Summer 2025

Combat Edge

Air Combat Command's Safety Magazine

A Will of Its Own

pg 4

Combat Edge

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COVER ILLUSTRATION COMPOSITED USING PHOTOS BY SRA EMILY KENNEY AND A1C ISAIAH PEDRAZZINI

ACCent

Col Jesse Doyle
Director of Safety

James Mattis, former Secretary of Defense and retired USMC General, is well known as a voracious reader and strong advocate for understanding history. His belief is that understanding history allows a person to "face nothing new under the sun." With that in mind, it is important to understand the history of the 101 Critical Days of Summer. Historically speaking, the summer months see an uptick in the number of mishaps, particularly those that in retrospect easily could have been prevented. I would like to offer up my own advice for reducing risk while still getting the most out of your summer plans.

First, it can happen to you. Many people, myself included, will read a mishap report and think of any number of reasons that particular series of events would never happen to you. Guess what? The person involved in that mishap probably thought the same thing! Don't become complacent.

Second, control what you can control. In other words, put on that helmet, apply the sunscreen, keep a fire extinguisher nearby. Even the best laid plans can go awry, but oftentimes proper preparation and taking the small steps can be the difference between a story for later and a hospital visit…or worse.

Third, understand your own limitations. Whether an activity becomes a lifelong passion, a seasonal hobby, or a one-time event, you have to give it a try first; however, that doesn't mean you should take on a "go big or go home" attitude right off the bat. Ease into a new activity, don't be afraid to take a beginner's lesson, and make sure you don't let more experienced friends or family push you out of your comfort zone.

Finally, imagine how the mishap report would read. In most cases, if you have already heeded the advice presented above, there won't be a need for a mishap report. On the other hand, if you find yourself in a position where you are about to take the plunge, either literally or figuratively, and the little voice in your head is asking if this really is a good idea, then this might be exactly what you need to think in that moment. Don't put yourself or others in a position that solicits the reaction of "What were they thinking?"

Summer should be a time of fun and excitement, and it absolutely can be. Please learn from the history of others whose summers did not end well, and set yourself up for success during the 101 Critical Days of Summer.

A QF-16 drone taxis back to the 82nd Aerial Targets Squadron, Det. 1 ramp, after its first flight at Holloman Air Force Base, NM
Photo by SrA Emily Kenney

A Will of Its Own

By Mr. James "Boomer" Schreiner *(retired)*

In August of 2023, I flew a dedicated test mission at White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) for a U.S. Army customer. I flew the aircraft directly as the pilot-on-board, and not under remote control (i.e. a normal F-16); however, I did activate some of the aircraft's onboard remote-control systems (known as Drone Peculiar Equipment, or DPE) to allow the recording of the aircraft performance data and real-time Time-Space-Position Information (TSPI) for use by the test customer. These systems can be left in the passive mode to allow data gathering or can be activated (engaged) to allow for remote control. No ground controller (Remote Pilot or RP) was present at WSMR, since only data recording was required for this mission.

The QF-16 is a modified block 15, 25 or 30 F-16, designed to allow for flight by remote control, with or without a pilot on board. Used for various weapons testing programs, it currently is flown at Tyndall AFB over the Gulf Ranges and, until recently, at Holloman AFB over WSMR, using the system known as the Advanced Aerial Threat Target Control Systems (AATTCS). Modifications include transponders and modifications to the basic aircraft flight control system, which allow remote-controlled flight from ground stations located at Tyndall and WSMR. One of the modifications is a throttle servo-actuator that permits remote operation of the throttle. Other modifications provide for remote operation of other aircraft systems such as brakes.

Except on live missions when actual weapons testing is being conducted, or on other missions during which the remote system will be activated and engaged, a Safety-Pilot (SP) is on board during remote control training missions. Allowing the QF-16 to be flown under remote control requires consent from both the SP in the cockpit and the RP at the ground station. Additionally, during manned-remote missions, the SP will enable individual aircraft systems to be operable under remote control, depending on mission requirements. Even after the aircraft is engaged to allow for remote-control operation, the SP can take full control of the aircraft at any time by simple activation of the paddle-switch on the control stick. There also is an emergency system that can allow the RP to assume control of the aircraft without the SP's consent. This system is designed to be activated in the event of SP incapacitation such as g-force induced loss of consciousness, during which the SP is unable to allow consent and the aircraft is not already engaged.

After landing, I began to taxi back to parking, using standard F-16 procedures. Normally, idle power is sufficient to maintain normal taxi speed, with only occasional, minor power increases or wheel-brake activations as required; however, during this taxi-back, the throttle began to move forward on its own. Without input from me, the aircraft began to accelerate down the main taxiway at Holloman.

"No matter how mature the system is, there is always something new that can arise."

A QF-16 Viper does an aerial maneuver at Holloman AFB, NM
Photo by A1C Isaiah Pedrazzini

James Schreiner, Civilian QF-16 pilot/controller, preflights a QF-16 before a manned dress rehearsal of a missile test on a QF-16 at Holloman AFB, NM.
Photos by TSgt Perry Aston

As the aircraft began to accelerate, I attempted to pull the throttle to idle while simultaneously activating the wheel brakes. The throttle would not move, and the brakes were not functional. I then closed the Fuel Master Switch, although under these circumstances it could take up to 20-30 seconds before the engine flamed out due to fuel starvation. At this point, I estimated my speed to be around 40 knots. I couldn't wait. With both hands, I grabbed the throttle and was able to pull it to the cut-off range, causing the engine to shut down. As it did, the generators dropped offline, and brake function returned. I was able to bring the aircraft to a stop, coincidentally in front of the QF-16 hangars. Several of our maintenance crew heard the commotion and quickly retrieved an aircraft tug and towed me to the chocks.

An incident like this had never happened before, and therefore a safety investigation was initiated. Because the DPE was still active during the incident, all the pertinent data was downlinked and recorded at the WSMR AATTCS. The data indicated the aircraft had become engaged without any input from me or anyone downrange. When that occurred, AATTCS commanded a throttle increase. This was because it had entered a mode of aircraft control in which the system adopted a logarithmically-increasing variable that had begun integrating throttle command control logic at some time prior to the aircraft's becoming engaged. According to all current tech-order data, an un-commanded engagement should not be possible. It never occurred to me that the jet had become engaged; therefore, it didn't occur to me to try and disengage it.

We preformed numerous ground tests with that particular aircraft, but we could not duplicate the engagement incident. During testing, we also discovered that if the aircraft is automatically engaged, such as using the emergency engagement command, most of the aircraft functions are automatically activated without safety pilot input, including the wheel brakes. In this mode, it was discovered that the wheel brakes do not function from the cockpit using the normal pedals. This feature also was not documented in any of the QF-16 TOs.

There has been a saying in the drone community going back to the 1970s, when the PQM-102 (a modified F-102) was introduced. No matter how mature the system is, there is always something new that can arise. "I've never seen that before" has been repeated many times during drone history. I have been a safety pilot since 1997, beginning with the QF-4 and then the QF-16. During that time, I experienced numerous "I've-never-seen-that-before" incidents, but nothing quite like this. I was fortunate enough to be able to overpower the throttle servo and shut the engine off, thereby preventing a potentially serious or even life-threatening situation. Despite almost 24 years and more than 2800 hours flying drones, there is still no room for complacency. We are paid flight pay for a reason: Flying high-performance aircraft is risky.

[Mr. James "Boomer" Schreiner served on active duty between 1981 and 2005. After retiring from the Air Force, he took a non-flying job for three years and then returned to flying, first as a contractor working for Lockheed-Martin, and then transitioned to Government Civil Service. He has logged over 6,500 hours in the T-37, A-10A, F-4E/G, QF-106, QF-4 and QF-16. He retired from Civil Service in March 2024.]

Don't Rush Me

By TSgt James M. Graben

While stationed with the 13th Fighter Generation Squadron at Misawa, Japan in 2022, I was the Weapons Expediter for swing shift. I was responsible for ensuring the safety and coordination of all weapons crews on my shift, as well as coordinating with flightline production. One day, a problem arose when my crew tried to deal with a hung gun.

On one of our unit's flying days, while the F-16s were firing their 20 mm guns, one of the aircraft squawked in an In-Flight Emergency for a hung gun. The response includes requiring the troubled aircraft is the last to land, in order that other planes may land before the airfield is shut down. After the stricken aircraft lands, the emergency responders arrive on site, and the weapons crews try to safe the gun as quickly as possible to permit the airfield to reopen. I tasked one of my load crews to pull the gun system once the aircraft was on the ground.

Fire crews and 80 FGS load crew members conduct a hung ordnance and gun procedure on an F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft during an exercise at Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea.
Photos by SrA Maria Umanzor Guzman

The day shift responded to the call and worked with Armament and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel to safe the gun. Once they declared the gun system to be safe, the aircraft was towed back to its parking spot. By the time my weapons crew arrived, the F-16 had been parked for 4 hours, and there were several people in the area, many of whom were working on the aircraft. My crew then determined the gun was in fact not safe, and was jammed so badly that it would take several hours to safe it.

The day-shift crew expediter had received several calls from our production supervisor, asking when the gun would be safe, and how soon the aircraft could be towed back to its parking spot. He had felt pressured to finish the job quickly. Rather than verifying it himself, he had taken the word of other agencies such as EOD and Armament that the gun was safe.

As soon as our team began working to remove the gun, the chief noticed something wrong with the way the safety hold-back tool had been installed, and called me over to confirm. I inspected the safety device for the gun system and agreed that it hadn't been installed correctly. I worked with the crew to try to install the hold-back tool properly, but we were unsuccessful. We couldn't determine whether the firing position had a live round in it or not. I called Production Super to let him know that I was declaring a ground emergency for an unsafe condition on the F-16. I called the Maintenance Operation Center to declare the emergency and cordoned off the aircraft, ensuring that only essential personnel were in the area.

A U.S. Air Force F-16 20mm gun system rests on a table during maintenance at Prince Sultan Air Base, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
Photo by TSgt Alexander Frank

After declaring the emergency, I too also was called about 10 times for an estimate as to when the aircraft would be safe. They keep telling me that our aircraft were running out of fuel at End of Runway, and we needed to end the ground emergency because they had put a freeze on aircraft movement.

Once the Fire Department arrived, I gave them all the information and released the scene to them. EOD was called because there were explosive ordnance on the aircraft. It took more than three hours for us to safe the gun system and remove it from the aircraft.

Our biggest problem—and the greatest lesson we learned—had to do with training. Neither the EOD members, the Armament shop, nor the day shift weapons crew knew how to correctly install the gun safety hold-back tool, yet they had deemed the gun to be safe.

This could have been a disaster. A live round in the firing position of the gun system could have fired while the aircraft was being towed, or while the earlier shift was working on it. We maintainers need to understand that safety is the most important thing, no matter what type of mission we have to accomplish. When we rush and don't verify, or are uncertain but don't ask, we are bound to make mistakes. We should have the fortitude to ensure everything is safe, even under pressure. Do not be afraid speak up if you don't know something. Trust but verify, and don't rush.

An Insidious OIL LEAK

By Capt Michael "DASH" Notti

Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) are a flying modern marvel. They are an intricate balance of information technology, machinery, communication, and coordination. The MQ-9A Reaper is controlled from a Ground Control Station (GCS), where a crew, comprised of an RPA Pilot and a Sensor Operator, input aircraft and sensor controls that are relayed to the aircraft. Currently, there are two main elements involved in conducting a sortie: a Mission Control Element (MCE), which controls the aircraft for the majority of the mission via Satellite with a delay; and the Launch and Recovery Element (LRE), which controls the aircraft via Line of Sight, with near-instantaneous control.

The day was like any other day in a deployed LRE environment: get on shift, check in with the outgoing crew, get a rundown of what to expect for the sorties, and execute the missions. The day was uneventful until approximately 2 hours after the last launch of the morning, when an MCE crew called to report a low oil level while in transit to the target area. Fifty-four percent remained, which soon dropped to 51%, and then 49%.

The MCE crew decided to terminate the mission and return to base, reporting that the oil level was dropping steadily. The good news: In its current state, the aircraft was safely recoverable. The bad news: The aircraft was 2 hours away and losing oil. My Sensor Operator and I requested the crew adjust gross weight before handing the aircraft over to us. This would help minimize any potential damage in the event the aircraft was unable to make it back to the airfield.

"The most crucial aspect of approaching any emergency is to remember to breathe. Take a moment to process what is happening and think logically through the next steps."

MQ-9 Photo by TSgt Emerson Nunez

After approximately 90 minutes, the MCE crew returned the leaking aircraft to within hand-back distance, and we stepped to the GCS to perform the recovery. Upon running our initial checklists there was a "rack lock up," a condition in which the GCS freezes and is unable to accept any inputs. A reset is required, and the process takes roughly 15 minutes to accomplish. These were 15 critical minutes we didn't have. We immediately stepped to a secondary GCS. After running checklists again, our screens turned from "snow," the black and white static of searching for the aircraft on the designated frequency, to capturing the aircraft in the "beam," reflecting clear pictures, telemetry, and valid aircraft data.

After ensuring the correct information was displayed, we checked the oil level, which by this time indicated 16% remaining. We successfully gained the aircraft, confirmed positive control, and started our checklists. Within 5 minutes of gaining control of the aircraft the oil level read 0%, and the alternator temperature rose to the CAUTION range of 207° C. The rising alternator temperature is indicative of an impending engine failure, something to be expected with no oil. We declared an in-flight emergency and coordinated with Air Traffic Control to proceed inbound directly over the airfield to conduct a Simulated Engine Out (SEO) approach.

Capt Michael "DASH" Notti

Arriving over the airfield at 18,000' Mean Sea Level, we reported High Key, a known energy state in the SEO approach in which landing is assured, and conducted approximately 7 descending 360 degree turns. 1 Lt Thomas Mitchell and TSgt Jeffrey McGraw had joined us in the GCS to be extra eyes and ears, and confirmed energy assessments during the descent. While descending from High Key, there were intermittent link hits. These are disruptions in the datalink as the aircraft passes directly overhead of the Ground Data Terminal. Temporarily flying outside the beam results in a change in the aircraft's heading and throttle to their programmed Lost Link Logic settings. As the aircraft re-enters the "beam" the throttle and control inputs from the GCS are then regained.

We landed from the SEO approach utilizing aerobraking, refraining from using full reverse in order to prevent any leaking oil from being dispersed onto the landing environment or the aircraft itself, and potentially into the engine intake. We coordinated with the control tower and maintenance to shut down while on the active runway, again refraining from utilizing full reverse while putting the propeller on the locks in order to avoid oil dispersal onto the first responders and the maintenance crew chiefs surrounding the aircraft.

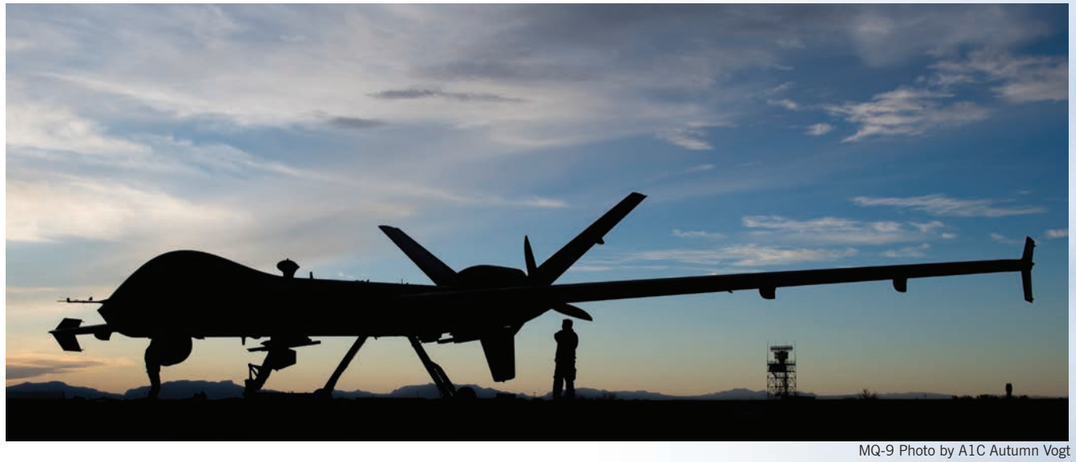
The pressure of the situation could have made it easy for any setback to cause us to lose focus. The initial rack lock up could have been the first domino in a series of unfortunate events. Experiencing momentary link hits while descending out of High Key could have resulted in unstable GCS throttle and control inputs. Thankfully, everyone maintained good Crew Resource Management, situational awareness, and task prioritization. We were determined not to let these events derail us from safely recovering the aircraft.

Members assigned to the 46th Expeditionary Attack Squadron use mobile equipment to taxi an MQ-9 Reaper at Ali Al Salem Air Base, July 18, 2023. Partnered with a stateside Mission Control Element, the team was able to perform a Satellite Launch and Recovery of an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle.
Photo by SSgt Breanna Diaz

The MQ-9A is equipped with only one engine. Therefore, there is always a risk during a recovery process, and the situation easily could change from a simulated engine-out approach to an actual engine-out approach. Back at our home station, we train for these scenarios in monthly Simulated Emergency Procedure Training (SEPT) profiles. The muscle memory built from taking these SEPTs lays the foundation necessary in real-world emergencies.

The most crucial aspect of approaching any emergency is to remember to breathe. Take a moment to process what is happening and think logically through the next steps. Getting the plane down safely is the number one goal, but that doesn't happen without maintaining composure, communication, and clarity. Effective training is the key.

MQ-9 Aircrew from the 489th Attack Squadron, Photo by SSgt Omari Bernard



MQ-9 Photo by A1C Autumn Vogt

(Left) Stephen Bridges, 47th Maintenance Directorate aircraft ordnance technician, works to take apart an ejection seat for an inspection at the Egress Shop at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas. Bridges and his coworkers take apart, inspect, replace or repair the ejection seats that are in each aircraft at Laughlin daily to keep our pilots safe.
Photo by A1C Kailee Reynolds

(Background Photo) A U.S. Air Force T-38C Talon takes off at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas.
Photo by A1C Keira Rossman

Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!

By Mr. Stephen Bridges

Being a 7-level isn't easy, especially in aircraft maintenance, as I'm sure most maintainers can attest. Aircraft maintenance has its challenges, especially when trying to meet production schedules. The Egress section is no stranger to this, since anything involving the seats and canopies is our bread and butter. Most of the time, the problems aren't too great; however, one event occurred that turned an ordinary day into a near-miss.

It was a normal day, where I was working with some journeymen (5-levels). A T-38C was at the beginning of a phase inspection requiring the removal of the ejection seats and canopies. My two counterparts and I were assigned to the job. We gathered our tools and technical order, and printed out our job control number. Before we left, I briefed our pre-task safety meeting. I emphasized one point: In the event of an emergency, don't be a hero. Should the cable fail on the crane and the seat fall, don't try to catch it. The same goes for the canopy. No one is allowed near the aircraft while we are working. I will notify all personnel to evacuate the hangar if the seat falls to the ground. If anyone comes up, I will handle it and send them away. In all the important instruction, I failed to cover one important item—what to do if the sling we use to remove the seats breaks away from the crane with the seat still attached.

Once I finished our briefing, we made our way to the hangar. We set up all our equipment and began the removal process. We removed both canopies without any problems and switched the canopy sling over to the ejection-seat sling. The first seat was removed and placed on the seat dolly with no issues. The crane was repositioned for the second seat and the sling was attached. The crane operator was signaled to lift the seat, and it was at that moment I saw the nose section of the aircraft began to rise. The seat was stuck in the rails, and the crane was lifting the aircraft. This happens occasionally because seats generally aren't removed until the next phase inspection, and dirt and grime build up over time. Before I could react and tell the crane operator to stop, the seat shot up the railing and then back down, breaking all four attachment points.

The seat slammed back down onto the railing, and the aircraft rocked up and down. Fortunately, the tail stand did its job and prevented the aircraft from tipping back. One of the team members had been inside the aircraft the whole time, and I rushed over to make sure he was not hurt. After confirming he was only a little shaken, I checked on our crane operator and asked why he hadn't stopped. Didn't he notice the increase in tension? He said he had, but assumed it was normal. This was odd, because he was trained and had performed this task before.

After hearing his reasoning, I realized we never had talked about what to do if we experience a stuck seat. I had always made it clear to stop and halt movement of the crane when I notice the seat is not sliding up the railing correctly. But I only said this when I was the one inside the aircraft or on the crane, and not when I was overseeing the operation. I didn't consider that the other 7-levels weren't doing the same when working with our newer guys.

This incident taught the entire egress shop the importance of communication. By failing to engage with my counterparts, and instead assuming that everyone was on the same page, I missed an opportunity to address a potential misunderstanding before it became a problem. Had I taken the time to bring up this issue as a team, this event could have been avoided. Communication is key.

EXCELLENCE:
A Day of Triumph Amid Crisis

By Capt Dillon D. Freitag

April 21, 2024, was a day that tested the skill, composure, and teamwork of three pilots aboard an E-11A Battlefield Airborne Communications Node. Just like the emergencies set up in the sim by the crusty old sim instructor. It came at the end of a long and demanding crew duty day, and compounded relatively quickly. Captain Derek Roth, instructor pilot Captain Mark Suges, and I faced a cascade of in-flight emergencies while enroute to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, on an iron swap mission originating from an undisclosed location in the Middle East. What began as a routine flight from points A to B coming back from a six-month deployment, the flight quickly transformed into a high-stakes battle against mechanical failure, adverse weather, and the ever-present demand for precision.

As we approached Ramstein, our mission took a sharp turn when we encountered a severe landing-gear malfunction coupled with an unexpected cabin door opening mid-flight. The gear malfunction stemmed from a faulty landing gear computer. The computer failed, thus preventing the gear from retracting or extending. The system has a redundancy, with the emergency gear T-handle. We pulled the handle, and the gear dropped into position and locked; however, using this procedure left us unable to close the gear doors, which would be inches from the ground when landing. These challenges were compounded by icing conditions, moderate turbulence, and gusty crosswinds, each a formidable obstacle in its own right. With Captain Suges in crew rest but contributing invaluable support, Captain Roth and I rose to the occasion.

I took charge of the emergency gear extension checklist, which required depressurizing the cabin and pulling the alternate gear extension lever. This procedure, though essential, triggered a secondary crisis: The aft cargo door inlet opened, resulting in an unsecured door in-flight. This hazardous condition was noticed by Captain Suges, who guided the team to double-check the crew-alerting system's message stack.

Meanwhile, Captain Roth focused on flying the aircraft. Executing a go-around in deteriorating weather with incomplete aircraft configuration, Roth avoided icing hazards and countered turbulence in order to keep the jet steady. Communication and teamwork among the three of us ensured the aircraft remained under control, even as the situation grew increasingly complex.

The final approach to Ramstein was a test of nerves and precision. With the gear doors inches from the ground and without nose-wheel steering, the crew stabilized the aircraft and coordinated with air traffic control, the command post, and emergency services for an emergency landing. Battling turbulent crosswinds, we safely touched down, preventing further escalation, and protecting the aircraft, its mission, and everyone aboard.

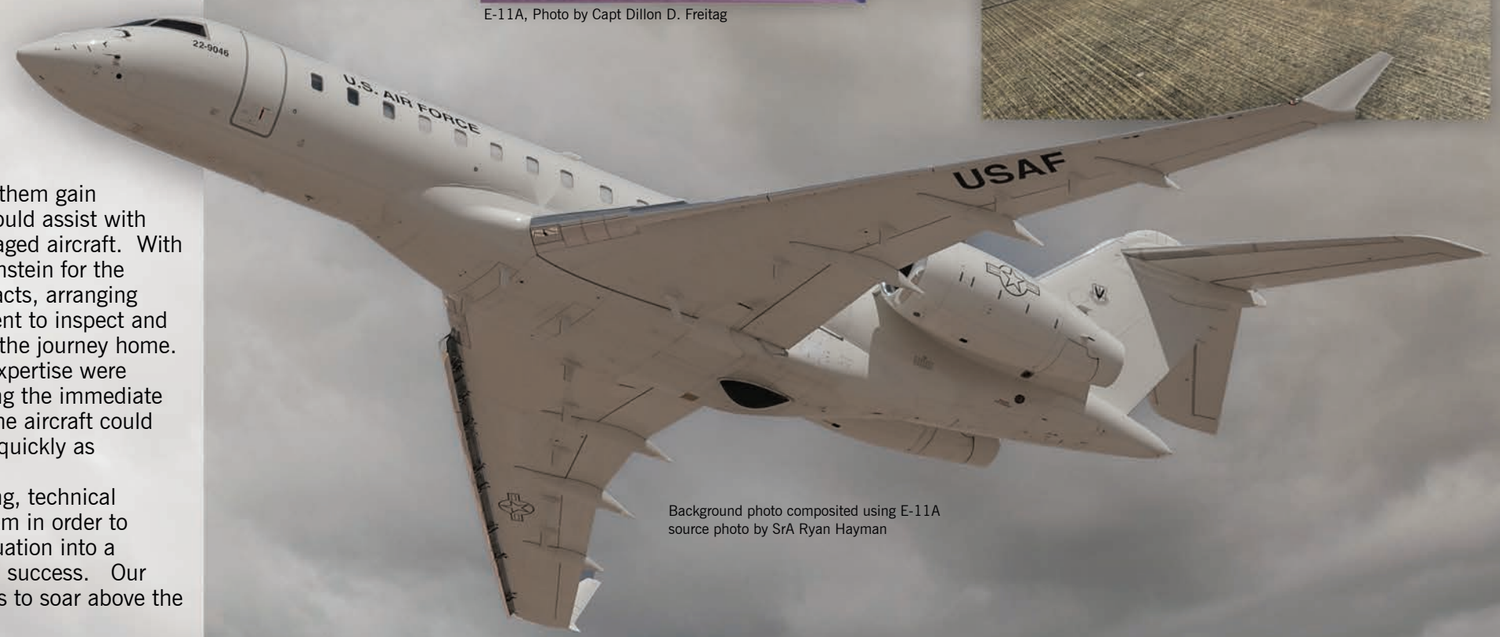
The crisis didn't end on the runway. The base's transient operations team, unfamiliar with the E-11A, and lacking the appropriate tow bar, needed assistance. Captain Suges retrieved the spare tow bar from the aircraft and helped install it. Acting as a wing walker, he ensured the safe and efficient tow of the jet from the runway. Recognizing the need for specialized support, he coordinated with the Northrup Grumman crew chief to host a civilian response team, helping them gain base access, and ensuring they could assist with evaluating and repairing the damaged aircraft. With limited resources available at Ramstein for the E-11A, Roth called multiple contacts, arranging for the necessary ground equipment to inspect and prepare the jet for the final leg of the journey home. The crew's efforts and logistical expertise were instrumental not only in addressing the immediate challenges, but also in ensuring the aircraft could return to mission-ready status as quickly as possible.

Our crew relied on quick thinking, technical expertise, and calm professionalism in order to turn a potentially catastrophic situation into a remarkable story of resilience and success. Our skill and determination enabled us to soar above the challenges.

A little reward: We got an extra day in Germany to unwind from the demanding six-month deployment in the sand.

E-11A, Photo by Capt Dillon D. Freitag

E-11A Landing Gear (top) and E-11A landing gear doors (bottom)
Photos by Capt Dillon D. Freitag



Background photo composited using E-11A source photo by SrA Ryan Hayman

A U.S. Air Force B-52H Stratofortress bomber.
Photo by MSgt Richard P. Ebensberger

LOBO 49's Emergency Return

By Capt Patrick "Tyson" Mason

On September 4, 2024, LOBO 49, my crew faced a critical in-flight emergency shortly after takeoff. A mechanical component failure caused the complete loss of the left body hydraulic system, resulting in a cascade of challenges including brake failure, partial stabilizer failure, and aft gear malfunction. Despite these severe complications, the crew demonstrated exceptional skill, coordination, and professionalism in safely landing the aircraft and protecting all personnel on board.

As the situation unfolded, I made the decision to terminate the departure and coordinate with the local approach controller to establish a dedicated airspace around Barksdale AFB. By positioning the aircraft in a steady orbit along the approach corridor, the crew maintained the ability to execute a power-off, gliding approach if additional systems failed. I was able to delegate tasks, ensuring all crew members prioritized emergency checklists as outlined in the B-52 flight manual and local procedures.

Lt Col Heemstra, the copilot—and seasoned B-52 Test Pilot—led the execution of 11 emergency checklists while continually calculating landing distances under varying conditions.

Acknowledging the risk of flammable hydraulic fluid contacting overheated brakes, Lt Col Heemstra developed conservative braking parameters to minimize the potential for fire. In order to stay prepared, he recalculated landing requirements for multiple weight scenarios, ensuring readiness to land at any moment.

At the same time, Maj David Miller and Mr. Greg Watson programmed airspace restrictions, emergency ejection points, and glide approach corridors into the aircraft's navigation systems. This provided critical guidance on traffic, air traffic control advisories, and emergency scenarios. The crew worked closely with the Duty IP, Operations Supervisor, Maintenance Production Supervisor, and the Supervisor of Flying to verify their data and refine their strategy.

With the aircraft's handling degraded and partial braking capacity, the crew executed a controlled short landing, skillfully using the full runway length to bring the jet to a stop without relying on brakes. This approach minimized the risk of fire while allowing the Base Fire Team to assume control once the aircraft was stationary. Thanks to precise execution and clear communication, the crew successfully evacuated, and the incident concluded without injuries.

Photo by Dennis Henry

Mishap Statistics Scoreboard

FY25 Flight

Thru 31 Mar 2025

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

FY25 Occupational

Thru 31 Mar 2025

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

FY25 Weapons

Thru 31 Mar 2025

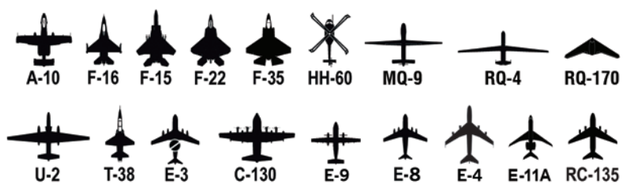
	Class A	Class B	Class C	Class D	Class E
ACC	0	0	1	0	2

Legend

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

(RED) = On-duty (BLACK) = Off-duty

Symbols for Mishap Aircraft



Flight Notes

During the second quarter of FY25, ACC had three Class A mishaps resulting in extensive damage to two F-15Es and one HC-130J. Aircrew must remain vigilant at all times, utilizing all available resources and adhering to published guidance to navigate the challenges of a rapidly-changing operational environment. This focus ensures both operational safety and mission success in dynamic conditions.

Occupational Notes

During the second quarter of FY25, ACC did not experience any Class A or Class B mishaps; however, our numbers for the first quarter of the fiscal year are one Class A and one Class B mishap. This is a significant reduction compared to the previous FY, when we sustained six Class A and one Class B mishaps at the same point in FY24. As we move forward into the summer months, including the Critical Days of Summer, we must slow down and think about what we are going to be doing, and consider any risk that may be associated with that activity. Whether we are on or off duty, risk management is crucial to maintaining our safety. Managing risks does not have to be a lengthy process, and usually can be done very easily. Let's redouble our efforts to make it through the next quarter without any mishaps.

Weapons Notes

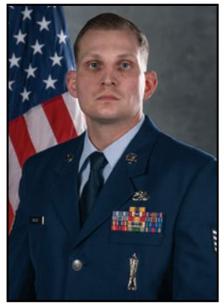
During the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2025, three weapons incidents occurred: one Class C mishap and two Class E mishaps. The Class C mishap involved eighteen KMU-572 containers falling from a forklift. The two Class E mishaps involved damage to AGM-65 missiles during removal from their containers. These mishaps underscore the importance of attention to detail and adherence to handling procedures and reinforcing best practices to maintain our commitment to safety.

1st Quarter FY25 Awards

Flight Line Safety
SSgt Christopher C. Santos
757 AMXS, 57
Nellis AFB, NV

Pilot Safety
Maj Timothy P. Noffsinger
50 ATKS, 432 WG
Shaw AFB, SC

Unit Safety Representative
MSgt Scott M. McDonough
NTTR/DOS
Nellis AFB, NV



Weapons Safety Professional
TSgt David A. Miller
366 FW/SEW
Mountain Home AFB, ID

Safety Career Professional
Ms. Tanya M. Dwyer
350 SWW/SEG
Eglin AFB, FL

Aircrew Safety Award
HAWK11
55 RQS, 355 WG
Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ

Unit Safety
319 RW Safety Team
319 RW/SE
Grand forks, AFB, ND

Aviation Maintenance Safety
D-Team
5 RS, 9 RW
Osan AB, ROK

Explosives Safety
TSgt Darwin E. Alvarez
SSgt Andrew T. Singleton
SrA Dillon S. Stratton
355 MUNS, 355 WG
Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ


OVER the Edge
MAGAZINE
Underwater
Blackout
PAGE 6

Photo by Alannah Don

Water Safety Tips

Water safety is everyone's responsibility. Follow these safety tips to ensure a day on the water is both fun and safe.

Wear proper attire.

Inexperienced swimmers can safely enjoy the water by wearing a U.S. Coast Guard approved flotation device, such as a life jacket.

Swim in monitored areas.

Lifeguards prevent many potential water related accidents. Whether you swim at the beach or the pool, make sure to swim in well marked and monitored areas.

Watch your head.

Head and spinal injuries occur most often in shallow water. Stay safe; avoid diving into shallow or murky water.

Avoid alcohol use.

Don't drink and swim. Alcohol impairs one's judgment, coordination and ability to stay warm.

Teach children to swim.

Drowning is one of the most common causes of accidental death among children. Learning to swim is not only fun, but is a lifesaving skill.

OVER the Edge MAGAZINE

Cover–Photo by cecilebjn/shutterstock.com

HAVE A FOOD SAFE SUMMER

While the warmer weather conditions may be ideal for outdoor picnics and barbecues, the summer months typically see a spike in reports of foodborne illness. Make sure your fun in the sun doesn't get cut short by following some simple summer entertaining tips:

1 in 6
Approximate number of Americans stricken with food poisoning each year

128,000
Estimated annual hospitalizations from foodborne illnesses

Did You Know?

U.S. beef sales are highest during the week of July 4th, when Americans are expected to buy about **$400 MILLION WORTH OF IT—25% MORE THAN AN AVERAGE WEEK** (according to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association).

Basic Tips

CLEAN

CLEAN SURFACES, UTENSILS AND HANDS WITH SOAP AND WATER. If you're at a picnic, bring moist towelettes to use!

Wash all produce under plain running water before eating, cutting or cooking, even if you plan to peel them!

SEPARATE

SEPARATE PLATES AND UTENSILS. When grilling, use separate plates and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry and ready-to-eat foods (like raw vegetables).

COOK

USE A FOOD THERMOMETER.

Burgers: 160°F

Just because your burger is brown, not pink, doesn't mean it's safe to eat!

CHILL

CHILL RAW AND PREPARED FOODS PROMPTLY if not consuming after cooking.

Don't leave food at room temperature for longer than two hours (or 1 hour if it's above 90°F). If planning a picnic, perishable food should be kept in an insulated cooler packed with ice or ice packs.

What Are You Making?

Here are some food safety tips for preparing a few signature summer dishes.

BARBECUE
Cook all meat and poultry to recommended internal temperatures.

Burgers: 160°F.

Chicken and Turkey: 165°F.

Sausage: 160°F.

Steaks: 145°F with a 3-minute rest time.

FRUIT SALAD
Rinse all produce before peeling or chopping.

Chop all produce with clean knives on cutting boards not used with raw meat to avoid cross-contamination.

DEVILED EGGS
Refrigerate prepared eggs until they're ready to be served and once out, keep them nestled in ice to keep them cool.

ADDITIONAL SOURCE CDC

USDA

Ad Council

For more summer food safety tips, go to **—FoodSafety.gov—**

USDA IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER AND EMPLOYER

Photo by Vecteezy.com

101 Critical Days of Summer

By Mr. Rodney "Robbie" Robinson

I know: I tend to write an article every year regarding summer safety and preparation. Summer is my favorite time of the year because I enjoy getting outside with the longer days and warmer temperatures. Now, don't get me wrong: I enjoy other seasons too. This past year, I was able to make it out to Colorado and went skiing. I also made it to Alaska to check out their annual winter festival known as the Fur Rendezvous ("Fur Rondy"). While there, I went dog sledding, tubing, and was even able to work in a ski trip. What was surprising to me was that I made it back in one piece with no injuries. That may be luck…or maybe I put some thought into what we were going to do before we started.

With the 101 CDS upon us, we must realize that mishaps can occur at any time, and we must do our best to apply risk management in order to reduce the likelihood of having one. Last year alone, the Air Force sustained 10 off-duty fatalities during the 101 CDS. Eight of them involved some type of vehicle (2WL or 4WL). Keep in mind that you don't need to be in a vehicle in order to be in an accident that involves one. Two of the eight involved pedestrians were struck and killed by 4WL PMVs.

We have a number of activities that we all do during the summer months: vacations, cruises, hikes, motorcycle rides, water activities, softball, barbecuing, running, camping, etc. During the 101 CDS, we have more daylight and warmer temperatures, and our exposure to risk during these activities is even greater. What can we do to reduce our risk when participating in these activities? First, I think we need to evaluate ourselves and determine if we are physically and mentally fit to participate. None of us are getting any younger, and what we did 10 or 15 years ago may not be possible today. I think back to 25 years ago when I ran the Honolulu full marathon (26.2 miles). If truth be told, I probably wasn't in shape to run it, but I did and I paid the price. Today I'm much wiser and think things through a little more.

Before you engage in any activity, you need to look at what it will take to do it safely. If you are planning a road trip, now might be a good time to establish your plan. Do you have a valid license? Is your vehicle road-worthy? Have you mapped out your travel and allowed for needed breaks? This might seem like overkill, but it might just save your life.

The old adage of "Pay me now or pay me later" comes to mind. Let's front-load this by being prepared. We need everyone to be safe and to help those around us to be safe! Enjoy Summer and see you in the Fall!

Below, you will find some helpful tips for some of the more popular 101 CDS activities:

Motorcycle Riding

- Ensure you are properly licensed and experienced.
- Conduct pre-trip inspections to verify the motorcycle is in good mechanical condition.
- Always ensure your tires are in good condition.
- Check your lights and signals.
- Ensure your helmet is approved.

Shooting/Hunting

- Never point a firearm at anything or anyone you are not willing to shoot.
- Keep firearms unloaded until you are ready to use them.
- Keep firearms locked up when not in use.
- Store ammo separately from firearms.

Hiking

- Know where you are going, and leave a copy of your plans behind.
- Know your limits and capabilities.
- Ensure your cellphone is serviceable and properly charged.
- Be aware of wildlife.
- Carry a serviceable first aid kit.
- Pack enough food and water.

Barbecuing

- Keep flammables away from the grill.
- Always monitor the grill.
- Check for gas leaks.
- Ensure you have a serviceable fire extinguisher on hand.
- Plan for emergencies.

Fireworks

- Designate a safe perimeter.
- Keep a bucket of water or a fire extinguisher on hand.
- Employ adult supervision at all times.
- Don't pick up an unexploded firework.
- Follow local laws and guidance.

Beach Safety

- Know and understand the dangers of water (riptides and currents).
- Protect yourself from overexposure to the sun by using sunscreen.
- Ensure someone is CPR-trained.
- Know how to swim.
- Understand and obey warning flags.

Boating

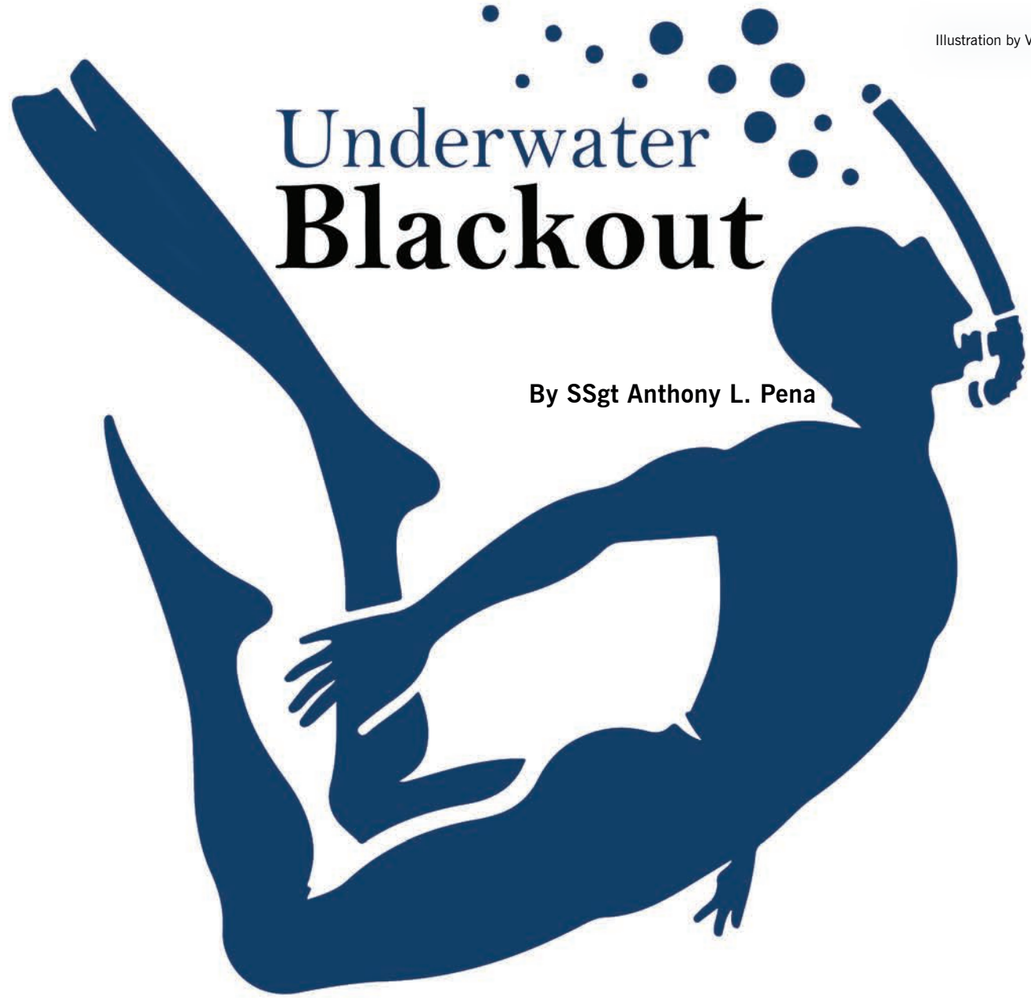
- Every operator must be properly licensed.
- Leave a copy of your boating plans behind with a family member or friend.
- Check the weather forecast.
- Ensure you have the appropriate number of approved life vests.
- Keep a serviceable first-aid kit on the boat.
- Ensure your cell phone is operational and properly charged.
- Ensure you have drinking water and food onboard.
- Protect yourself from overexposure to the sun with sunscreen.

Photo by cecilebjn/shutterstock.com

Illustration by Vecteezy.com

Underwater Blackout

By SSgt Anthony L. Pena



In the summer of 2021, I began my journey of learning how to spearfish. Spearfishing is an interactive sport, job, and lifestyle. It's performed by diving underwater with a pole spear, spear gun, or a Hawaiian sling attached to the sharp point at the end of a 3- to 10-ft pole.

The average person can hold their breath anywhere from 30 to 90 seconds. When swimming, the time is even shorter because exertion depletes the oxygen in the blood. I worked diligently as I trained, slowly increasing my skill and knowledge of the sport over the course of a year. I developed confidence in the water, diving deeper and holding my breath longer over time. By the following summer, I found I could perform dives slightly longer than average, still searching for my first big catch.

Equipped with a 7-ft spear and a dream, I swam out into a cove just off the coast of Okinawa, Japan. One year of training is a relatively short time compared to the years of experience passed down through generations in tribes or among professionals at the peaks of their careers. Their training allows them to reach depths of up to hundreds of meters while holding their breath for 10 minutes or more. In comparison, mine was a 20-meter dive on a sunny afternoon, with calm, warm waves, and a partner watching me. I took a deep breath and plunged into the deep water.

Spear in hand and clock ticking, I took up a position on the edge of a reef leading to a cliffside, waiting for the perfect fish. Leaning on my training, I relaxed my heart rate, equalizing on the way down.

Equalizing is the act of ensuring that your ears, sinuses, and mask are equalized to the water pressure at your depth, and is performed by pinching the nose and swallowing or pinching, blowing, and swallowing. It is a similar sensation to going up a mountain or being in an aircraft. It's necessary, but every attempt to equalize properly results in the loss of precious oxygen and time.

Waiting at the edge of the cliff, I came across one of the largest, most vibrant rainbow-colored parrot fish I ever had seen. Filling my goggles and moving towards my potential dinner, I prepared for the shot…and missed. The fish was unaware of the near-miss, and continued swimming. Being so close to my goal, I cocked my spear and went after it. I swam deeper and stayed down longer than I ever had.

The chase continued, and the fish slid into a small crevice, just in sight. I took my second shot, but I couldn't tell if I had hit my mark. Everything looked different, as though I were looking down a long, dark tunnel. As I looked up, the small glimmer of light from above appeared to be far away.

Professional divers spend their whole careers learning to lower their heart rates and ignore the natural urge to breathe (related to the Hering-Breuer reflex). When a moment of blacking out occurs, it doesn't feel like a desperate struggle, but rather a gentle release with a relaxed heartbeat. This is known as an underwater (or shallow water) blackout.

> Also called freediving blackout, breath-hold blackout, or apnea blackout, underwater blackout is a class of hypoxic blackout—a loss of consciousness caused by cerebral hypoxia towards the end of a breath-hold dive. It is brought about by a lack of carbon dioxide in the blood, which prevents the brain from sensing the need for oxygen. Blackout occurs because the swimmer does not necessarily experience an urgent need to breathe. It often is provoked by hyperventilating just before a dive. Victims are often established practitioners of breath-hold diving, are fit, strong swimmers, and have not experienced problems before.*

Divers and swimmers who black out (or grey out) during a dive usually will drown unless rescued and resuscitated within a short time. Freediving blackout has a high fatality rate, and mostly involves men under the age of 40, but is generally avoidable. It can occur on any dive profile: at constant depth, on an ascent from depth, or at the surface following ascent from depth. It may be described by a number of terms depending on the dive profile and depth at which consciousness is lost.

In my case, my partner, watching from above, saw my not-so-gentle struggle. He pulled me up by the tethered line to which I was attached and hauled me out of the water to safety. I surfaced after roughly 3 minutes underwater, my longest and most grueling dive yet.

I learned a great deal while trying for my first big catch. The scales of risk versus reward can shift quickly and drastically, even during the kind of dive taken many times before. When opportunities present themselves, it is vital to be able to manage risk when making choices.

We in the military are expected to perform our jobs professionally, and to manage risk effectively while working in dangerous situations. Instead of becoming desensitized or complacent, we all should work to maintain situational awareness, and thus avoid gently blacking out—in all our endeavors.

* Additional content provided by Dr. Bill Crosland, pulmonologist – U.S. Army (retired)

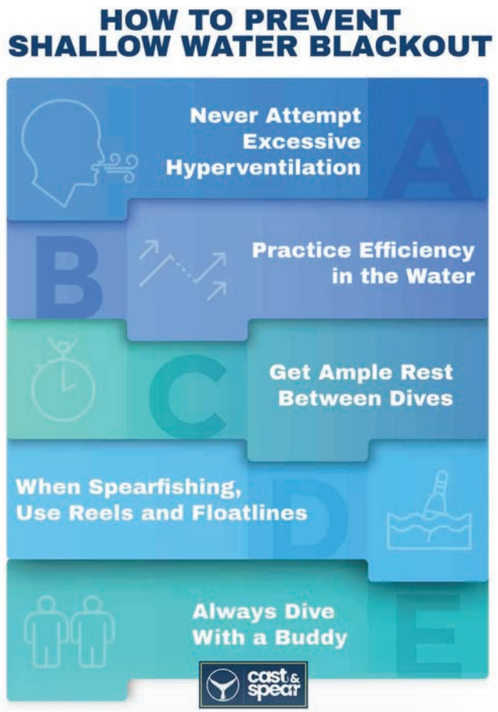


Illustration courtesy of https://castandspear.com/shallow-water-blackout/

Freediving rescue technique and simulation of a diver after blackout
Photo by benoit Daoust/shutterstock.com

Weightlifting Safety: Learning the Hard Way

Photo by A1C Mikaela Smith

By TSgt Eric C. Gale

Weightlifting is a great way to stay in shape, build strength, and improve athletic performance; however, it comes with risks, especially if safety isn't prioritized. Whether you're lifting to build strength, improve sports performance, or train for competition, focusing on safety is essential. Improper form, lifting too much weight too quickly, or ignoring your body's signals can lead to serious injury.

I learned this lesson the hard way while deployed in Kuwait. I was focused on my deadlifts, thinking I was in peak condition. I ignored a few key safety rules and ended up injuring my back. Here's how it happened, and these are the lessons I learned.

During my deployment, I was lifting consistently, and decided to go for a heavy deadlift personal record. After months of training, I felt confident, but during my final set, I felt a sharp pain in my lower back. Instead of dropping the bar, I tried to push through the pain. That decision led to weeks of recovery from an injury that could have been avoided by using better form and exercising caution. Looking back, I realized I had ignored two basic safety rules: lifting more than I was prepared to lift, and not paying enough attention to my form. The injury could have been much worse. It was a clear example of how ego lifting can go wrong.

From that experience, I learned that proper form is crucial. Whether you're a beginner or an experienced lifter, you always should focus on lifting the right amount of weight with perfect form. Lifting too much too quickly increases the risk of injury, especially when combined with poor form. Since my injury, I always warm up with light weights and focus on form before adding more resistance.

A qualified coach can help you improve technique and ensure you're lifting safely. They provide valuable guidance, motivation, and support. Avoid advice from unqualified sources, like untrained friends or online personalities. While online resources can help, personal coaching is far more effective.

Weightlifting can be very rewarding when done safely. Learn from my mistake in Kuwait: Focus on proper form, warm up and cool down, progress gradually, and listen to your body. With these steps, you can enjoy the benefits of weightlifting while minimizing the risk of injury. Lift smart, and stay safe!

When designing a weightlifting program:

- Make sure it aligns with your goals, fitness level, and recovery needs.
- Focus on a mix of exercises targeting major muscle groups and increasing weight gradually as your body adapts.
- Allow adequate rest between workouts.
- Build a foundation with lighter weights before progressing.
- Don't underestimate the importance of a warm-up and cool-down routine. A proper warm-up prepares your muscles for the workout ahead, while cooling down aids recovery and reduces the risk of injury.
- Don't ignore persistent aches or pains. Early detection of injuries can prevent long-term damage. Seek medical attention if you notice joint pain, lingering soreness, back or neck pain, or signs of a hernia.

Decision Making 101

By Mr. Rodney "Robbie" Robinson

I just wanted to take the time to share a recent event in my life that wasn't fully thought out. During the summer of 2024, I volunteered to tear down and replace the back portion of a fence for my sister-in-law. My wife and brother-in-law helped. The job was not very big, and would take two days because I needed to set two posts in concrete for the gate. It was around the Fourth of July, during the hottest part of the summer.

We had planned to work in the morning so as to keep the afternoons free to do things with the family. The weather during this period was extremely hot and humid, but I said to myself: "It's only a few hours, so we should be good." On Day One, the temperature was already close to 90 degrees when we started working at about 8:00 a.m. We all made sure we had plenty of water to drink, but I was still overheating. We tore down about 25 feet of fence, including the gate, and then reset the 4 x 4 posts for the new gate. Once we got those in place and braced them, we poured the cement around them and called it a day. It took only 3 hours, but I was totally exhausted. Once we were done, we headed to my in-law's house. I took a cold shower, rested, and prepared for the next day.

The goal on Day Two was to put up the stringers, pickets, and gate, and finish the job. This was going to take a little longer than the first day, but we were prepared…or so we thought. Once again, the day was extremely hot and humid, and it hit me quickly. Just like the day before, we started at 8:00 a.m., and I felt the heat and humidity immediately. After about 90 minutes of putting up the stringers, I couldn't go any further. I started feeling lightheaded and grew concerned. You see, I had experienced passing out in extreme heat before. I passed out at a college football game, and therefore I knew some of the signs.

The rest of the crew was good to go, but they all knew they needed to pay close attention to each other. After I showed them what needed to be done, I headed inside my sister-in-law's house to cool down. I walked out to check on them about every 30 minutes, but I could not stay out in that heat. My wife and brother-in-law were able to finish the stringers and put up the pickets before lunchtime.

We took about an hour break to eat lunch and cool down. At the end of lunch, I was ready to go back out and help install the gate, which is not an easy task. We put up most of the gate before the heat hit me once again. My wife and brother-in-law finished the gate with no difficulty, and, believe it or not, the fence is still standing.

As I reflect on this project, I know I could have done things differently. I didn't need to work during the hottest days or accomplish the work in the morning as the heat built up. I could have rescheduled the job for another week or done it in the evening. I know we all have reasons we do certain things the way we do them, but we need to think of the consequences when we make those decisions.

Looking back, I realize the job was not worth taking the chance of having one of us pass out due to the extreme heat. I was leading this project, and I should have made the decision to reschedule. I was lucky on this one, but I don't want to make the same mistake again. I shouldn't make decisions based on luck—nor should you! STAY SAFE!

Assess the RISK!

- **Listen to your body…You are not Superman!**
- **Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate.**
- **Take rest breaks, in a cool place.**
- **Plan ahead: Should we be working on the hottest day of the summer?**

Illustration composited using photos by SSgt Jorrie Hart and by BLACKWHITEPAILYN/shutterstock.com

Facing Skin Cancer: Scars Tell Stories

By TSgt Katelynn M. Baker

The Air Force trains us to face challenges head-on; nevertheless, some battles take us by surprise. For me, the enemy wasn't external. It was a small, stubborn bump in the middle of my forehead. It turned out to be skin cancer. Here's my story of finding it, treating it, and learning to live with the experience.

The Moment I Knew Something Was Wrong
It started as a tiny bump. I figured it was just a pimple, or maybe an ingrown hair; however, it didn't go away. Months passed, and it just sat there: a little red, slightly shiny, but nothing dramatic. During a routine physical, I casually mentioned it to the doctor. After a quick look, they referred me to dermatology for a biopsy. A few days later, I got the call: Basal Cell Carcinoma. Skin cancer. Hearing the word cancer hit me like a ton of bricks. I didn't even know skin cancer could look like this, so small and non-threatening. I certainly didn't think it could happen to me.

Processing the Diagnosis
At first, I felt embarrassed. I thought I should have caught this sooner. Then the fear crept in. What's next? Will it spread? Will it leave a permanent scar? After talking with my doctor, I learned that Basal Cell Carcinoma is the least aggressive type of skin cancer. It rarely spreads and is highly treatable if caught early. That helped ease some of my anxiety, but it didn't take it all away. Support from my leadership and coworkers was a huge relief. They reminded me to focus on getting healthy. Still, I had to face the reality. Surgery was next, and it was happening right in the middle of my face.

The Surgery: Mohs Procedure
The removal process was called Mohs surgery. It's a step-by-step procedure during which the surgeon removes one thin layer of skin at a time, checking it under a microscope for cancer cells. The procedure continues until the margins are clear. The surgery itself wasn't painful because the area was numbed with a local anesthetic. As simple as the procedure was, seeing the size of the incision afterward was a tough surprise. They had removed more skin than I had expected, and the stitches in the middle of my forehead were impossible to hide. I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel self-conscious. Every time I looked in the mirror, the scar reminded me of what I had been through. It also reminded me of something more important. The cancer had been caught early, and I was lucky.

Courtesy Photo, Murtha Cancer Center at Walter Reed

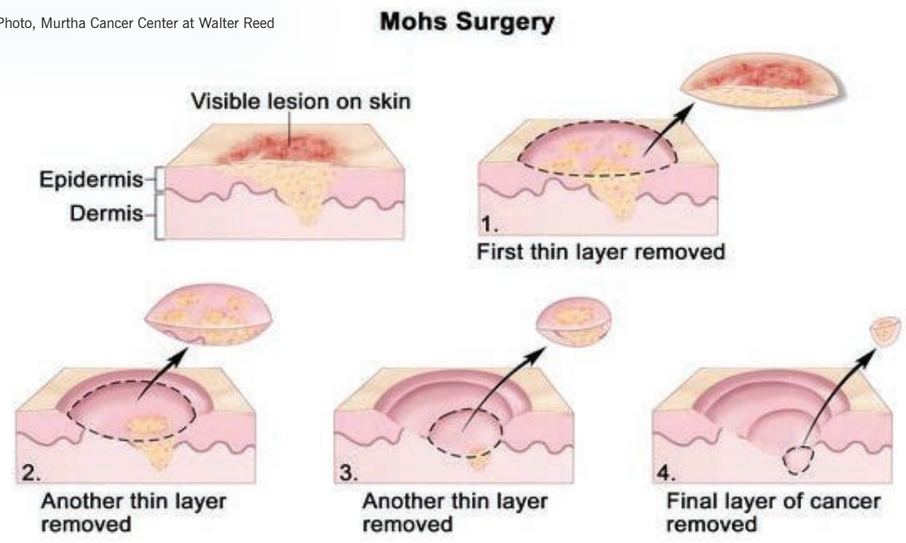


Photo by Stokkete/shutterstock.com

Life After Skin Cancer
The recovery process wasn't just physical; it was mental and emotional, too. Here's what I learned:

1. Sun Protection Is Non-Negotiable - I never thought much about sunscreen, but things have changed. Now that I have had skin cancer, I am more susceptible to its recurring as I age. Whether I'm on the flightline, hiking, or just running errands, I wear sunscreen every day now. I also keep a hat handy.
2. Get Regular Checkups - Catching the cancer early made all the difference. I now make it a priority to see a dermatologist every year. Skin checks are quick and potentially lifesaving.
3. Scars Tell Stories - At first, I hated my scar, even though it's barely noticeable. I believed everyone could see it, and I worried it made me look weak. Over time, I realized it's just a part of my story. It's a reminder that I acted when it mattered.
4. Share What You Learn - Since my diagnosis, I've made a point of talking about skin cancer with my fellow Airmen. It's easy to forget about things like sunscreen when we're focused on the mission, but taking those small steps can make a huge difference.

U.S. Air Force Maj. Shannon Buck, dermatologist, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, performs a surgical procedure. Buck is reintroducing Mohs surgery services to LRMC after decades of non availability. Mohs surgery is considered the most effective technique for treating many basal cell carcinomas (BCCs).
Photo by Marcy Sanchez

A Word to My Fellow Airmen
Skin cancer can strike anyone. When we think of sun exposure, we often think of dehydration; however, our skin is affected, as well. If you notice something on your skin that doesn't look right—a bump, a mole, or a spot that changes color or won't heal—don't ignore it. Get it checked out.

This experience taught me the importance of paying attention to my own health. I'm still proud to wear the uniform, and now I also wear my scar with pride. It's proof that I faced this challenge and came out stronger. Take care of yourselves, wear your sunscreen, and take care of the skin you're in. The mission is important, and so are you.

HIGHWAY Hypnosis

By SSgt David R. Martin

Photo of wrecked car by SSgt Martin

Distracted driving can be caused by one of a number of things, such as using a cell phone, eating, driving, or even highway hypnosis. We've all been there. We all have taken our normal commute to or from work, but had little remembrance of the drive afterward. During these times, we fall into a state during which our subconscious takes over and we lose awareness of our surroundings. This typically occurs during trips we make every day, such as to and from work, but it's also possible on long highway drives. One stream of consciousness focuses on driving while another stream deals with other matters. If you have had a long day at work, received exciting news, or are just trying to get out of the house, then your mind probably is more focused on these things than it is on the road.

After a particularly long day at work, I decided to drive to a restaurant for a nice dessert. I had other things on my mind, and I wasn't aware of much of the trip…until I pulled in front of oncoming traffic. At that moment, the road had my undivided attention, but it was too late. I was at a 4-way intersection waiting to make a left turn. I had been at that intersection and in that turn lane hundreds of times. In my mind, I knew the pattern of the traffic lights and knew I was going to get a green arrow. After proceeding through the intersection, I was hit head on by oncoming traffic. I had time to come to a complete stop prior to the collision, but the other driver was approaching the intersection and already moving prior to the light turning green.

Certain I wasn't in the wrong, I was eager to check my dash cam. After pulling out of the way of traffic, I inserted the SD Card into a reader connected to my phone. I was wrong. There was no turn arrow. The oncoming vehicle had been approaching the red light and was moving at around 15 mph, anticipating the light would turn green. The other driver got the green signal, and therefore had the right of way. We both had anticipated the light change, but I was wrong and was at fault.

I still think back to that night, and what I should have done differently. It's easy to tell myself to give the road my undivided attention, but there is more to it than that. Routines and emotions are a part of everyday life, and our minds will always be susceptible to distractions, whether they are physical or emotional. While driving around might be a popular way of clearing one's head, doing so sets the stage for disaster. Now, I give mental prompts to myself in order to pay attention to the road, and I often take alternate routes to keep my mind alert by driving through a different area with different traffic patterns. Driving a vehicle that weighs thousands of pounds is a major responsibility, and we must give the road the respect it deserves.

Photo by Mica Mitchell

Tornado Safety Action Guide

Don't be caught off guard by the sudden onset of a tornado. Keep your family safe by following a few simple steps that could be the difference between inconvenience and disaster.

BEFORE

Build an emergency kit that contains some essential items like drinking water, non-perishable food, a battery-operated or hand crank radio, and a flashlight. More details can be found at http://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit.

Make a family communications plan to make sure that you and your loved ones are able to stay connected in the event that you're not together when the tornado hits. A plan template can be found at http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan.

Make sure to be aware of changing weather conditions. Look for dark, often greenish skies, and any rotating clouds. Be sure to tune in to your radio or TV for the latest information if you notice any of those things.

DURING

Seek shelter immediately. Go to a safe room, cellar, or basement if you have one. If you don't have a basement, go to an interior room on the lowest level possible. Be sure to keep clear of windows, doors, and exterior walls.

If you're in a mobile home or trailer, get out as soon as you can and go to the lowest level of a sturdy building or storm shelter. If you're out in the open, get in your vehicle and put on your seatbelt. Try to drive to the nearest sturdy shelter, and watch out for flying debris.

AFTER

Be careful walking around debris. 50% of all tornado-related injuries occur after the tornado is over.

If your home's been damaged, turn off the electricity and shut off the gas and propane to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions.

Keep listening to your radio or TV to stay up to date on the latest emergency information.

TORNADO WATCH

Be Ready

to move to a safe place. Conditions are favorable for tornadoes to occur.

VS.

TORNADO WARNING

Take Action!

Get to a safe place now! A tornado has been spotted or indicated on weather radar.

Source: http://www.ready.gov/tornadoes

U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jordan Jennings

Fireworks Safety Tips

- Never allow children to play with or ignite fireworks.
- Never try to re-light or pick up fireworks that have not ignited fully.
- Keep a bucket of water or a garden hose handy in case of fire or other mishap
- Make sure fireworks are legal in your area before buying or using them.
- Light fireworks one at a time, then move back quickly.