

Fall 2019

Combat Edge

Air Combat Command's Safety Magazine



LEARNING FROM LOSA

HOLIDAY TIPS



DON'T BRING UP POLITICS
AT THE DINNER TABLE
AND MOST IMPORTANTLY
BUCKLE UP.
EVERY TRIP. EVERY TIME.



Combat Edge

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TECH. SGT. LEALAN BUEHRER

ACCent



Col. Steven G. Owen
Director of Safety

Looking back on 2019

Welcome to the Fall 2019 edition of The Combat Edge. Fiscal year 2019 has officially come to a close, and once again ACC has achieved some great new milestones. We completed our first-ever Line Operations Safety Audit for the heavy intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance community, and we are in the process of reviewing our safety statistics for the last 12 months. The initial numbers are looking good, and FY19 is shaping up to be another great year. You can look at the fiscal year scoreboard totals on page 23, and we'll provide a complete rundown on all of the statistics in the Spring 2020 edition.

Fall has got to be my favorite season of the year. Fall brings great flying weather, cooler temperatures, leaves changing colors, Thanksgiving holidays with family, new sitcom seasons, new blockbuster movies, tailgate parties and cheering for your favorite football teams. Along with the sitcoms and football games, there are also some new and creative commercials.

A few years back, a telecommunications company produced a commercial where some poor guy was deep-frying a turkey for the first time. His friend had called to warn him that he needed to completely thaw the turkey before submerging it in the fryer. Unfortunately, he did not have good phone coverage and missed the phone call. The images on the screen showed the results of the turkey exploding inside the fryer, scattering the boiling oil all over the "chef" and setting fire to his front yard. Accidents can be pretty funny when they are on a sitcom or television commercial. However, in real life, they cause real damage with real consequences. Take a look at the article "Crashing Hurts" by Dave Robinson.

As the weather cools down and we begin our transition into the winter months, there are some seasonal hazards that can challenge our on-duty and off-duty risk management skills. Whether it's deep-frying a turkey, tailgating at a football game with your friends and family (and the biggest bottle of lighter fluid you can find), taking the ski lift straight to the top of the mountain on your first run (without taking lessons), or chaining together 16 strings of seasonal lighting (on a single outlet) to have the brightest house on the block, make sure you have the proper Gear, Plan and Skills to enjoy the holiday season safely.

On a more serious note, the holiday season typically includes long road trips to visit friends and family. It can also be a very sad and lonely time for many of our members who are either far away from home or experiencing significant stressors in their personal lives. ACC recently suffered a tragic mishap when one of our Airmen, driving at a high rate of speed on a long road trip, lost control of their vehicle and subsequently passed away after crashing into a culvert on the side of the road.

On a more positive note, some of our ACC Airmen recently identified a fellow senior noncommissioned officer who was struggling with suicidal thoughts, and they immediately took steps to intervene. They asked the tough question: Are you going to hurt yourself? The Airmen then rapidly networked through social media to get the SNCO some help. As a result, that SNCO is still with us and on the road to recovery. This holiday season, look out for your wingmen and yourself – we need you!

Fly safe, take care of each other, and have a great holiday season.

– Grit



STRUGGLE WELL

A NEW APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE

BY RETIRED MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER KEN FALKE

Our nation is in the midst of a mental health epidemic that shows no signs of abating. The scope of this epidemic is evidenced by the suicide rate – up 33% since 1999 – and large numbers of drug and alcohol overdoses.

Historically, the military was immune from these types of societal trends. Many of the protective factors for strong mental wellness – a clear sense of identity, purpose, mission, and community – are part of military life and underpinned much lower rates of mental health challenges and suicides.

Tragically, this is no longer the case. In 2018, the military recorded an all-time high in suicides. This despite the fact that the Department of Defense is spending more money than ever on more programs than ever to solve the problem. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein recently noted, “I actually don’t know what’s going on, and I certainly can’t point to our programs today and say that they’re working.”



At its core, suicide is the result of hopelessness and loneliness. Suicide stems from a belief that tomorrow will always be the same or worse than yesterday, there is no path to a life worth living, and that nobody really “knows me or gets me.” Why is it that far too many service members find themselves on the precipice of suicide? What contributes to their struggle?

I would be the first to admit I do not have all the answers. If there is one thing I can conclude after 21 years in the Navy and 17 years working closely with service members and veterans in the nonprofit world – and attending far too many funerals for my brothers and sisters who died by their own hand – there is no such thing as a suicide expert. That said, years of experience working with military veterans who are victims of trauma has convinced me a new approach is needed.

A Misguided and Myopic Focus on Suicide Prevention

In response to this growing active-duty crisis, the DoD does what the DoD does well when they have a problem – throw money and people at it. Unfortunately, doing more of the same, as General Goldfein noted, will not prove effective in the slightest.

As a retired bomb disposal technician, I come from a profession that is always trying to improve our situation. We thrive on the concept that perfect practice makes perfect. We, the explosive ordnance disposal community, are harder on ourselves in

training than anyone else could be. When we have a problem, we find a way to squeeze it from all sides, hence the term, “left of boom.” In the improvised explosive device fight, this meant that just trying to locate and disarm IEDs was a fool’s errand; there had to be a way to identify the component supply chain, financing, and bombmakers and disrupt the manufacturing and placement processes.

When it comes to the topic of suicide prevention, we are not squeezing the problem. The so-called prevention efforts and public health approach are misguided and ineffective and miss the boat entirely. Why? Because the opposite of suicide is not prevention, it is creating a life worth living.

The Role of Leadership

Over the past 18 months, I have spoken to active duty units that have recently dealt with multiple suicides, and I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on the nature of the challenge and how we work to get left of boom. My hope in sharing these lessons is to catalyze a conversation about gaining a far deeper understanding of the nature of the problem, and more significantly perhaps, what to do about it. At its core, I believe the growing active duty suicide epidemic can be traced to one word: Leadership.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Marie Brown



Leadership in terms of individuals of every rank understanding how to effectively lead themselves first. And leadership in terms of the climate created up and down the chain of command – what some refer to as “toxic leadership.”

The good news is that I believe by focusing on the first type of leadership – lead yourself first, we can make a meaningful change in the chain of command leadership. At its core, this means focusing on a type of intelligence seldom discussed but for mandatory briefings and a few PowerPoint slides: Emotional intelligence also referred to as EQ.

Harvard Business School research shows that great leaders possess three key attributes: a high IQ, strong technical expertise, and a high EQ. Emotional intelligence includes five skills: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, the ability to understand and motivate self and others, and social skills. I am aware of disparate efforts to train service members in EQ; however, this simply is not good enough. EQ often comes across as soft. This is the farthest thing from the truth. As a master chief petty officer, the highest compliment I could receive is that I was a “Sailor’s Sailor.”

When we think about the narrative of someone who dies by suicide, there usually are a series of difficult, challenging or traumatic events followed by a descent downward that usually includes of a fair bit of self-medicating, perhaps an ineffective visit to a mental health professional, the pushing away of friends, family and other forms of support, and then a tragic, far-too-preventable ending.

At the heart of this story is the inability to understand three things. First, that all lives are filled with ups and downs and, therefore, struggle is a normal part of the human experience. Second, the downs – the times of struggle, difficulty, and even despair – can serve as catalysts for growth and transformation. This is an area I spend a lot of time working on the context of the science of post-traumatic growth. And third, how to regulate one’s emotions so people do not get overwhelmed by stress and trauma to the point that self-medicating seems the easiest option for relief.

The Importance of Training

I was recently asked what I would do if I was “king for a day” and had the opportunity to reshape how the military addresses these issues while maintaining lethality and readiness. My response is that I would focus a great deal of time and energy on the leadership training continuums.

On the far left of the continuum, I would focus on recognizing that when a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airman, or Coast Guardsman arrives on day one for basic training or boot camp, they likely have already been through a great deal of trauma. The research, and my personal experience, demonstrate

that members of our all-volunteer force arrive with levels of childhood trauma, or adverse childhood experiences, three to five times higher than their civilian counterparts.

Second, I would integrate emotional intelligence – call it personal leadership training – in the leadership continuum. I would also focus on integrating such training into the service academies.

Third, I would work toward integrating an understanding of the elements of personal leadership – self-regulation in particular – into every day military training. This is not about more “mando” briefings, but the recognition that breathing training that is part of any shooting activity is also a great way to create calm during difficult times; that physical training is not just about being fit and able to hump your ruck, but actually releases great chemicals that reduce stress and make people happier; that volunteerism is not an award, but actually something that improves your well-being.

Fourth, I would stop outsourcing mental healthcare to a small group of people that are difficult to access, talk to, connect with, and understand. Especially when rank is involved. Somewhere along the way, our society decided that we would leave mental health stuff to mental health professionals. This is a huge mistake. As the pioneering psychiatrist Vikram Patel noted, “mental health is too important to be left to mental health professionals alone.” We have seen the result of a world dominated by mental health professionals – it is not good. As Dr. Thomas Insel, the former director of the National Institute of Mental Health, recently asked, “Are we somehow causing increased mortality and morbidity with our interventions?”

Fifth, we must focus on normalizing struggle, and democratizing our individual and collective ability to deal with it. This starts by stopping the artificial separation between wellness and readiness, and by starting to educate current and future leaders in the tenets of good well-being.

By all accounts, the military should not have a suicide problem. Military service comes with myriad benefits – from a profound sense of purpose to a “tribe” you can count on. The fact there is a growing active-duty suicide crisis should raise all alarm bells. Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is the definition of insanity. As General Goldfein noted, what we are doing is not working. It is time for a new, innovative and comprehensive approach. This approach starts with some of the suggestions I have outlined, and a renewed focus on what great leadership is. 🇺🇸

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and their families.



DIAGNOSIS

During Descent

BY 1ST LT. RILEY CURNUTT

It was March 14, 2019, and the 390th Electronic Combat Squadron commander and I were assigned to fly my first student formation ride in the EA-18G Growler at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington, with the Navy's VAQ-129, also known as the B Course Squadron. As part of an Air Force squadron with a large Navy wing supporting the Department of Defense's electronic warfare mission, it was a rare opportunity to fly in an Air Force-crewed plane – an Air Force student pilot and an Air Force instructor and electronic warfare officer.

After taking off and passing 20,000 feet on our way to the eastern Washington military operations area, our jet began experiencing noticeable cabin pressure fluctuations. While the pressure surges were not out of safe standards of operation, they were close, so we began to closely monitor the cabin pressure gauges.



About two minutes later while approaching our level-off altitude, our airplane continued to experience surging. The aircraft alerted us to an environmental control system degrade accompanied by a malfunction code, which warned that our cockpit environment was unsafe and potentially lacked adequate air for the crew. After completing immediate actions, which included activating emergency oxygen, we alerted our flight leader that we needed to rapidly descend to reduce the risk of hypoxia. After a brief discussion between my instructor and the Navy instructor pilot in the lead jet, they decided that we would not risk flying back over the Cascade Mountains and would

instead divert to Grant County International Airport in Moses Lake, Washington, about 50 miles away.

During the rapid descent, our Growler also experienced a degrade in the Onboard Oxygen Generation System. This meant our primary oxygen system was compromised and we would be forced to rely on the plane's emergency oxygen, which could provide as little as three minutes of oxygen in less-than-ideal circumstances. After descending below our safe altitude of 10,000 feet, we began experiencing possible symptoms of hypoxia.

As pilot, I told my instructor that I was having greater than usual difficulty staying in formation, and I was going to

take off my mask to breathe the normal air. He immediately instructed me to keep my mask on and use the emergency oxygen to reduce possible hypoxia – and the potential for a delayed onset. Additionally, my instructor had difficulty operating the radios and setting up the GPS instrument approach for our emergency divert – things that he should not have had trouble with as a military aviator with more than 2,000 flight hours. After flying on the flight lead's wing for the next few minutes and being guided to final approach at the off-duty tailwind runway, my instructor's emergency oxygen supply shut off, and he was forced to drop his mask at about 1,500 feet.

After the subsequent landing and taxi at Grant County International, we checked the deeper subsystem integrity codes and found that the jet had experienced a critical failure of two of the EA-18G's most vital air valves, meaning that the jet was unflyable until repaired.

When we departed the jet to meet the emergency medical technicians, my instructor started to "button up the jet" rather than follow the EMTs to the ambulance. He quickly realized his obvious misprioritization, called to the EMTs and walked back to the ambulance. After being driven to the local emergency room, we were tested and treated for hypoxia and later released with a clean bill of health.

As a military aviator in a two-seat fighter, tactical crew coordination, or TCC, is the commonly emphasized and practiced method for dealing with the mission at hand, as well as emergency procedures in the Navy. Once we began to recognize the symptoms of hypoxia, such as difficulty flying in basic formation, we used TCC to safely recover the jet on the ground. In hindsight, I now recognize that I was aviating in a diminished capacity and my decision-making was lacking. I should have recognized this and said something earlier in the emergency, but fortunately, my instructor communicated his symptoms, which allowed me to reevaluate and diagnose myself as hypoxic.

As a crew, we were able to double-check and back up each other's actions in the cockpit, such as when I aided my instructor in the set up of the approach, and when he ensured – multiple times – that I had completed all of the appropriate emergency procedures and was flying the divert in a safe and efficient manner. The crew coordination between the aircraft and among the aircrew provided invaluable situational awareness-enhancing information, which would not have been otherwise available. The ability to communicate this information allowed for the recovery of the aircraft – and it saved our lives. ✈



LOSA

Feb. - June 2019



LOSA is a voluntary and anonymous safety program

LOSA observations are a look at the system, not the individual

LOSA will identify the strengths and weaknesses of RC-135, E-3 and E-8 procedures as well as any potential threats to operational safety

LOSA observations are not checkrides and are non-jeopardy events

Illustration by Josh D. Plueger

LEARNING FROM LOSA

BY LT. COL. ALESSANDRO BRUZZANO

Your flight safety briefings probably have a minute or two dedicated to trends and statistics and may mention programs such as the Airman Safety Action Program, also known as ASAP, and Military Flight Operations Quality Assurance, or MFOQA. What they probably don't do though is allow for a look at operational strengths and weaknesses in the absence of a MFOQA event, ASAP-reportable event, or even worse, an incident or accident. A Line Operations Safety Audit, or LOSA, does just that.

A LOSA is a voluntary, anonymous program that gathers the natural behavior of crews during operational flying. By doing so, it identifies external threats that may impede our jobs and categorizes errors that we commit due to natural human fallacy or poor system design. When we collect enough observations and aggregate the data, the strengths and weaknesses of an operation can be seen. As aviators, we are resourceful, mission-driven and will work through problems that have been built into our operation. Additionally, we will find workarounds for a poorly written technical order, or TO, procedure or instruction. These are clear indicators that the books need to be written to reflect the truth of the operation. After careful review and coordination between engineers and operators, we can do just that. When aggregated and analyzed, LOSA data is predictive in nature – it truly is proactive safety at its finest.

A lot of good lessons have been lost over time because they have not become part of our institutional culture. Lack of strong standard operating procedures are compensated by having strong tribal knowledge, “technedures” and undocumented standards or contracts. A recent Navy analysis “The Half-Life of Scared” showed that on average, a tough lesson is only remembered for six months, and after that, we return to the old habits that got us in there in the first place.

“In plain English: We stay ‘scared’ (and vigilant) for the first 90 days and don’t make the same mistakes. After about six months we lose the healthy fear, get complacent, and do it again.”

A tactical debrief lives as long as the memory of those who attended it, or until a new penguin knocks an old one off the iceberg. To truly incorporate lessons learned, they need to become part of the institutional process; not just part of the personality one brings to the table. Safety, as a process, needs to be repetitive and generate a consistent answer.

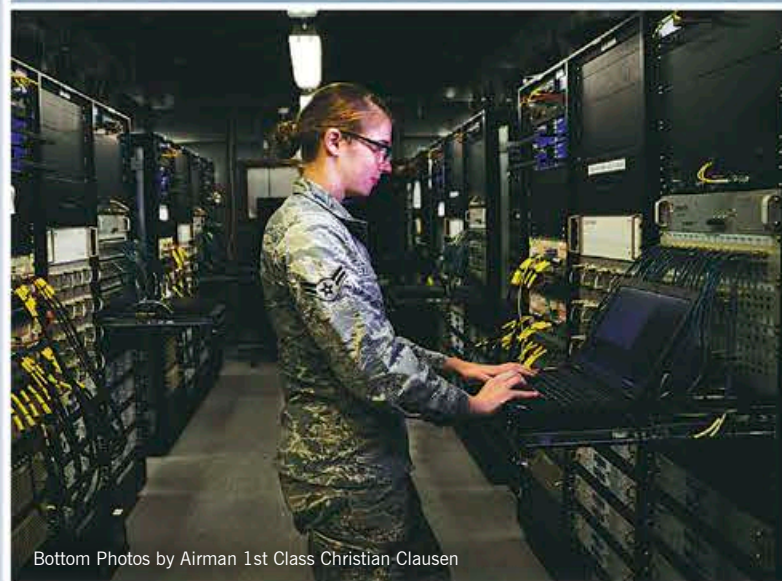
In a previous edition of *Combat Edge*, Lt. Col. David Paulsgrove wrote an article describing the first Air Combat Command Line Operations Safety Audit Proof of Concept for the MQ-9. Since then, as full-scale LOSA was done on the MQ-9, and Lt. Col. Kindal McKinney, 432d Wing Safety, led an analysis team consisting of ACC, Air Force Special Operations Command and Air National Guard members to outbrief ACC’s deputy commander. Her brief delivered findings and recommendations on what can we do to prevent this from happening. Along with safety enhancements came recommendations for systematic process improvements that will make the MQ-9 more lethal, reliable and provide crews with better checklists and technical data that has been missing for a long time. Her brief is available in the Air Force Safety Automated System. Using the Data Extraction Tool, run a query for the word “LOSA” and look for the MQ-9 report.

While the 2017 Proof of Concept focused heavily on the mission control element, or MCE, the 2018 full-scale LOSA expanded to the launch and recovery element, or LRE. Combined, the 2017 and 2018 LOSAs collected 230 observations, 812 individual events and over 2,500 individual threats and errors during approximately 1,610 hours of observed flight time – all during combat operations.

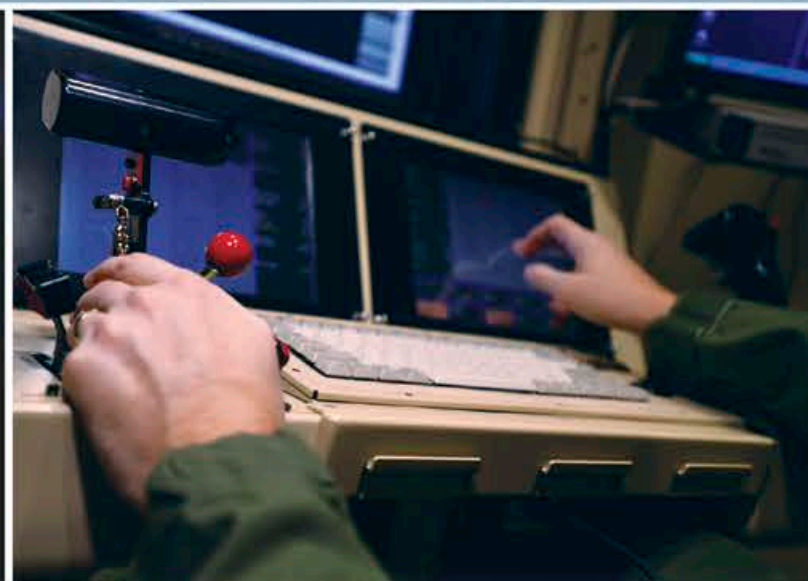
The results showed some clear areas where the system needs help, indicating with statistical accuracy some known crew issues – as verified in the anonymous crew comments collected after each flight. For example, the most prevalent threats during transit are ops pressure and the ground control station itself. The highest levels of mismanaged threats, or threats that lead to errors, were “Unannounced entry into the GCS” and



Photo by Senior Airman Cory D. Payne



Bottom Photos by Airman 1st Class Christian Clausen



“Previous crew error or communication omission.” For error examples, the most prevalent errors during launch and recovery were “Nonstandard checklist protocol” and “Failure to visually verify settings when called for on checklist.” A term “Big 6” used by the LRE crews to ensure radio link connectivity is a perfect example of how crews develop a better way to ensure mission success as compared to the TO guidance. Remember that this isn’t an indication

of crews behaving poorly, but an example of how our TO process did not keep up with the reality of this weapon system’s needs.

Another interesting point about this LOSA is the unique look at something that most pilots aren’t accustomed to. Thanks to having both MCE and LRE data, we were able to look in-depth at the seam that exists between the two control elements and explore things such as a misconfigured aircraft that

one crew could leave for the other. You can imagine that when working out of two separate control elements thousands of miles and several hours apart from each other, something one crew did eight hours ago and 4,000 miles away may suddenly catch you by surprise when least expected. As a matter of fact, we showed that the LRE can be a threat to the MCE and vice versa, or one MCE crew can be a threat to the next crew taking their place at the controls.

Our team of contractors gave ACC an initial vector of things they think we can work on, and below are some of those highlights.

Threat management:

- Develop improved weather forecasting, pilot reporting and guidance and techniques to aid the mission crews in successfully accomplishing their taskings.
- Analyze the culture and purpose behind the high number of unannounced entries into the GCS by numerous other crewmembers and supervisory staff and implement “sterile cockpit” procedures.
- Seek improvements in systems quality and reliability to provide the operating crews the tools necessary to safely accomplish the mission (aircraft- and GCS-related malfunctions).

Error management:

- Conduct a thorough analysis of MQ-9 written procedural guidance and rewrite appropriate checklists and procedures to better support the high-tempo operational environment.
- Analyze the challenges of emergency mission management throughout the entire operation. Investigate areas where automation and/or crew alerting could be used to reduce operator workload and reliance on memory.
- Research the seam during crew changeovers and the resultant errors that occur in MCE operations. Determine if improved training and communication can better facilitate this critical interaction for improved operational efficiency and effectiveness.

We have also wrapped up the ACC Heavy LOSA. The Heavy LOSA consisted of the RC-135, E-3 and E-8 platforms, and included active-duty and Air National Guard members. Another analysis board president listened in as The LOSA Collaborative, the founders of LOSA in the civilian aviation industry, analyzed data for ACC and briefed the deputy commander on their findings. After this briefing, the board president spent a month looking for holes in our safety and operational processes that leave the aircraft and its operators susceptible to systemic weaknesses within the process. The team then traveled back to Langley and delivered the findings and recommendations.

The MQ-9 and Heavy LOSAs spanned the Northern, Southern, Central, European and Pacific Commands. This is truly a global operation, requiring support from many combatant commands as well as assistance from Air Mobility Command. Some of you reading this article served this program as subject matter experts, observers and analysts. To you, we say thank you and well

done! Your belief in this program, long hours of work and unwavering patience allowed ACC to get LOSA on the map and move the ball forward. Others reading this may have been members of the crews who were observed on operational flights. To you, we owe the success of this program. You allowed a fellow Airman into your cockpit, MCE or LRE and trusted us enough to show your natural behavior, enabling us to really capture the challenges of your job. That trust was well placed, and your LOSA delivered exceptional recommendations to the highest level of command in ACC.



Photo by Senior Airman Juan Torres

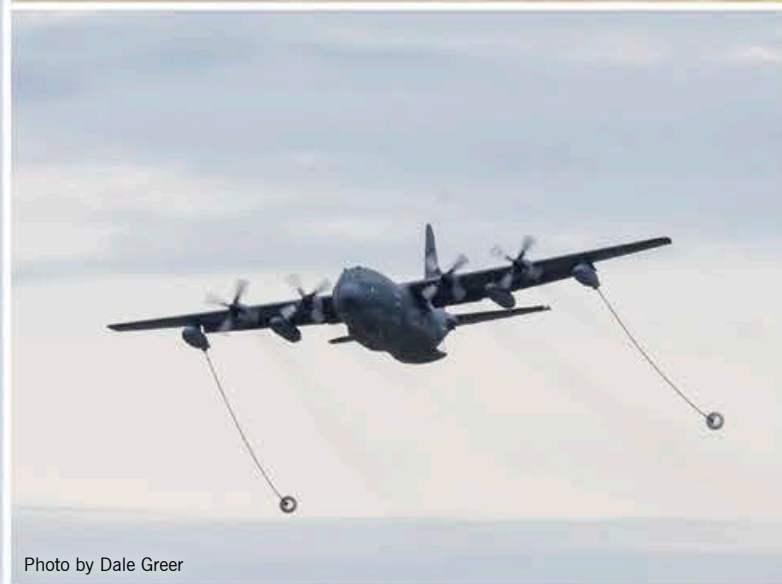


Photo by Dale Greer



Photo by Airman 1st Class Taryn Butler

We still have many significant challenges, but most of all, we have tremendous opportunities ahead. Up for discussion are the RQ-4, the HC-130, HH-60, and eventually, the single-seat F-series aircraft. No one wants to be put under a microscope, but the trust we have built will hopefully allow us to bring this proactive level of safety to all our platforms in ACC.

More information on LOSA can be found in Air Force Instruction 91-225, *Aviation Safety Programs*, the Federal Aviation Administration's Advisory Circular 120-90, *Line Operations Safety Audits* and by visiting the SKYbrary at www.skybrary.aero under “Enhancing Safety” and “Safety Management.”

Threats: Threats are defined as “events or errors that occur beyond the influence of the flight crew, increase operational complexity, and which must be managed to maintain the margins of safety.”

During typical flight operations, flight crews have to manage various contextual complexities. Such complexities would include, for example, dealing with adverse meteorological conditions, airports surrounded by high mountains, congested airspace, aircraft malfunctions, errors committed by other people outside of the cockpit, such as air traffic controllers, flight attendants or maintenance workers, and so forth. The Threat and error management model considers these complexities as threats because they all have the potential to negatively affect flight operations by reducing margins of safety.

Errors: Errors are defined as “actions or inactions by the flight crew that lead to deviations from organizational or flight crew intentions or expectations.” Unmanaged and/or mismanaged errors frequently lead to undesired aircraft states. Errors in the operational context thus tend to reduce the margins of safety and increase the probability of adverse events. Errors can be spontaneous (i.e., without direct linkage to specific, obvious threats), linked to threats, or part of an error chain. Examples of errors would include the inability to maintain stabilized approach parameters, executing a wrong automation mode, failing to give a required callout, or misinterpreting an ATC clearance.

Undesired Aircraft State: Undesired aircraft states are defined as “flight crew-induced aircraft position or speed deviations, misapplication of flight controls, or incorrect systems configuration associated with a reduction in margins of safety.” Undesired aircraft states that result from ineffective threat and/or error management may lead to compromising situations and reduce margins of safety in flight operations. Often considered at the cusp of becoming an incident or accident, undesired aircraft states must be managed by flight crews. Examples of undesired aircraft states would include lining up for the incorrect runway during approach to landing, exceeding ATC speed restrictions during an approach, or landing long on a short runway requiring maximum braking. Events such as equipment malfunctions or ATC controller errors can also reduce margins of safety in flight operations, but these would be considered threats. Undesired states can be managed effectively, restoring margins of safety, or flight crew response(s) can induce an additional error, incident or accident.

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12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one): The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes: ☐ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months ☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement.)

PS Form 3526-R, July 2014 Page 1 of 4 (See instructions page 42) PSN: 7530-02-000-8000 PRIVACY NOTICE: See our privacy policy on www.usps.com

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (Requester Publications Only)

13. Publication Title: _____

14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: July 19, 2019

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation

		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)			
		9,560	9,359
b. Legitimate Paid and/or Requested Circulation (By mail and outside the mail)			
(1)	Outside County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541 (Include direct written request from recipient, telemarketing, and internet requests from recipient, paid subscriptions including normal rate subscriptions, employer requests, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies.)	9,350	9,149
(2)	In-County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541 (Include direct written request from recipient, telemarketing, and internet requests from recipient, paid subscriptions including normal rate subscriptions, employer requests, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies.)	0	0
(3)	Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid or Requested Distribution Outside USPS®	0	0
(4)	Requested Copies Distributed by Other Mail Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	0	0
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))		9,350	9,149
d. Non-requested Circulation (By mail and outside the mail)			
(1)	Outside County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include sample copies, requests over 2 years old, requests indicated by a premium, bulk sales and requests including association requests, names obtained from business directories, ads, and other sources.)	0	0
(2)	In-County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include sample copies, requests over 2 years old, requests indicated by a premium, bulk sales and requests including association requests, names obtained from business directories, ads, and other sources.)	0	0
(3)	Nonrequested Copies Distributed Through the USPS by Other Classes of Mail (e.g., First-Class Mail; nonrequestor copies mailed in excess of 10% not mailed at Standard Mail® or Package Services rates)	0	0
(4)	Nonrequested Copies Distributed Outside the Mail (Include pickup alerts, trade shows, advertisements, and other sources.)	0	0
e. Total Nonrequested Circulation (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4))		0	0
f. Total Circulation (Sum of 15c and 15e)		9,350	9,149
g. Copies not Distributed (Net press run minus total circulation)		210	210
h. Total (Sum of 15f and 15g)		9,560	9,359
i. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15c and 15e)		9,350	9,149
j. Total Nonrequested Circulation (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4))		0	0
k. Total Circulation (Sum of 15i and 15j)		9,350	9,149
l. Copies not Distributed (Net press run minus total circulation)		210	210
m. Total (Sum of 15k and 15l)		9,560	9,359
n. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15c and 15e)		9,350	9,149
o. Total Nonrequested Circulation (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4))		0	0
p. Total Circulation (Sum of 15n and 15o)		9,350	9,149
q. Copies not Distributed (Net press run minus total circulation)		210	210
r. Total (Sum of 15p and 15q)		9,560	9,359

16. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: Amy L. Robinson, Editor, The Combat Edge, Nov. 5, 2019

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership for a Requester Publication is required and will be printed in the _____ Fall 2019 issue of this publication.

18. I certify that 85% of all my distributed copies (electronic and print) are legitimate requests or paid copies.

19. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

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Photo by Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley

The Road to Mishap Prevention

BY MASTER SGT. MICHAEL ULMEN

Throughout the munitions and loader community, weapons mishaps commonly occur due to complacency. During my 20 years as an aircraft armament systems specialist, also known as a loader or weapons troop, I've witnessed several of my co-workers as well as myself fall victim to a safety mishap directly resulting from becoming too complacent on the job. When a mishap occurs, there are certain emergency actions that will take place to verify the severity of the mishap. Different offices and sections will also discuss the mishap with crosstalk among them for awareness and lessons learned. During the incident recovery efforts of the mishap, we may find ourselves asking, "How could I have done this?" Or "What could I have done to prevent this – or not make mistakes like this again?" More importantly, we also loom

over what is going to happen to us, i.e., what administrative actions or decertifications might take place. In the end, we may feel a large sense of failure and regret as the investigators peel back the onion. What we don't think of is the possibility to learn from our mistakes and make corrections to ensure they don't happen again. This train of thought is what I call mishap prevention. Fast forward a few years when I was given the chance to leave the flight line and enter the safety world as a weapons safety manager. One of my main tasks was to perform mishap investigations on dropped munitions to damaged equipment etc. during mishaps both on and off the flight line. During the investigation process and digging through operating procedures and instructions, I was sometimes looked at as the bad guy, as almost all mishaps sprouted from

complacency and were preventable. Most interview questions led to answers such as "I've always done it this way," or "We've been doing this for years," or finally, "We don't need any technical orders – it's minor maintenance." This kind of thinking and practice is driven by repetition during specific jobs or individual tasks – doing them over and over again, often without regard to technical data and system specifics. When we do this, we set ourselves – and others – up for failure, ultimately placing everyone in immediate danger. What we need to instill in our daily routines is that complacency starts and ends with each of us. We must immediately recognize and train ourselves to be always thinking about the task at hand and the possible negative outcomes. If we can embrace this mindset, then we'll be on the road to mishap prevention. ✈️

2nd Quarter FY19 AWARDS



Crew Chief Safety

Tech. Sgt. Bruce A. Parker and
Tech. Sgt. Sean M. Douglas
4 AMXS, 4 FW
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC



Flight Line Safety

Tech. Sgt. Carleton Kennedy
4 AMXS, 4 FW
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC



Flight Safety

Master Sgt. Ryan L. Smith
4 FW/SE
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC



Aircrew Safety

Capt. Trey Cottingham and
Capt. Bradley S. Belz
389 FS, 366 FW
Mountain Home AFB, ID



Safety Career Professional

Tech. Sgt. Dylan Gaissert
4 FW/SEG
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC



Unit Safety Representative

Master Sgt. Brian S. Wade
4 MXG/MXQP, 4 FW
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC



Unit Safety

79 RQS
355 WG
Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ



Weapons Safety

Staff Sgt. Aaron A. Anderson
7 RS
Sigonella, Italy



Pilot Safety

Capt. Shaun P. Lovett
55 EFS
AFCENT

Mishap Statistics Scoreboard

FY19 Flight

As of 30 Sep 2019

	Fatal	Aircraft Destroyed	Class A Aircraft Damage
1 AF			
9 AF			✈ ✈ ✈
12 AF		✈ x2	✈ x2 ✈
25 AF			
USAFWC			
ANG (ACC-gained)		✈	
AFRC (ACC-gained)			

Flight Notes

Rounding out the fiscal year, ACC experienced three Class A mishaps in the fourth quarter. An F-35A and an F-22A each experienced substantial engine damage due to ingestion of foreign objects through the engine intake in two distinctly unrelated events. Additionally, an MQ-9A suffered aircraft damage during a forced landing event. In total for FY19, ACC experienced 10 Class A aviation mishaps with a total of three destroyed aircraft and zero fatalities.

Occupational Notes

Within ACC's Occupational Safety division, FY19 finished with numbers statistically in line with previous years. Having said that, losing nine Airmen takes a greater toll on our force than can be displayed through mere statistics. Seven of the nine fatal mishaps involved motor vehicles. There is a reason leadership at all levels of the Air Force stress the importance of using risk management while operating a motor vehicle ... this is how we are losing Airmen, teammates, friends, spouses, parents, sons and daughters.

All nine fatal mishaps and all five Class B mishaps might have been prevented if proper risk management had been used. Study your environment. Ask yourself, "What could go wrong in the course of this operation?"

Look out for your fellow wingmen, and together we can work to not simply reduce statistics in the coming year, but to prevent the unnecessary loss of life.

Weapons Notes

The ACC weapons community is doing a good job in the mishap prevention arena. However, since the last issue, we have experienced three Class C events resulting from dropped munitions and one Class D missile. The common theme from these incidents was not following technical data. As a result, all four mishaps could have been avoided. When you're out on the job, remind your buddy that it takes less time to do the job right than it does to do it over. Let us work together to make ACC mishap-free, particularly from these types of preventable incidents.

FY19 Occupational

As of 30 Sep 2019

	Class A Fatal	Class A Non-Fatal	Class B
AFCENT		0	0
USAFWC		0	0
9 AF	✈ ✈	0	2
12 AF	✈ ✈ ✈	0	2
24 AF		0	0
25 AF	✈ ✈	0	1

FY19 Weapons

As of 30 Sep 2019

	Class A	Class B
ACC	0	0

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

Symbols for Mishap Aircraft





accident
person
vehicle
distracted
driving

auto, reckless, urban car, modern, teamwork, concentration, steering, angry, meeting, busy, texting, talking, driver, drive, lifestyle, entrepreneurs, smartphones, transportation, businessman, indoors, transport, multitask, dangerous, hand, telephone, executive, automobile, cellphone, law, coffee, business, travel, smart, communication, mobile message, people, street, adult, text, traffic, screen, insurance, teenager, office, sms, drink, stop, careless, multitasking, distraction, technology, call, attention

... It's NOT just texting!



There is no deer hunting season for vehicles. **Be Alert!**

4 | HOLIDAY HEALTH & SAFETY TIPS
*by Dept. of Health & Human Services
USA*

6 | PUT IT IN PARK
*by Staff Sgt. Jalleshia Miller
8 FW/SEG, Kunsan AB, Korea*

8 | DISTRACTED DRIVING
*by Master Sgt. Chad Grady
ACC/SEW, JB Langley-Eustis, VA*

12 | CRASHING HURTS
by Dave Robinson

**THE OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE DRINKING CAMPAIGN
OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

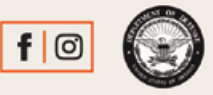


re • spon • si • ble drink • ing
(noun)

Knowing your **alcohol limits** and sticking to them.
Not just legal limits - but personal limits too.

SERVE HONORABLY. DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

Learn more at ownyourlimits.org



Holiday Health & Safety Tips



1 Wash your hands often.

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Wash your hands with soap and clean running water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based product.



2 Stay warm.

Cold temperatures can cause serious health problems, especially in infants and older adults. Stay dry, and dress warmly in several layers of loose-fitting, tightly woven clothing. Check on children, the elderly and pets.



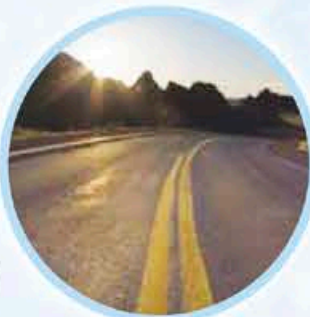
3 Manage stress.

The holidays don't need to take a toll on your health. Keep a check on over-commitment and over-spending. Balance work, home, and play. Get support from family and friends. Keep a relaxed and positive outlook. Get enough sleep.



4 Travel safely.

Whether you're traveling across town or around the world, help ensure your trip is safe. Don't drink and drive, and don't let someone else drink and drive. Wear a seat belt every time you drive or ride in a motor vehicle. Always buckle your child in the car using a child safety seat, booster seat, or seat belt according to his/her height, weight, and age.



5 Be smoke-free.

Avoid smoking and breathing other people's smoke. If you smoke, quit today! Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW, or talk to your health care provider for help.



6 Get check-ups and vaccinations.

Exams and screenings can help find problems early or before they start. Vaccinations help prevent diseases and save lives. Schedule a visit with your health care provider for a yearly exam. Ask what vaccinations and tests you should get based on your age, lifestyle, travel plans, medical history, and family health history.



8 Prevent injuries.

Injuries from falls and fireworks often occur around the holidays. Use step stools instead of furniture when hanging decorations. Leave the fireworks to the professionals.

Most residential fires occur during the winter months. Keep candles away from children, pets, walkways, trees, and curtains. Never leave fireplaces, stoves, or candles unattended. Don't use generators, grills, or other gasoline- or charcoal-burning devices inside your home or garage. Install a smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector in your home. Test and change the batteries regularly.



7 Watch the kids.

Children are at high risk for injuries. Keep a watchful eye on your kids. Keep potentially dangerous toys, food, drinks, household items, choking hazards (like coins and hard candy), and other objects out of kids' reach. Learn how to provide early treatment for children who are choking. Develop and reinforce rules about acceptable and safe behaviors for all electronic media.



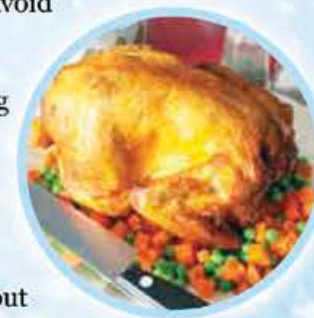
10 Eat healthy, and be active.

With balance and moderation, you can enjoy the holidays the healthy way. Choose more vegetables and fruit. Select just one or two of your favorites from the host of tempting foods. Find fun ways to stay active, such as dancing to your favorite holiday music. Be active for at least 2½ hours a week. Help kids and teens be active for at least 1 hour a day.



9 Handle and prepare food safely.

As you prepare holiday meals, keep you and your family safe from food-related illness. Wash hands and surfaces often. Avoid cross-contamination by keeping raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs (including their juices) away from ready-to-eat foods and eating surfaces. Cook foods to the proper temperature. Refrigerate promptly. Do not leave perishable foods out for more than two hours.



put it in
Park

BY STAFF SGT. JALLESIA MILLER

recently determined that if I get less than six hours of sleep, the following day doesn't start out so well, and this particular day was no exception.

One morning, I woke up really tired after only getting five hours of sleep. I was a complete mess trying to get ready for work, and everything that could have gone wrong went wrong. From not being able to find my wallet, to having issues with my hair, my day was not starting out too well. In the midst of it all, I was running late for work. My ideal time to head downstairs is 7:30, but it was already 7:45, and I was still upstairs trying to gather my lunch and gym bag.

Finally, at 7:55 I was walking down the stairs to my garage. Backpack on my back, gym bag on my shoulder, gallon of water in one hand and lunch in the other. I opened the door that leads from the house to the garage, walked to the car and tossed everything in the back seat. I got into my car, pressed the remote to open the garage door and slowly pulled forward out of my garage. As I pulled out, the first thing that came to my mind was that I forgot to close the door leading into the house. Although I was running late, I could not leave knowing that I left the door unlocked.

As I pulled midway out of the garage, I knew closing the door would only take a few seconds, so I put the car in park and left the driver's door open. As I walked up to the house, I heard a faint noise. I turned around to see what it was, and in disbelief, I saw my car rolling away.

Without hesitation, I sprinted as fast as I could toward my car. As I was sprinting, my only thought was that I had to stop my car before it crashed into the apartments 15 feet away. As soon as I got close enough, I grabbed the open driver's door with my left hand, put my right hand on top of the roof for support, and threw my feet inside the car. I immediately hit the brakes, just before my car crashed into the apartments.

After it happened, I sat in the middle of the street for a minute, in complete shock of the entire incident. In shock, but relieved at the fact I was able to stop just in time, avoiding damage to my car – and someone else's property. It wasn't until I got to work that I realized what I did wrong. I was in such a huge rush that I didn't take a few seconds to put my car in park. It also crossed my mind that during the time I leave for work, little kids are also walking to school. What was – thankfully – a minor situation could have quickly turned into a major tragedy.

Should I have gotten more rest? Definitely. Would that have prevented me from rushing around that morning? Probably. But what I do know is that if I had only taken a few seconds to slow down and put it in park, I could have avoided that mistake.

Each year, automobile manufacturers continue to add more and more technology to automobiles. Not only do these techy gadgets compete for your business, but they also aim to make driving safer. Unfortunately, the more technology manufacturers add to vehicles the more distracted we are from the physical act of driving. Features such as hands-free calling, voice activation, massive display monitors and front, rear and side sensors are intended to make vehicles safer.

However, until someone is experienced with these features, they can be a major distraction either by taking your eyes off the road, impacting your concentration or both. I've had my own stories on distraction with the most recent being my truck's display.

My 2019 truck came with what equates to a small television screen in the dash. There are so many features on the touch screen that I have yet to figure them all out. At times this can be a major distraction – to the point of having to turn off the monitor off in heavy traffic or at night.

Several years earlier, I had an alarming experience with a rental vehicle when the group I was travelling with requested a full-size SUV. The first day I drove the 2015 vehicle, another car approached and apparently it was traveling too close to our vehicle, which caused my seat to rumble violently. It startled me to the point of making a sudden steering adjustment in traffic, which could've been bad for everyone. Features like these are designed to aid in safety, but until you're familiar with them, they can be a major distraction.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 3,166 lives were claimed on America's highways from distracted driving in 2017 alone.

"It's those damn kids driving and talking or texting on their cell phones."

Many of you might have uttered similar words at some point in time; I know I have on multiple occasions. While that demographic is guilty of distracted driving, it's safe to say that all demographics of drivers are guilty of distractions behind the wheel. The percentages of the different age groups that were involved in fatal crashes in 2017 range from 16% (ages 15-19) to 37% (ages 20-29) Those numbers don't necessarily correlate to the worst offenders being those kids on their phones.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated nine people are killed and more than 1,000 are injured each day in accidents that involve a distracted driver. When you send or read a text while traveling at 55 mph, the estimated time your eyes are off the road is approximately five seconds. At that speed, and for even that short duration, you just covered the length of a football field ... but on the highway and probably in the midst of other distracted drivers.

In today's fast-paced world, the days go by with the blink of an eye, weeks and months pass in a flash and years pass by so fast that sometimes it's hard to comprehend. The search for those precious extra seconds or minutes can have a direct impact on our driving ability. While texting remains one of

the most significant factors of distracted driving, it is only one of a laundry list of things to take into consideration. Trying to save those extra seconds and down a cup of coffee on the way into work or eat breakfast or lunch while on the road can also contribute to those same poor driving habits. We all feel that there are just not enough hours in the day, and we cut corners on a routine basis to save those few seconds while we're behind the wheel.

Unfortunately, many of us consider ourselves to be experienced drivers and continue to take on more and more distractions when we drive. This false sense of skill only breeds complacency, and before we know it, we are trying to juggle the phone, program the GPS and manage the kids in the back seat. We are so accustomed to this that not only does it occur while driving, it occurs while traveling at 70 plus mph on the highway. Many of us will continue to consider ourselves skilled drivers while multitasking as we speed down the road, changing lanes, and many times not only driving, but driving aggressively. Mixing aggressive driving and distracted driving can be as dangerous as mixing alcohol or fatigue and driving.

Clearly we have an issue with distracted driving on our highways; but what can we do to combat it?

Managing our time better is probably at the top of the list. Streamlining our daily tasks and better time management could considerably reduce the amount of time we spend behind the wheel while we are distracted. Better preparation prior to departing from any location is a simple step toward reducing distractions. When starting your vehicle, consider setting your radio to your favorite station, podcast or other listening features prior to shifting into drive. If using navigation, set your navigation aid prior to putting the car in drive. Make sure the kids are buckled up and prepared for the ride before you leave the driveway.

Keep in mind that while you cannot control the distractions of other drivers, you can control the distractions that influence your driving. Incorporating a few simple steps into your daily routine could give you those extra five seconds and prevent you from becoming a statistic of distracted driving. If a phone call or a text is truly that important, pull off the road and take the call or read and respond to that text. Those few seconds of delay to stop and read that emoji-riddled abbreviated and acronym-filled text truly can save your life, the lives of your loved ones or the lives of your fellow drivers. 🚗

Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age, Distraction, and Cell Phone Use, 2017

Age Group	Total Drivers		Distracted Drivers			Drivers Using Cell Phones		
	Number	% of Total Drivers	Number	% of Total Drivers in This Age Group	% of All Distracted Drivers	Number	% of Distracted Drivers	% of Drivers Using Cell Phones
15-19	3,255	6%	271	8%	9%	63	23%	16%
20-29	12,086	23%	816	7%	27%	151	19%	37%
30-39	9,290	18%	557	6%	19%	86	15%	21%
40-49	7,944	15%	431	5%	14%	48	11%	12%
50-59	8,029	15%	360	4%	12%	33	9%	8%
60-69	5,562	11%	224	4%	7%	19	8%	5%
70+	4,911	9%	292	6%	10%	4	1%	1%
Total	52,274	100%	2,994	6%	100%	404	13%	100%

Source: FARS 2017 ARF; Note: The total includes 62 drivers 14 and younger, 3 of whom were noted as distracted. Additionally, the total includes 1,135 of unknown age, 40 of whom were noted as distracted.





CRASHING HURTS

BY DAVE ROBINSON

W

e've all heard the sayings ... something to the effect of "Pain is temporary, glory is forever and chicks dig scars." Well, now that I've been through it, I have my own sayings:

1. Crashing hurts. A lot.
2. The most expensive motorcycle protective gear in the world is still cheaper than a few days in the hospital.
3. Wives think scars are gross.

How did I become so wise? Well, the school of life decided I needed a refresher course in common sense, and I was a bad student.

It all started when my buddy asked if I wanted to go on a business trip with him. The unnamed-company-that-he-works-for-that-coincidentally-happens-to-make-motorcycles-and-uses-a-bar-and-shield-logo was sending him to training, and he'd be in a seminar for a couple of days. Meanwhile, the plan was that I would lounge around and wait for him – perhaps I could even take a solo daytrip. That part of the plan wasn't entirely ironed out, but no big deal.

We headed up to the meeting on a beautiful day – a little chilly in the morning, but we were dressed for it and had a great ride. While they got started with training, I decided to ask the service guys their opinions on a good daytrip ride in the area. They suggested a great ride on local highways that had just been repaved, heading over to the Mississippi bluffs and back, estimating the round trip would take four to five hours. Supplied with a map they highlighted for me, advice on the best lunch stop and a rough schedule, I said goodbye and headed east on the highway, not realizing the Mississippi was to the west. About a half hour into it, I realized maybe something wasn't right, but I decided to just go with it. These roads were in great shape, and I was having a great time.

Then I came to a very interesting intersection. Ahead of me, the beautiful paved road continued. To the left and right of me, a wide dirt trail led off into the forest. A sign read: “No Cars. No Trucks.” I thought to myself “I’m not a car,” followed by “I’m not a truck.” The next part is the part that my wife has since labeled “The bad idea.”

I had a great idea.

I would attempt to ride this section of the trail. The signs indicated a 7-mile trail section. I can ride 7 miles in the woods, no problem, I thought. I’m not a total novice to racing and motor sports, plus, I was sitting on a dual-sport motorcycle ... so the idea wasn’t THAT bad. The next part is what my wife refers to as “The bad decision.”

I turned left and headed down the trail.

I had a GREAT time for about 5 miles. As I moved through the glorious forest, I gained confidence, and sped up a tad. Unfortunately, I had never ridden this trail before, which means I was essentially riding blind. I crested a majestic hill that I’d been cruising up, and that’s when I realized maybe I’d made a small mistake. The backside of the hill was sand. Not “a little sand on the trail” – it was a sand DUNE. The tracks from other riders went everywhere. There was no trail anymore. I could see across the sand bowl to where the trail continued back up into the woods, so I knew roughly where I needed to go, but I also knew I probably wouldn’t make it. I knew I couldn’t stop, since I wouldn’t be able to start again, considering I just had street tires installed – I should have went

with the knobbies. I figured my best option was to jump clear and let the bike go. Plan in mind, I lightly throttled on. I made it through most of the sand, but then I came into seriously deep sand – like 18 inches deep. I was literally in too deep.

I felt it start. The front tire veered to my left, and the handlebar torque was too much for me to countersteer. I attempted to dismount, but as the bike started tipping to the right, my foot hooked the right pannier and I didn’t make it clear. I essentially high-sided in slow motion and landed prostrate just before the bike landed on me.

Fortunately, I was wearing excellent boots, but unfortunately, they were street boots and only covered my ankles. The full weight of the cycle came down on my splayed leg and fractured my

“This was the exact moment I realized I might **REALLY** have made a big mistake.”

tibia where the boot protection ended. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I also broke off the medial malleolus, or the part on the end of the big leg bone, on the inside in my case, that makes the “socket” that the talus or the “ball” of the ball-and-socket sits in. I broke off half the socket, basically. Without my boots, my ankle would have been smashed.

This was the exact moment I realized I might REALLY have made a big mistake. Not only did I just crash and get hurt, but I was pinned – I could NOT get my foot out from under the bike. This was also the point in time when I had some scary thoughts. Bear in mind, it was Tuesday about 1 p.m., and I was on a recreational trail in the woods. No one knew I was here. In fact, they thought

I was 180 miles west of here. If I was lucky, someone might come along to help me, oh I don’t know, maybe Saturday.

My leg hurt like a ... well, “It hurt a lot” just doesn’t convey the reality of the situation and the level of pain. I knew it was bad, but at the same time, I knew I had to get out of the situation. Realizing I was in sand, I figured that – duh – I could probably dig myself out. This was a little bit better than Plan B, which involved my pocketknife. I managed to move enough sand from around my waist that I could push my left leg under my body, and relieve the twisting part of the pain of my trapped right leg. Eventually I was able to push on the edge of the pannier and leverage the bike a bit to slide my

right leg out. It was at his point that I realized the trauma kit I carried was in the very pannier that just crushed my leg, and the motorcycle was now resting firmly upside down on it. Since I still had all my gear strapped to the bike, I dug out my shaving kit and popped four Ibuprofen. I knew it was only going to get worse, and if I did nothing else, I needed to dull the pain.

I attempted to lift the bike. We all know how to properly lift a bike alone, so I backed up to it, grabbed low, and started walking backward. In deep sand. It was a joke. The bike didn’t move an inch, and all I did was push a big trough into the sand with my feet. Running through scenarios in my mind, I noticed my next problem: The bike was leaking gas.

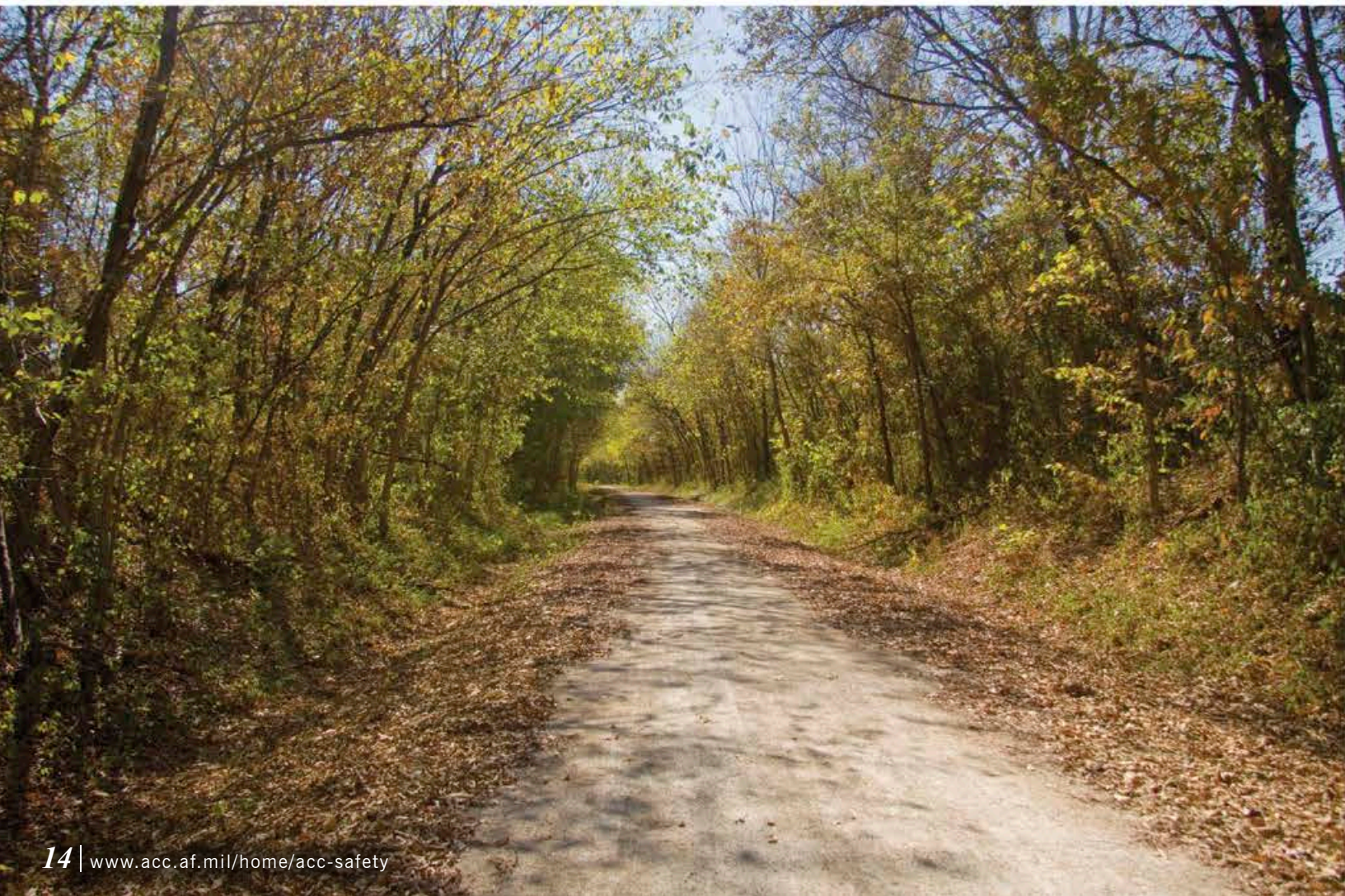




Photo by Nomad Soul/Shutterstock.com

It had tipped so far over that the wheels were higher than the seat, and the fuel was leaking out of the overfill channel in the filler cap. I had to figure out some way to get the bike back on its wheels so I could get out of this mess before I no longer had enough fuel to get out of this mess. I stuck my finger in the hole the gas was draining out of while I tried to figure something out. Then I heard it ... the beautiful put-put exhaust note of a four-wheeler. Sweet!

A few minutes later, a wonderful couple and their son, who happened to be on vacation, came around the bend. They offered help, and I asked them to help me lift the bike. It took taking off the rear box and left pannier to lighten the load, then

all four of us to get that thing upright in the deep sand, and to find a rock to wedge under the kickstand to keep it upright. We chatted a bit while I waited for the oil and fuel to drain back in place before I tried to start it. The most interesting part of the conversation?

The son: "You gotta have balls to be out here on that thing!"

Me: "Nope, you just gotta be an idiot."

It started on the second try, and I put everything back together. I asked how much farther the trail went, and they said the road was about a mile up the trail. They offered to follow me out, but I just said when they come back through, keep an eye out for me lying on the side of the trail. They promised me they would.

I thanked them profusely, and to this day, I wish I would have gotten their names – I wish I could send them flowers or a case of oil or something.

I mounted up and slowly rode on. I had to use my heel on the rear brake, since pushing down on the brake with my toes hurt too much. I came to the road, and even though it wasn't paved, the gravel was heavenly! I rode directly to a pharmacy, bought all of their ice packs and a roll of duct tape. In the parking lot, I busted out two ice packs and taped them to my leg under my jeans with the duct tape. It was almost 4:30 now, so I rode back to where I started.

My friends were just finishing up, so we talked a bit with the staff, and they had a nice laugh

at my expense. The staff highly recommended I go to the urgent care in town, but I was feeling okay, so we went to dinner instead. Later that evening, I iced my leg, elevated it and figured it would feel better in the morning.

The next morning, I used the whole roll of duct tape and made myself a fantastic cast. I figured athletes with sprained ankles just tape the injury and go, so I taped up my leg, jumped on the bike and rode four hours back home. I worked all day, walking and standing on my duct tape cast, and around 5 p.m., I thought, "You know, my leg STILL hurts pretty bad. Maybe I should go to the emergency room ..." I took the bike home and told my wife what happened. She loaded me up and off we went to the ER.

I busted myself up pretty good, and I definitely learned a few things. If I leave you with nothing else, remember this: A dear friend once said to me "Intuition doesn't get in front of you and yell or scream, or even stand behind you and tap you on the shoulder to get your attention. No; intuition simply whispers."

I confess – intuition whispered to me before I even pulled off the pavement. It said "You're not dressed to go off-road," followed by "You're fully loaded with gear," and finally, "It's been years since you've moto'd"... all of which I chose to not hear because ... well, I'm an idiot. But I've learned from my experience: The next time I ride that trail, I'm going to go *slower*.

A few days after the surgery to bolt everything back together, I experienced some chest pain. Again, being an idiot, I figured I was getting a chest cold, so I took some medicine and decided to ride it out. A few days later, I

drove myself to the hospital where they took me in as a priority-one patient. Turns out I had multiple pulmonary embolisms, which resulted from the accident or the surgery that followed. After a week in the hospital, I would be on blood thinners for the next nine months, which came with many restrictions including no riding.

The only good thing about that whole ordeal was having a "rolling crutch" – it was a blast! My nephews loved it and started calling me "Uncle Wheels." I let the neighbor kids try it, and they

were gone for three hours. It's basically a giant kick-scooter for adults.

All kidding aside, I am dealing with my mistakes by making fun of myself, but if you are experiencing any chest pain or if you have any level of accident, even minor, I urge you to seek medical attention immediately. I didn't even know what a pulmonary embolism was, and I was truly stupid to ignore it. Turns out I could have easily died. Learn from my stupidity and keep the shiny side up. Also, stay on the pavement. 🦋

