks distinguished himself by superior performance as a Ground Safety Professional, from 1 April to 30 Jun 2014. During this period, Sergeant Hicks' leadership during three unit, 80 spot, and five high-interest inspections led to all hazards being mitigated in under 30 days, as well as a 15 percent decrease in 4 FW mishaps. His outstanding performance as a lead investigator of 20 reportable mishaps guaranteed 100 percent of Air Force Safety Center requirements were met and 98 percent of all reports were completed within 30 days. Staff Sgt. Hicks was also commended by the 4 FW Commander for his efforts leading a DUI-goggle presentation for the Wing's Critical Days of Summer launch, elevating awareness of the effects of drunk driving. He exemplified the utmost growth as the section's Airfield Driving Program Manager, revitalizing the overall program and elevating vehicle readiness to 100 percent inspection compliance. His dedication to self-improvement was displayed when he accomplished a Humanities College Level Examination, bringing him within four classes of a dual CCAF degree in Aerospace Ground Equipment and Safety. Sergeant Hicks demonstrated his safety expertise by completing the ACC Ground Safety Program Managers and OSHA 510 Construction Safety Courses, and subsequently imparting his gained knowledge to five squadron Unit Safety Representatives.

Weapons Safety

TECH. SGT. MICHAEL J. ULMEN, 4 FW, SEYMOUR JOHNSON AFB NC. Tech. Sgt. Ulmen distinguished himself by outstanding performance as a Weapons Safety Manager, 4th Fighter Wing, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. Sgt. Ulmen's expertise and collaborative skills enabled him to work with eight helping agencies in the authoring of the 4th Fighter Wing Fireworks Display Plan. Additionally, he garnered a magnificently zero weapons mishaps record during his watch and his extensive knowledge of explosive safety standards aided him in the orchestration of 143 explosive safety assessments and 65 inspections. Furthermore, his out-of–the-box thinking was pivotal to the creation of an aggressive spot inspection program leading to the identification of 34 potential hazards ensuring all deficiencies were closed within 30 days of discovery. Finally, Tech. Sgt. Ulmen's unparalleled work ethic and management skills were showcased in the management of the wing's Nuclear Certified Equipment program valued at over 93 million dollars, as he investigated 28 Dull Sword reports ensuring a 100 percent serviceability rate.

FY14 Flight

As of September 30, 2014

	Fatal	Aircraft Destroyed	Class A Aircraft Damage
1 AF			
9 AF			
12 AF		(MQ-1) ** X6	
25 AF			
USAFWC			(MQ-1) **
ANG (ACC-gained)	***	(MQ-9) **	
AFRC (ACC-gained)			

FY14 Ground

As of September 30, 2014

	Fatal	Class A	Class B
9 AF		4	2
12 AF		6	2
USAFWC		0	0
ACC		1	0

FY14 Weapons

As of September 30, 2014

	Class A	Class B
9 AF	0	0
12 AF	0	0
USAFWC	0	0

Flight Notes

FY14 was ACC's safest flying year ever. Zero destroyed aircraft. Zero fatalities. Our two Class A mishaps were both engine-related and allowed our rate to be 66% below our 10 year average! The Class B and C rates were also down 38% and 10% from their 10 year averages. On the RPA side, our Class A rate was down 57% from the 10 year average. These are compelling numbers and I echo the CSAF and AF/SE comments on a job extremely well done. These numbers are a direct reflection of your hard work and attention to detail. Having said that, ACC Airmen don't rest on their laurels! We don't stop thinking about how to prevent mishaps. We know there is more that can be done; and we know there are hazards waiting to bite us in the butt if we lose that focus or stray from established T.O. guidance. Stay engaged, fly safe, and check 6!

Ground Notes

ACC finished the fiscal year with 11 Class A and 4 Class B mishaps that resulted in 10 fatalities, two permanent total disabilities, four permanent partial disabilities and one property damage. All but two of them could have been prevented by not speeding, not drinking and driving, being aware of surroundings, planning better for the task, not exceeding skill limits and using proper PPE or procedures. If each of us would apply Check 3, GPS we could practically eliminate these losses. So before your next activity, remember to Check 3: Gear—may include personal protective equipment, your vehicle, or availability of drinking water; Plan—may encompass the timeline, weather, sequence, emergency contact/backup, as well as other facets; and Skill—may mean are you rested for the activity or your overall experience level with the activity. The AF has already lost 13 Airman to mishaps since 1 Oct 14; let's put a stop to it now! As we go through FY15 let's remember our motto … "Quest for Zero," my job, my life, my choice—we are, in a real way, fulfilling our commitment to mission success.

Weapons Notes

During the 4th quarter of FY14, we experienced zero mishaps. That speaks volumes given the nature of our business. This also shows how committed we are as a team; striving to preserve Air Force assets in Air Combat Command. You've shown tremendous pride reducing explosive mishaps. Let's continue exercising mishap prevention methods. We certainly appreciate all that you do for the weapons community!

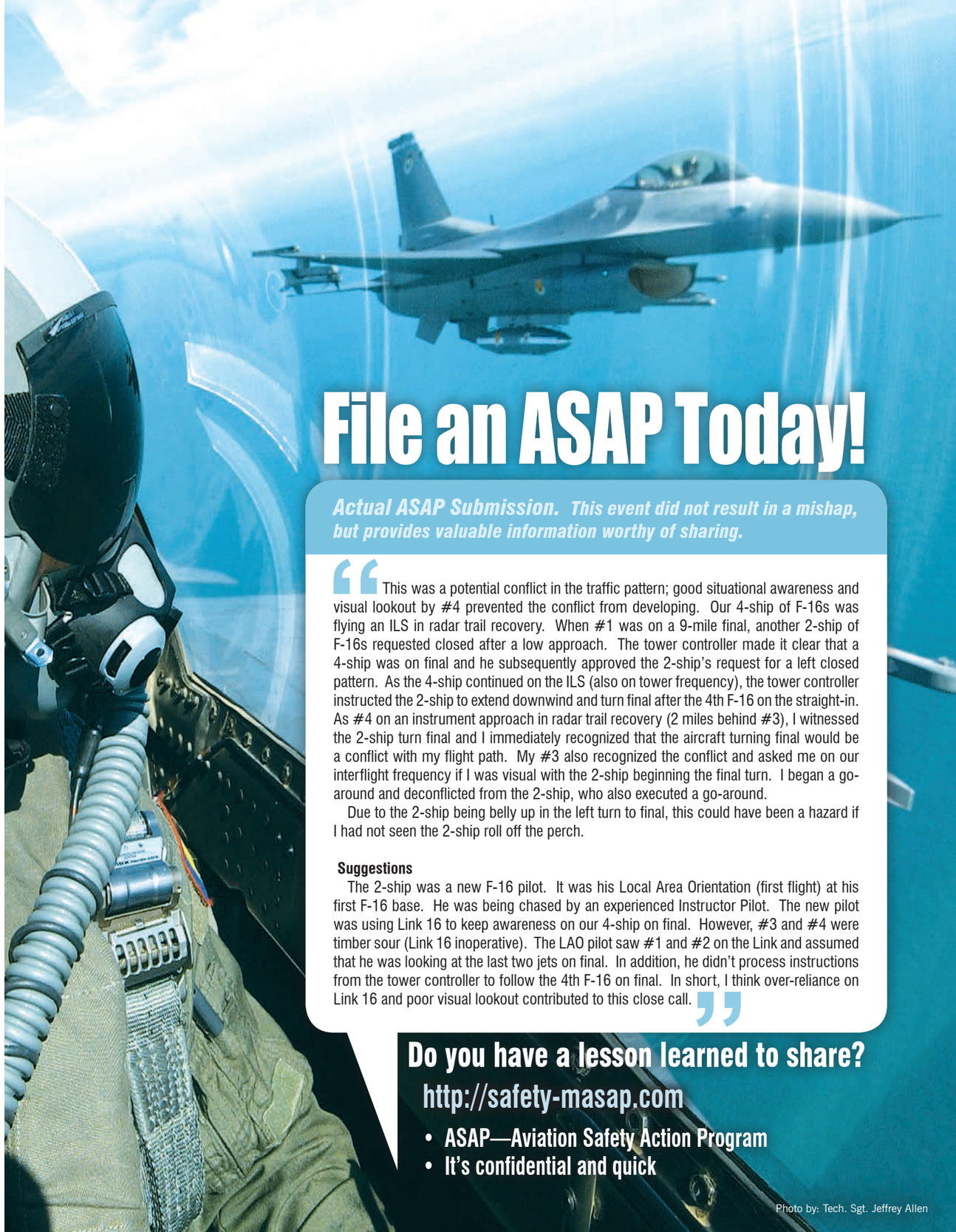
Legend

Class A - Fatality; 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)

* Fatality ** Non-rate Producing *** Performing SOUTHCOM Mission

= Fatal = Fatal due to misconduct

Symbols for Mishap Aircraft



File an ASAP Today!

Actual ASAP Submission. ***This event did not result in a mishap, but provides valuable information worthy of sharing.***

"This was a potential conflict in the traffic pattern; good situational awareness and visual lookout by #4 prevented the conflict from developing. Our 4-ship of F-16s was flying an ILS in radar trail recovery. When #1 was on a 9-mile final, another 2-ship of F-16s requested closed after a low approach. The tower controller made it clear that a 4-ship was on final and he subsequently approved the 2-ship's request for a left closed pattern. As the 4-ship continued on the ILS (also on tower frequency), the tower controller instructed the 2-ship to extend downwind and turn final after the 4th F-16 on the straight-in. As #4 on an instrument approach in radar trail recovery (2 miles behind #3), I witnessed the 2-ship turn final and I immediately recognized that the aircraft turning final would be a conflict with my flight path. My #3 also recognized the conflict and asked me on our interflight frequency if I was visual with the 2-ship beginning the final turn. I began a go-around and deconflicted from the 2-ship, who also executed a go-around.

Due to the 2-ship being belly up in the left turn to final, this could have been a hazard if I had not seen the 2-ship roll off the perch.

Suggestions

The 2-ship was a new F-16 pilot. It was his Local Area Orientation (first flight) at his first F-16 base. He was being chased by an experienced Instructor Pilot. The new pilot was using Link 16 to keep awareness on our 4-ship on final. However, #3 and #4 were timber sour (Link 16 inoperative). The LAO pilot saw #1 and #2 on the Link and assumed that he was looking at the last two jets on final. In addition, he didn't process instructions from the tower controller to follow the 4th F-16 on final. In short, I think over-reliance on Link 16 and poor visual lookout contributed to this close call."

Do you have a lesson learned to share?

http://safety-masap.com

- **ASAP—Aviation Safety Action Program**
- **It's confidential and quick**

Photo by: Tech. Sgt. Jeffrey Allen

OVER the Edge MAGAZINE

FAMILY FUN

Montana Style

OVER the Edge MAGAZINE

“Intestinal Fortitude”
or overconfidence?

BY TECH. SGT. CRAIG FARNER

What do you get when you put four A1Cs, two civilians, and too much beer into two canoes in the winter? ... You get a recipe for death! My story is a tale from the crypts as a newer Airman stationed at Eglin AFB, Fla.; sit back and learn from my adventure, so you can make sure yours goes better.

It was a chilly late February in the Fort Walton, Fla. area and a few wild Airmen (including myself) decided they were bored of playing cards and watching movies in the dorms all day. Sitting in a dorm room were myself, Shaun, Joseph, and Joseph’s girlfriend. Shaun’s brother was also on his way from Texas and we wanted to do something different—something exciting. I hadn’t been canoeing in a long time so I offered up an overnight canoe trip as a solution to our boredom. Stocked full with beer and adventure, this was a sure-fire plan, I thought to myself.

We began planning. Questions were posed to test people’s knowledge of how to plan and execute a trip in the wilderness. We began to pack our bags, which were inspected for emergency items, appropriate clothing, and assurance everything was vacuum-sealed in plastic in case the canoe tipped over.

As we were walking through the dorms about 30 minutes before “lift off,” a newer Airman, (Jamison) peered out from his room to ask what was going on. After we explained our plan, he wanted in. We told him he could only come if he had experience in outdoor matters such as we were about to embark on. He exclaimed he was a boy scout and has done tons of stuff like this in his life. We decided to let him in and told him to make sure everything was water proofed. We did not check his bags as we were a bit behind and trying to get to the staging area.

As we arrived to the outfitter, we noticed it didn't look open. A man appeared from the side of the building to help us. We told him our plans and he looked at us kind of funny. He said no one really canoes this early as it is cold; the fallen trees have not been removed from the river, and in the event of something happening there are no other revelers out on the river to provide help. Being in our early '20s, we said we understood, had plenty of experience, and were up for an adventure. He laughed again and said he would give us the canoes at 25 percent cost because we had ...

"Intestinal Fortitude."

(RED FLAG ALERT: This should have made us turn around, and it ALMOST did. Blinded by the perception of our abilities, we forged ahead.

Before we knew it, we were in the river enjoying our cruise! Things were seemingly going well. Everyone was having beers and properly navigating the river. It wasn't but a few hours later people began getting a little tipsy. Nobody was drunk yet, since we all decided we would control intake on the river because of the weather conditions.

There we are, enjoying the cruise, when the inevitable happens ... over goes a canoe! The canoe Jamison was in tipped over. We scrambled over to help in gathering the floating equipment. It is starting to get closer to dusk and the temperatures are falling out of the 60's and steadily declining to their intended target of 40 degrees.

We decide it is time to find a shoulder to set up camp, get a fire going, and dry off clothes.

As we head to the shoulder, Jamison is the last one out of his canoe. He is so intent on getting a fire started that he forgets he is the last one in the canoe and jumps out onto the sand. At this point I've already decided to stop drinking. Things didn't go quite as planned and I was feeling a little uneasy. My crew raced the canoe to the shoulder and I immediately took most of my clothes off and swam down a short ways to get the canoe before it sailed off into the dark.

As I brought the canoe back on shore, I could tell Jamison was a little more than tipsy. He wasn't hammered, but I could tell he needed to stop drinking. As I reached for my extra dry clothes, I asked him why he wasn't getting out of his wet clothes. He responded that since he did not have enough time, he did NOT waterproof anything.

Everyone was upset. We were out in the middle of the woods, no cell phone reception, and no person or vehicle waiting for us even if we did make it all the way to the end of the route. Everyone else thought it was funny and kept drinking. I knew what could happen, so I kept to my water.

Everyone had some sort of plan for staying warm. I brought multiple layers and was going to use the sand as insulation using my entrenching tool. Others had sleeping bags and there was a single tent. Everyone wanted to sleep by the fire. Jamison had tried to "dry" some of his clothes while we gathered wood and ended up burning part of them. We gave him some extra clothes and he covered up in an emergency solar blanket.

Most continued to drink, but Jamison was still cold. He was asking the others for their clothes and parts of their sleeping bags. The other members were now drunk and calling him a dummy for not listening to the rules. I had given him my extra layer, but it wasn't enough to fully keep him warm.

Jamison became angrier he was not getting part of Joseph's sleeping bag. He made what could have been an epic mistake. He retreated from the fire with his solar blanket, in the middle of the night, to the cold tent. I told him that he needed to calm down, stay by the fire, and move around. He was so upset about not getting Joseph's sleeping bag and tipsy from the alcohol, that he threw all sanity out of the window for spite.

I decided I would keep him awake and moving until tomorrow. I was dead tired from the super long day, the cold water from earlier, and everything that had happened, but it was the only option.

As I went to the cold tent, everyone else had pretty much fallen asleep. I walked in and told him he needed to get up. He wasn't responsive at first so I began lightly shaking him. After about 30 seconds he softly responded that he was too cold and couldn't move. I lifted him up and told him he didn't have a choice and to get by the fire. Of the clothes he did have, he had tossed some off.

We spent all night picking up twigs to keep the small fire alive and repeating about every 10-15 minutes. I made Jamison drink water and talk. After hours of tedious, repetitive motions it was finally light. The sun heated the ground and air and Jamison was warm and well.

The next morning, we all realized Jamison could have died. Many factors contributed to this potential disaster, but as always, it was largely exacerbated by alcohol. Anytime there is alcohol involved, we should really take a big step back and make sure it is 100 percent safe. If you are in Real-Time tactical execution of a plan that involves alcohol you should Knock-It-Off! Real-time plans are no place to include drinks. If you are not in the strategic in-depth planning process, you should just turn the beer light off and if the plan was risky in the first place, you should stop period.

So, I ask again, "What do you get when you put four A1Cs, two civilians, and too much beer into two canoes in the winter?"... A recipe for disaster and possibly serious injury or death!

CHECK THREE ANALYSIS

Check Three — Gear · Plan · Skills

- Gear
- Plan
- Skills

Gear: Good effort and initial checks —however, the new add was missed and ended up being the "weak link."

Plan: Some planning ... but not enough. The plan to canoe at the location during the time of year was a bad plan and they ignored very good advice. In addition, the plan to excessively drink and canoe was a bad idea. Finally, they did not notify anyone external of their trip and did not have a means of communication, such as cell phones.

Skills: Some, but severely degraded by the excessive drinking. The new member of the party added at the last minute also did not have the canoeing skills of the other members of the trip.

The author and his friends made a decent effort to have a good trip. However, as the old saying goes, the chain is only as strong as the weakest link. The individual added at the last minute did not have the same preparation of equipment or canoeing expertise as the rest of the party. These limitations, coupled with the event occurring in an environmentally challenging area and the experienced members having skills degraded by alcohol, created a bad situation for everyone. Remember to always let someone know when and where you will be (and when you are expected to return) when planning an outdoor trip or activity. To the max extent possible, have a means to communicate in an emergency.

CARBON MONOXIDE

The Silent Killer

BY CLIFF TEBBE

Two cadets were driving westbound on Interstate 70 en route back to the Air Force Academy in 1983 following a Thanksgiving weekend shared with family and friends. A nasty snowstorm had set in, making travel treacherous. Conditions on this Kansas stretch of interstate soon became impassable as the terrain, winds and heavy snow created deep drifts. The cadets' vehicle became stuck in a snow drift. The cold was intense and they knew to run the vehicle's engine only intermittently and to keep the exhaust pipe clear of drifting snow.

But Mother Nature conspired against their best efforts. The overpass they were under formed a natural wind break, and snow piled up more quickly than they could clear it. This allowed for the buildup of a deadly gas—carbon monoxide—inside the vehicle. This buildup of gas, coupled with the insidious nature of carbon monoxide poisoning, sealed the fate of the two cadets.

A tragic incident? Absolutely! Uncommon or rare? Not at all. In fact, carbon monoxide, or CO, is the number one cause of poisoning fatalities in the United States, resulting in more than 15,000 emergency room cases and roughly 3,300 deaths each year. But what makes it so insidious and, more importantly, how do you prevent becoming a victim of this silent killer?

First, the facts: CO is a colorless, odorless, and deadly gas. It is a byproduct of combustion; some common sources include automobiles, gas-fire appliances, kerosene and propane space heaters and wood or charcoal units. It neither sinks nor rises; it mixes well with air. Because you can't see, taste or smell it, CO can kill you before you even know it's there.

While we are not entirely helpless, the subtle nature of CO may cause symptoms to be misread. At low to moderate levels of exposure, common symptoms include headache, fatigue, nausea, dizzy spells, confusion and irritability. These symptoms may easily be ignored or mistaken for some other ailment.

If you think it can't happen … think again!

A Boston boy was killed by carbon monoxide while trying to keep warm after helping his father shovel out the car; when they got cold, the father started the engine and the boy got inside the car, but the car's exhaust pipe was covered by a snowbank.

A Connecticut couple was found dead, in a running vehicle, from carbon monoxide poisoning. Officials deduced there was an exhaust leak.

An Ohio couple considered themselves lucky to be alive after narrowly escaping their home, which was filled with CO (the husband didn't realize he had left his car running in the garage the night before).

~ Ed.

With the facts in hand, the real question is: "How can you protect yourself and your family?"

- Immediately remove your car from the garage after starting the engine. Even if the garage doors are open, the CO can build up very quickly in the garage and living area of your home.
- Have your vehicle's exhaust system inspected if you have any suspicion of leaks. Repair any holes in the exhaust system, the vehicle body, and any malfunction of the emission control system.
- Equip your vehicle with emergency supplies such as extra clothing and blankets, a flashlight, energy foods, drinking water, a small shovel, and chemical-based emergency hand warmers.
- If you're stranded, run the engine as a last resort to stay warm; only run it periodically and make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked.

FAMILY FUN

Montana Style

BY MASTER SGT. JUSTIN ULMEN

I love to ride snowmobiles. Even with assignments to Europe and the East Coast I have always found time to make my pilgrimage back home to Montana each year to clear my head in the mountains. For me there is nothing better standing atop a snow-covered peak, looking down on the world. Looking out across the wide open sky from the top of a mountain is a humbling experience that puts things into perspective. As my children grow older I want to share that feeling with them. I want to let them feel the satisfaction of looking down at the world during a time of year most people don't even leave town.

Getting to the top is always an adventure and sometimes, may be a bit risky. If you ask me, a life without risk is a pretty darn boring life. Luckily, to date, all my adventures have ended well. Whether those endings are a result of sound risk management or pure dumb luck is debatable. As I reflect, I would have to say luck plays more of a role than I care to admit.

But therein lays the problem. Are the risks I am taking worth a view? Maybe if I had a whole winter to hone my skills and ensure I have all my equipment ready I will be good to go. But as the played out You Tube saying goes ... "I ain't got time for that!" Instead, I head into the backcountry when I haven't sat on a snowmobile in 11 months. The road conditions I'm faced with are usually deplorable at best. I'm pulling my 28-foot enclosed trailer with my dad's pick-up in gale force winds. I can't remember if I changed the drive belt that was slipping last year, I am jet lagged, there is a blizzard, and I am not 100 percent certain I even have all my gear. By the way, my wife and kids want to go, too. To say the least my little relaxing vacation has transformed into a risk management nightmare. But I manage—I always do.

However, as I get older the "fun at all costs" attitude has begun to change. This was pretty clear to me last year when it wasn't me who was in harm's way, but my 12-year-old son. I am pretty protective when it comes to my kids. I ensure they wear Personal Protective Equipment at all times and are as careful as is reasonable. My son had shown very good judgment when it came to operating small motor vehicles, like his kid-sized 120cc snowmobile. As a result, I made a judgment call that he could ride an adult sized 700cc snowmobile. (This is the equivalent of going from a rundown Ford Escort to a new Corvette.) He had been riding that machine for several days and had shown that he was competent under close supervision. I put less of a watchful eye on him and started to work with my 8-year-old to start teaching him the ropes.

Now as the old saying goes, Give them and inch and they will take a mile." He took that mile. We were with a large group of experienced riders. My son was somewhere in the middle of the pack and I was tailing the group. We were keeping the riding sane—around 35 mph. But as the trail conditions were great and other people began to open up their machines, my son also accelerated. The trail took a wide sweeping turn to the right. My son and his sled kept going straight. He drove right into a stand of lodge pole pine and spruce trees at an undetermined speed.

As I rounded the corner, all I could see were members of our group running into this stand of timber in snow up to their waists. I was wondering to myself "Who went into the trees?" As I got closer I didn't see my son or his machine. And finally, through the trees I see the back of his jacket. My heart immediately sank and the worst case scenarios started racing through my mind. I began to question every decision I ever made with respect to raising my kids. Did the decision I made to let him ride this sled ultimately hurt my son?

As things got sorted out, we all saw my son was fine and is laughed off the crash. He and the sled missed every single large tree that could do any damage. Essentially, nothing bad happened. I'd like to think he had an angel on his shoulder that day. But how did we end up in this scenario in the first place?

When the sled was finally pulled out of the trees and everyone stopped to catch their breath, I asked my son, "What happened?" All he said was he was going so fast that he couldn't turn the machine. I asked why he didn't hit the brakes when he knew he wasn't going to make the corner at his current speed. He stated hitting the brakes never crossed his mind. That disturbed me because I know he knows where the brake is and how to use it.

Bottom-line: he was so inexperienced that when faced with a split-second decision he just froze.

Luckily for our whole family the only thing that happened were a few scuffs on a snowmobile.

That one event taught me about overconfidence. Not only in my sons perceived ability to operate the machine, but my perception that he was fully capable. It is important to me that my kid develop those skills so he can get to the top of the mountain with me, but I was very naïve to think that in only a few rides he would be able to master more advanced maneuvering techniques, let alone remember easy things like hitting the brakes when you go into a corner a little fast. My rush to make him proficient to ride with the adults and overconfidence in his ability could have cost him his life.

As we look at the big picture, what can we take from this scenario and apply to other situations? This could happen to anyone of us at any time. From a supervisor's perspective you must ask yourself if you are overconfident in your subordinate's abilities to perform certain tasks. On the other hand, do your subordinates feel that their skills are sufficient to perform dangerous or complex tasks or activities only with limited experience? Only thorough, candid, honest discussion can it be determined if your actions are safe and wise.

Whether it is teaching your kids how to ride a 140 horsepower snowmobile to letting one of your Airmen perform a job task, the "AHA!" moment shouldn't be right after something bad happens. Take time and think about a few things. First do you or your team have the right equipment to undertake this endeavor? Has there been an honest candid discussion about what the plan is? Do you and/or your people have the correct training to even try whatever it is you plan to do? If the answer to any of those questions is "No," maybe you should think a little harder if the reward is worth the risk.

CHECK THREE ANALYSIS

Check Three – Gear · Plan · Skills

GPS – Gear Plan Skills

Gear: Good preparation and checks of everyone's gear and equipment.

Plan: Good effort – but the younger riders' abilities and skills were not fully considered for the size and power of the snowmobile chosen for the ride.

Skills: As mentioned above, the overall skills of the party were good – however, the capabilities of the younger members were not taken into account on more powerful equipment.

Good effort on planning for a safe, comfortable day of fun. Overlooking the abilities of the younger rider, however, almost resulted in a major problem; this proved detrimental in the end ... for the tree he ran into. Fortunately for him, he came away unscathed, but with a valuable lesson … know your skill and ability for the task/adventure you're about to undertake.