

The Air Force Journal of Occupational, Recreational, and Driving Safety

# ROAD & REC

Volume 14, Number 3

Summer 2002

## **A July Fourth Holiday Tragedy — Joelle's Story**

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# The ABCs of ATVs



Photo by TSgt Mike Featherston

Courtesy of **Safety Times**

The airman raced his ATV over the dry riverbed at between 35 and 40 mph, enjoying himself until he suddenly struck an unseen rock. This close encounter of the "worst kind" sent him flying through the air where he came to rest 60 feet down the riverbed. Although he'd been wearing all of the required personal protective equipment, he still got some nasty injuries. A broken collarbone and right ankle landed him a day in the hospital and five more on quarters. This was probably NOT what he had in mind when he set out on his ATV that morning. Still, he'd set himself up for an accident by going faster than he should have, especially since he was unaware of all of the potential obstacles.

Today more than seven million people ride ATVs for work and pleasure in America. To keep them helpful and not harmful, remember:

- Before taking your first turn with an ATV, enroll in a sanctioned rider training course. Call 1-800-887-2887 for details.

- Read and follow the owner's manual and warning labels.

- Practice driving your ATV in a safe area before driving on

more difficult terrain.

- ATVs are intended for off-road use only. Never operate one on public roads or paved surfaces.

- Dress appropriately. Always wear:

- A motorcycle helmet approved by the Department of Transportation. **This is your most important piece of protective gear.**

- Goggles or face shield.

- Boots. Over-the-calf style with low heels to keep your feet from slipping off the footrests.

- Off-road style gloves padded over the knuckles.

- Long pants.

- A long-sleeved shirt or jacket.

- Do not carry passengers.

- Never ride when tired, or under the influence of alcohol or drugs, prescription or otherwise.

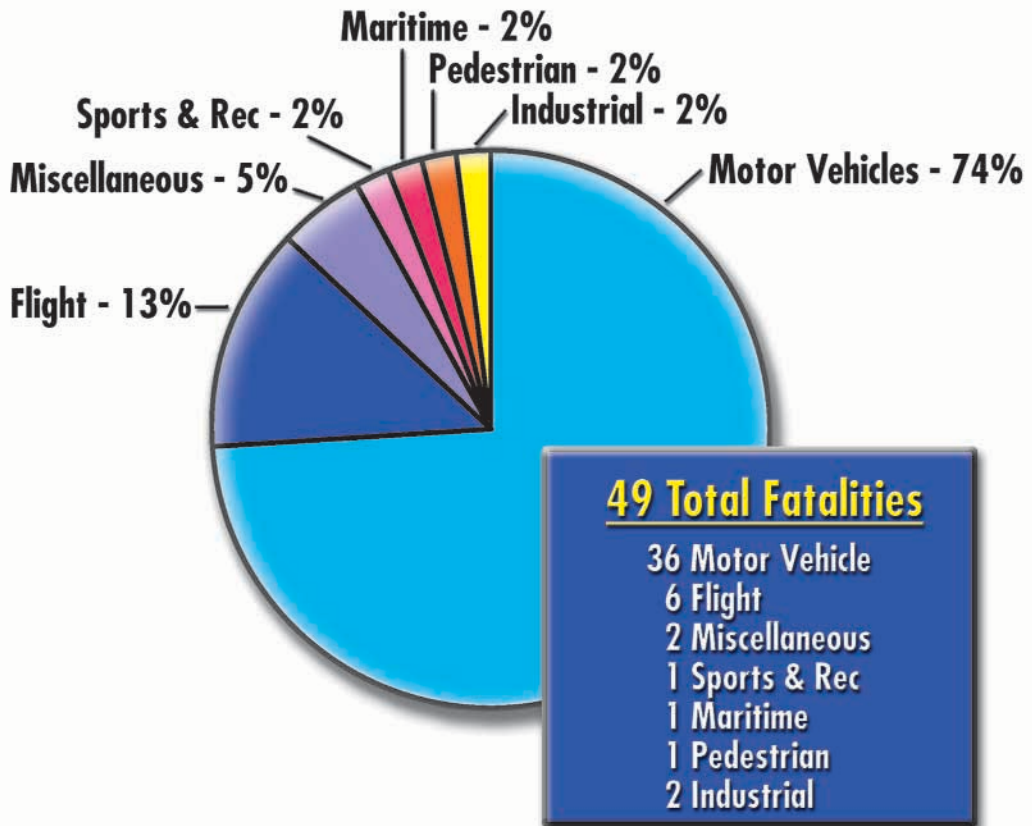
- Ride on existing trails when possible.

- Do not operate the ATV at excessive speeds.

- Some hills are too steep to climb. If it looks too steep, it probably is.

- Ride only where you have permission to ride. ■

# Safety and the 101 Critical Days of Summer FY02 USAF On & Off-Duty Fatalities



**MSGT CURT GONTER**  
HQ AFSC/SEGO

**A**s we enter the longer daylight hours and warmer weather of summer, our activities shift to the outdoors, vacation travel and visiting friends. The summer months are, historically, a period when we do more and are at greater risk. Each year, between Memorial Day and Labor Day, an average of 19 Air Force members lose their lives. These deaths not only affect the Air Force mission, they also cause great suffering to the victim's families.

The Air Force has established a summer season campaign called the "101

Critical Days of Summer" to promote safety and risk management during summer-related activities. This campaign highlights the fact that we need to aggressively work to curb the increase in accidents associated with better weather and longer days.

Vehicle accidents represent the biggest threat to airmen's lives during the "101 Critical Days of Summer." On average, 17 airmen die in traffic accidents. In fact, last summer the Air Force suffered 19 fatalities, 16 of which were related to off-duty driving.

Motorcycle riding is popular during summer and is also an important off-duty safety concern. As the figures below show, there has been a dramatic increase in motorcycle accidents involving airmen during recent years.



- 56 percent increase since 1997.
- 13 percent increase between 2000 and 2001.

• Nine fatalities have occurred so far this year, compared to three this time last year.

Unfortunately, 49 airmen have lost their lives in mishaps, with vehicle accidents accounting for 36 of those fatalities. The pie chart accompanying this article shows the percentage of on- and off-duty accidents according to the type of activity. Vehicle accidents continue to lead all other mishap causes, accounting for 74 percent of all fatalities.

- Of the 36 fatalities, over half (57 percent) were the result of the operator driving aggressively.

- Seven of the 36 crashes (20 percent) involved alcohol.

- All of the crashes were the result of human factors such as:

- Driving after drinking alcohol
- Driving tired
- Attempting to beat a red light
- Forgetting or deciding not to wear a seatbelt
- Thinking you can operate a motorcycle without adequate training
- Operating a motorcycle without protective equipment

Again, these unnecessary deaths severely affect families and the Air Force mission and each of us must do our part to reverse this unfortunate trend.

The greatest challenge is to change our behavior. The key to reducing mishaps in the Air Force is using sound risk management principles. To effectively reduce mishaps, we must evaluate risks and make appropriate risk control decisions. Our decisions about accepting risks may

very well determine not only our fate but the fate(s) of our loved ones as we're traveling on the highway. The following are some factors we need to consider when planning our summer activities:

- Anticipate trouble.
- While driving, scan your car's path to assess hazards.
- Don't tailgate — keep at least a two-second-safety cushion between your car and the one in front of you.
- Always be alert for the unexpected.
- Remain alert at the wheel.
- Don't speed in an effort to arrive earlier.
- Focus on your driving so you'll have plenty of time to make decisions.
- Look down the road far enough to get the big picture of what's ahead.
- Let your car protect you. Use your seat belt each time you get into an automobile.

The Bottom Line — Anticipate the unexpected and be ready to react.

We must constantly help keep each other safe by using and promoting risk management on and off duty. We need to emphasize the risks of some of our more dangerous summer activities and make smart, informed decisions to reduce those risks. Those who are older and more experienced need to help younger airmen recognize the dangers they may face while on leave or traveling long distances. We also need to stress the danger of mixing alcohol with any activity — especially driving.

Finally, please watch out for yourself and each other. Seize the opportunity and actively take steps to help protect other airmen from harm. In doing so, we can all enjoy a safe summer with our families and friends. ■

# Short Circuits



## Auto Recalls

**The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has recently announced the following vehicle recalls.**

**2002 BMW 325i, 330i, 525i, 530i. Number involved — 4,672. Defect:** On these passenger vehicles, the front strut mount thrust bearing was not properly positioned and secured. If the suspension is fully unloaded, the front strut could separate from the upper mount. This could affect vehicle handling and control, increasing the risk of a crash. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V057)

**2002 Jeep Grand Cherokee. Number involved — 71,677. Defect:** Those sport utility vehicles equipped with a fuel tank brush guard could fail to comply with the requirements of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 301, "Fuel System Integrity." The onboard vapor recovery system control valve can become detached during a crash, allowing fuel leakage. Fuel leakage in the presence of an ignition source can result in a fire. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V032, DaimlerChrysler Recall No. A10)

**1990-1995 DaimlerChrysler Jeep Wrangler. Number involved — 316,148. Defect:** On those sport utility vehicles with manual transmissions, the parking brake can self-release without warning, allowing the vehicle to roll away and increasing the risk of a crash. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V041, DaimlerChrysler Recall No. B03)

**2001 Daimler/Chrysler Dodge Ram. Number involved — 268,740. Defect:** On certain pickup trucks, the alternator wire connection to the power distribution center can loosen, resulting in a vehicle fire. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V042, DaimlerChrysler Recall No. B04)

**2002 Ford Ranger. Number involved — 1,096. Defect:** In certain pickup trucks equipped with the FX4 package, the rear axle differential case could fracture under a high torque event, such as

when drivers accelerate rapidly from a stop or when a spinning tire suddenly gains traction. Differential fractures could potentially result in a wheel lock-up and loss of vehicle control. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V035, Ford Recall No.02S32)

**2002 General Motors Corporation Saturn S Series. Number involved — 1,509. Defect:** Some passenger vehicles equipped with automatic transaxles were assembled with an inadequate weld at the brake pedal pad to pedal actuator arm assembly. During braking, the brake pedal pad could separate from the brake pedal actuator arm. If this were to occur, the driver's foot could become dislodged from the pedal, resulting in a loss of brake system application and a vehicle crash could occur. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V060, GM Recall No. 02007, Saturn Recall No. 02C06)

**2002 General Motors Corporation Saturn S Series. Number involved — 790. Defect:** Certain sedans fail to comply with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards No. 210, "Seat Belt Assembly Anchorages," and No. 214, "Side Impact Protection." These vehicles were manufactured with welds between the door striker and the belt-line that do not meet Saturn specifications. If the seat belt anchorage on the pillar failed during a crash, the driver could be injured more seriously. In a side impact, occupants could also be injured more seriously because of greater intrusion, or the reduced performance of the optional side curtain air bag. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V020, GM Recall No. 02002, Saturn Recall No. 02C05)

**2001-2002 Harley Davidson Motorcycle Company Shrine, FLHTCU-1 Shrine, FLHTP-1, FLHPE-1, FLHP-1, FLHTCU-1, FLHTC-1, FLHTC, FLHT, FLHR-1, FLHR. Number involved — 26,949. Defect:** On certain motorcycles, the clips that retain the wiring for the front fender tip light can become detached from the fender, causing the wires to fray and short. This could cause the lighting system fuse to blow, leaving the vehicle without an operational front fender tip light, headlight, taillight, run-

ning lights, and passing lamps (if equipped). (NHTSA Recall No. 02V002, Harley Davidson Recall No. 0105)

**2003 Hyundai Tiburon. Number involved — 1,174. Defect:** On certain passenger vehicles, the lower left instrument panel bracket was not installed. If this bracket has not been installed, there may be an increased likelihood of injury, or increased severity of injury, in a frontal crash. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V044, Hyundai Recall No. 050)

**1999-2002 Land Rover Discovery II. Number involved — 64,925. Defect:** On certain sport utility vehicles, the accelerator cable could have become kinked during vehicle assembly, resulting in chaffing of the cable. Continued chaffing could lead to breakage of the interior cable stands, which could result in the throttle being stuck in the open position and increase the risk of a crash. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V028, Land Rover Recall No. D274).

**2002 Nissan Maxima, Infiniti I35. Number involved — 39,000. Defect:** On certain passenger vehicles equipped with an electronic throttle control system, the stopper for the accelerator pedal will prevent excessive movement of the accelerator position sensor. If the driver applies excessive force to the accelerator pedal while, at the same time, pushing it to the right, the pedal can "over travel" due to the design of the pedal stopper. This will cause the engine malfunction indicator lamp to come on and the engine speed to be severely limited. If this occurs unexpectedly, it could lead to a crash. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V043)

**1999 Pontiac Montana. Number involved — 814. Defect:** On certain of these minivans the driver's air bag inflator modules could produce excessive internal pressure. In the event of a crash that would trigger a driver's air bag deployment, the increased internal pressure could cause the inflator module to explode. The resulting metal and plastic debris could cause severe injuries to vehicle occupants. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V027, GM Recall No. 01052)

**2002 Saab 9-5. Number involved — 2,601. Defect:** On certain passenger vehicles, the steering knuckle castings may have been contaminated during the casting process. These knuckles can break, resulting in the loss of steering control. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V0006, Saab Recall No. 15007)

**1996-1998 Toyota 4Runner. Number involved — 273,743. Defect:** A combination of heavy loading (simultaneous loading to the rear gross axle weight rating and gross vehicle weight rating) and

severe steering maneuvers could cause the two-wheel-drive 4Runner to lose directional stability. Although the four-wheel-drive 4Runners do not exhibit this handling condition, Toyota is recalling these vehicles to avoid any public confusion as to which vehicles should receive the replacement parts. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V021)

**1998-2000 Volkswagen Passat, 1997-1999 Volkswagen Jetta. Number involved — 311,047. Defect:** On these passenger vehicles, the fuel tank filler neck can suffer abrasion damage if the rear tire goes flat and the vehicle is driven until the tire disintegrates. As a result, fuel leakage could occur, increasing the risk of a fire. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V026)

**2001-2002 Volkswagen New Beetle, Jetta, Golf. Number involved — 55,000. Defect:** On these passenger vehicles, short circuits within the Electronic Control Unit of the anti-lock braking system (ABS) can result in a fire. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V031, Volkswagen Recall No. WJ)

*Owners who do not receive a free remedy for these recall defects within a reasonable amount of time should call the following numbers: BMW, 1-800-331-1117; DaimlerChrysler, 1-800-853-1403; Ford, 1-866-435-7332; General Motors (Saturn), 1-800-553-6000; Harley Davidson, 1-414-342-4680; Hyundai, 1-800-633-5151; Land Rover, 1-301-731-9040; Nissan, 1-800-647-7261; Infiniti, 1-800-662-6200; Pontiac, 1-800-762-2737; Saab, 1-800-955-9007; Toyota, 1-800-331-4331; Volkswagen, 1-800-822-8987.*

## Recreational Vehicles (Trailers)

**2001 Starcraft 1702, 2106, 2408, 2601; 2001-2002 Starcraft Gemini, Nova, Orion, 2101, 2105, 2107, 1706; 2002 Starcraft Apollo, Aurora, Comet, 1404, 1701L, 2104 Shuttle, 2106, 2106L, 2108, 2109, 2406, 2407, 2408, 2409, 2410L. Number involved — 3,600. Defect:** On certain camping trailers equipped with lift systems provided by Goshen Stamping Company and winches supplied by the Dutton-Lainson Company, the winches included in the roof lifter systems have an inadequate weld to the gear, making it possible that a raised roof could descend rapidly. This could result in property damage or serious personal injury. **Remedy:** Dealers will inspect the lifter system and replace any defective winch. The manufacturer reported that owner notification would begin during April 2002. Owners who do not receive the free remedy within a reasonable time should contact Starcraft at 1-219-593-2550. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V034) ■

# Protect Your Eyes

## From Fireworks

Reprinted Courtesy, *Countermeasure*

**H**ow hazardous are fireworks? The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that more than 11,000 people were treated for fireworks-related injuries in 2000. According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, fireworks cause over 2,000 eye injuries each year. The average age of those injured was 13 years old.

What are the most dangerous fireworks? It isn't the big items that cause the most injuries to the eye. The firework that produces the most frequent eye injuries is the bottle rocket. Many of these injuries result in permanent vision loss or even loss of an eye. Sparklers are second on the eye injury list. Sparklers account for three-quarters of all fireworks injuries to children under age 5. The firecracker ranks high even though it is banned in most states. Severe injury can result from use of these devices.

How can you protect your family from a fireworks-related eye injury? The best way to view fireworks is by watching displays produced by professionals from a safe distance. If you decide to use fireworks personally or allow your family to use them, here are some suggestions that will

help prevent injury:

- Use only fireworks that are legal in your community.
- Both the people lighting fireworks and those watching should wear safety glasses with side shields, or goggles. Inexpensive (\$3 - \$10) industrial safety eyewear meeting national safety standards are available at most lumber or hardware stores. You can also use this safety eyewear the rest of the year when involved in other eye-hazardous activities.
- Do not allow young children to handle or light fireworks.
- Never put fireworks in containers. An explosion may propel debris into the eyes or other body areas.
- Make sure a bucket of water or hose is available to douse fireworks that do not ignite properly or to stop fires started by the fireworks.

What should you do if an eye injury occurs? Fireworks explosions may cause damage to the inside of the eye even though damage to the outside of the eye does not appear to be too severe. Should an eye injury occur, do not put any pressure on the eye because the eye may be punctured. Protect the injured eye from pressure and call an ambulance or take the injured individual to an eye care provider or emergency room immediately. ■



# Bad Tires, Bad Roads and Bad Judgment

**COLONEL MARK ROLAND**  
Editor-in-Chief

I do a lot of driving on Forest Service roads helping transport my Boy Scout Troop to good camping locations. The all-weather tires on my two-wheel-drive Chevrolet Suburban had 48,000 miles on them. I'd been debating when to replace the tires, but had hoped to wait another 5,000 miles to stretch my dollars.

I'd just driven about 50 miles on dirt and gravel in an old mining area in south-central New Mexico. It was a Sunday afternoon and we'd told the parents we'd be back home at 3:30 p.m., but we were late. I was driving in excess of 50 mph, exercising classic "get-home-it-is." Besides, the dust cloud was really cool — or at least the boys thought so since they couldn't see the four vehicles behind us.

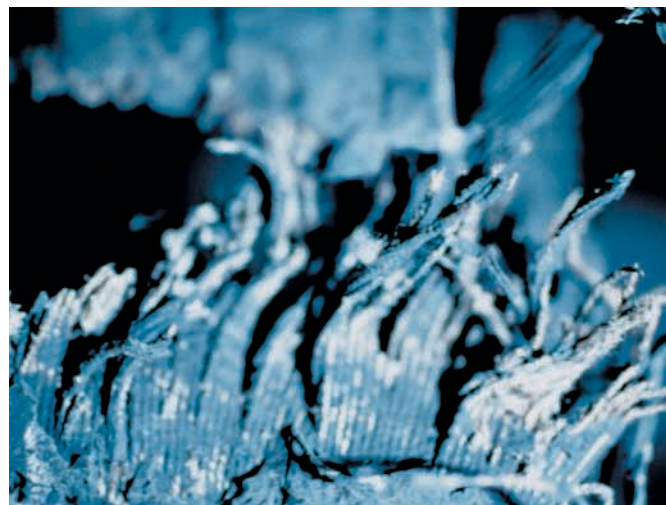
As we crossed the last cattle guard and reached the asphalt, it was time to accelerate, but something didn't feel right. "OK," I thought, "Let's slow down this beast." The next thing I knew, there was a "pop," a "bang," some white smoke, and chunks of rubber thumping against the inside of the wheel well. Without touching the brakes, I slowed down to about 25 mph and started braking to get off the road. Wow! What a mess! The five Scouts responded with, "Cool!" while the driver was thinking, "I almost screwed this up!"

After changing the tire and getting everyone home safely, I reviewed this experience. Did I apply risk management to this activity? The obvious answer is "NO!" I was concerned about my tires before this trip, but I did not take them into consideration as I was driving.

I had been driving in an abandoned mining area on dirt and gravel roads where large amounts of glass and metal scrap were lying about everywhere. I hadn't inspected my tires for damage during the four oppor-

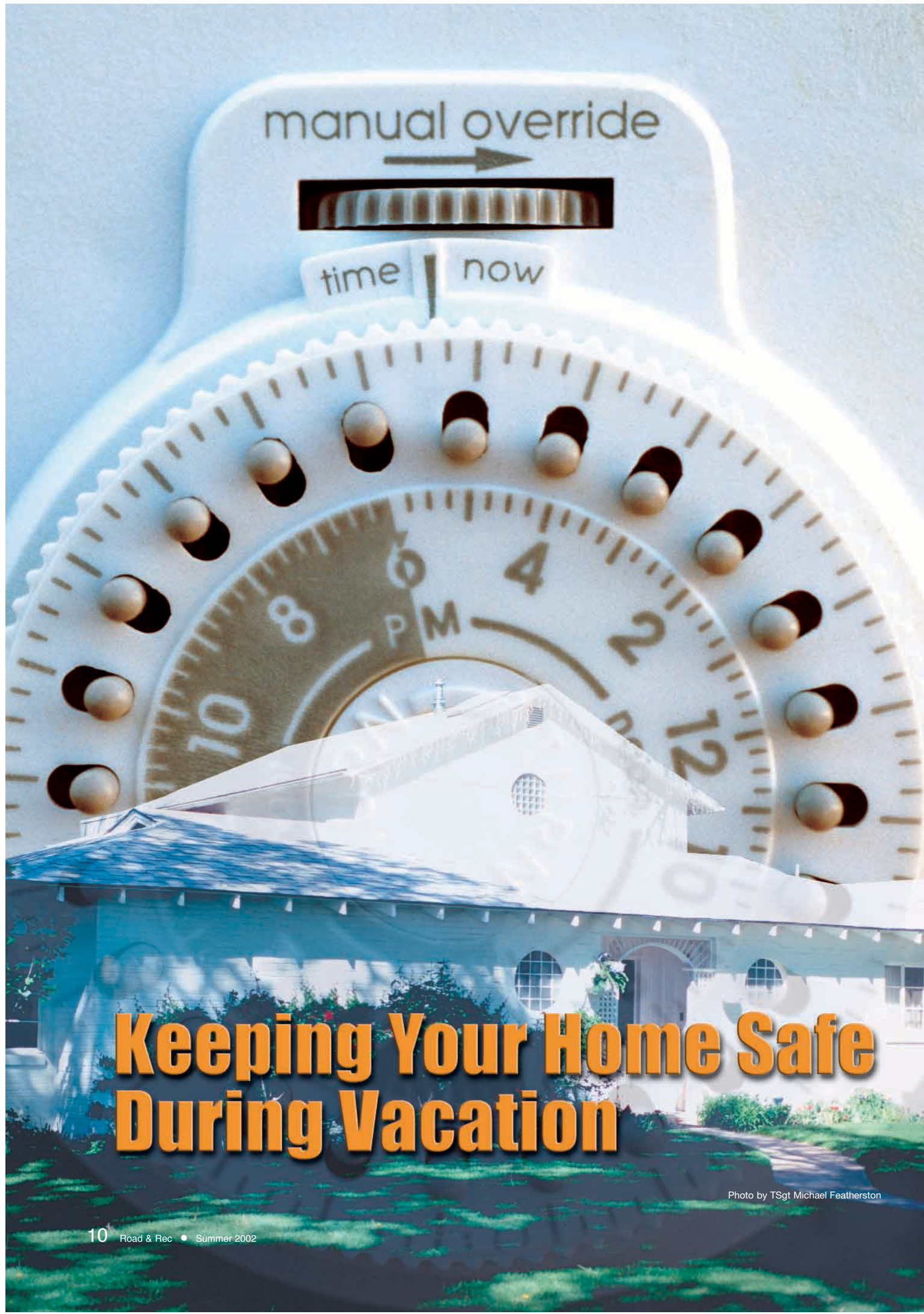
tunities I had prior to beginning the last 25 miles of the drive. I had been driving too fast for the road conditions and, considering everything else, for the tires. The result was a blown tire, but luckily, nothing worse.

I hope others will benefit from my experience. Here are some lessons I have learned: *Always check the condition of your tires, especially after driving off-road. Also, be aware of road conditions and don't drive faster than is safe. And finally, avoid "get-home-it-is."* ■



USAF Photos by TSgt Mike Featherston





manual override



time

now

# Keeping Your Home Safe During Vacation

Photo by TSgt Michael Featherston

**W**hile summer is the most popular time for vacations, it also can provide more opportunities for home break-ins. AAA New Mexico reminds vacationers that taking a few simple precautions can reduce the risk of home burglary.

"Home burglaries are generally high during the peak travel months," said Cher Kuffrey, district sales manager for AAA New Mexico. "These crimes are most likely to occur if the residence appears to be unoccupied and if access seems relatively easy."

AAA offers the following tips to help keep your home safe while you're vacationing:

- Double-check all door and window locks and invest in slide lock protection for sliding-glass doors — a frequent point of entry for burglars. Garage windows and doors should also be secured.

- Consider installing an alarm system that can serve as protection and qualify you for a discount on your homeowner's insurance.

- Temporarily cancel newspaper subscriptions.

- Ask a close neighbor or friend to pick up your daily delivery of mail. If that is not an option, have the U.S. postal service hold your mail.

- Engrave your name on your large valuables. It makes them less attractive to burglars and also assists with quicker identification if they are stolen and recovered.

- Move expensive electronic equipment away from the windows where such equipment would be easily visible.

- Transfer valuables and cash to a safety deposit box.

- Arrange for lawn service if your trip will be longer than one week.

- Consider parking your second vehicle in your driveway while you are away — if it has burglar alarm protection.

- Turn down the volume on your phone and answering machine so they cannot be heard outside. Make sure answering machines or voice mail messages do not say you are on vacation.

- Don't give your house a "closed-down" look by completely shutting drapes and blinds.

- Ask a trusted friend to stop by your home while you are away, or to be a house sitter. Ask them to turn on lights at night, or buy a light timer and set it to come on every evening. Radio timers are also a good idea.

- Never leave spare keys "hidden" under doormats or anywhere outside the house.

- Don't broadcast your trip regardless of how delighted you are about the vacation.

- If you're departing from a local airport, don't expose personal addresses on your luggage tags. Use a business address instead.

- Double check insurance coverage before leaving home to make certain your homeowner's insurance is paid and the policy suits your current needs. Also check your travel insurance. Loss of possessions while traveling is not covered in all policies.

When traveling, safety awareness is also important. Remember that crime can happen anywhere at any time. When you are away from home, take all necessary precautions. ■

Photo by TSgt Michael Featherston

## With Your Help and Contributions — We Won!





# IF DADDY HAD ONLY KNOWN

Reprinted Courtesy, **Countermeasures**  
**ORILLA MARTINEZ**  
Fort Rucker, Ala.

**I**t was 8 p.m. on July 10, 1996. I had just gotten home from a psychology class at Coker College, located at the Fort Jackson, S.C., education center.

What a great day it had been! It was my oldest son's birthday, and I just received an "A" on my test.

I picked up the phone to call my son and wish him a happy birthday. I noticed the light was blinking, so I decided to check my messages first. When the message came on, I heard my mother's crying voice say, "Your daddy's in intensive care and we don't know if he'll live or not, come home." 'Click,' she hung up. No explanation.

At that moment I stood frozen — my brain would not function, my prayers were on frozen lips. A second seemed like an eternity. All I knew was that I had to get home.

I called the hospital in my hometown and asked to speak to any family member. My niece came to the phone. She said my dad had been burned in a gasoline fire that afternoon on the farm. He was currently in intensive care and, if he lived through the night, they would transfer him to the Vanderbilt Burn Center in Nashville, Tenn., the next day.

I called my first sergeant at midnight and informed him of the situation. He told me to get some rest, then go home first thing in the morning and he would fax me my emergency leave papers the next day.

I didn't get much rest that night. The next morning I drove the longest trip of my life, not knowing if my dad would be alive when I got there.

When I arrived at the hospital, my family told me what happened. My dad, who was 73 years old at the time, was planning to burn a wild rosebush that was touching his electric fence. He took gasoline that was stored in a plastic milk jug and poured it on the rosebush and then made a six-foot-long trail of gasoline.

He then set the plastic jug, which had a third of the gasoline left in it, beside him. Gasoline has a flash point of -40 degrees and higher. It was about 92 degrees that day. The gasoline vapors, being heavier than air, were encircling my dad without him knowing. When Dad bent over to ignite the trail of gasoline, he went up in flames. The milk jug then exploded at his feet and knocked him backwards about six feet into a stack of cedar posts he had cut earlier.

Dad received second and third degree burns over 40 percent of

his body. He received skin grafts from his groin area all the way down to the bottom of his feet. Today, his legs look like the skin of a copperhead snake. The doctors said he really needed to have skin grafts on both his arms and chest, but they were afraid he couldn't survive any more surgery. For that reason, those areas are very scarred.

This accident happened 6 years ago this coming July. The lives of so many were changed forever in just a moment of poor judgment. My entire family saw a giant of a man broken down to a shell of the man he once was. We have all been humbled. As for my dad, he has not had a single healthy moment since the accident, and never will. Not only was he burned and scarred, his respiratory tract is so damaged that he has to take many medications. In addition, he has to take five breathing treatments a day.

However, because I work in the safety field, I have learned many lessons about fuel that I wish my dad had known.

- The fuel should have been stored in an approved container for flammables.

- When using flammables, you need to understand that there are more vapors when the temperature is hot.

- Have proper firefighting items readily available.

- Don't forget to notify someone where you're going, what you will be doing, and when you're planning to return.

- Use the right equipment for the job; i.e., hedge trimmer and shovel, or, if the bush is larger, a chain saw and axe should have been used.

We are around fuel every day and often fail to realize its real danger. Remember to **THINK** before you strike a match. Just maybe this will keep a tragedy like this from happening again. ■

# Fighting the

Reprinted Courtesy, *Torch*, July 2000  
**TSGT KELVIN STOVALL**  
Det 15, 372d Training Squadron  
Kadena Air Base, Japan

**F**or most people, scuba diving of any sort is an exhilarating adventure. But some friends and I wanted to enhance the scuba diving experience. So we decided to try night diving.

It was a beautiful night. The moon was shining on the ocean. The water and wind were calm. A great night for diving ... or so we thought.

We gathered into a van and started our journey to the dive site. The site was a 200-yard-long pier on an island in the South Pacific and touted as one of the greatest scuba diving places in the world. It was a perfect setting for us to observe the "mysteries" of the deep.

Our group had two dive masters and two beginners. Yours truly was one of the greenhorns. The dive masters began the pre-dive safety meeting and discussed safety instructions for our diving excursion. We checked all our equipment and then paired up into two groups (one dive master and one beginner in each group). We agreed on a rendezvous point and time if we became separated. With everything set, off we went into the dark ocean.

When we got into the water, we noticed the current was pretty strong. Therefore, my group started swimming into the current, which is normal. You always start your dive by swimming into the current, because you have more energy the first half of the dive. It makes it easier to swim or drift with the current during the second half of the dive when you are on the way back to shore — tired and almost out of air.

The other group's plan was a bit different. They wanted to cover a lot of area, so they started swimming away from the pier with the current. The other group's dive master wanted to show the beginning diver a coral reef shelf that contained a lot of different and colorful underwater life.

So our two groups went our separate ways.

About an hour later, my group made it back to shore on time without any problems. We arrived at our rendezvous point on time, but the other group was nowhere around. We didn't start to worry until another 30 minutes passed with still no sign of our friends. At first I was still too excited about my first night



# Night Tide



dive to realize anything was wrong. But the intensity in the dive master's face told me something was wrong.

The other group had swum with the current, which pushed them further away from our starting point. Darkness contributed to distance miscalculations. When they realized how far away they were they tried to turn around, but it was too late. They were a half-mile to the

left of the dive spot and 200 yards off the pier. They were too far out to make it back with the air they had remaining in their tanks.

On their way back to shore, they fought the current all the way, an exhausting endeavor that forced them to use up their remaining air even faster. They began to panic when they realized they weren't making any progress getting back to shore.

The inexperienced diver ran out of air in his tank, so he was unable to inflate his buoyancy compensator to keep afloat. He began to go under, gasping for air, while trying to stay afloat and screaming for help. The dive master came to his aid and released his 18-pound weight belt from around his waist. Releasing the belt was just enough to keep him afloat.

They tried to snorkel to shore, but waves crashed over their heads and filled their snorkels with salt water. Snorkeling would be impossible. The dive master still had air left, so he placed his alternate regulator into the beginner's mouth and started pulling him to shore.

Back on the beach, we still didn't know what could have happened to them. We started to review our options. We couldn't go back into the water and look for them because our tanks were empty. We couldn't call for help because we didn't have a telephone. We couldn't go get help because we didn't have the keys to the van. We were helpless. All we could do was wait.

Two hours overdue, the other group finally made it to shore. Tired and cold, they then had to drag their gear another half mile to the rendezvous site. However, at least they made it back in one piece.

If we had used Operational Risk Management techniques we might have better identified some of the extreme hazards of night diving and assessed the risks of splitting into two groups. Next time, I'm making sure we properly use the risk control measures by ensuring we have a cellular telephone, emergency numbers and duplicate keys to the vehicle.

I want to ensure the rewards outweigh the risk. ■



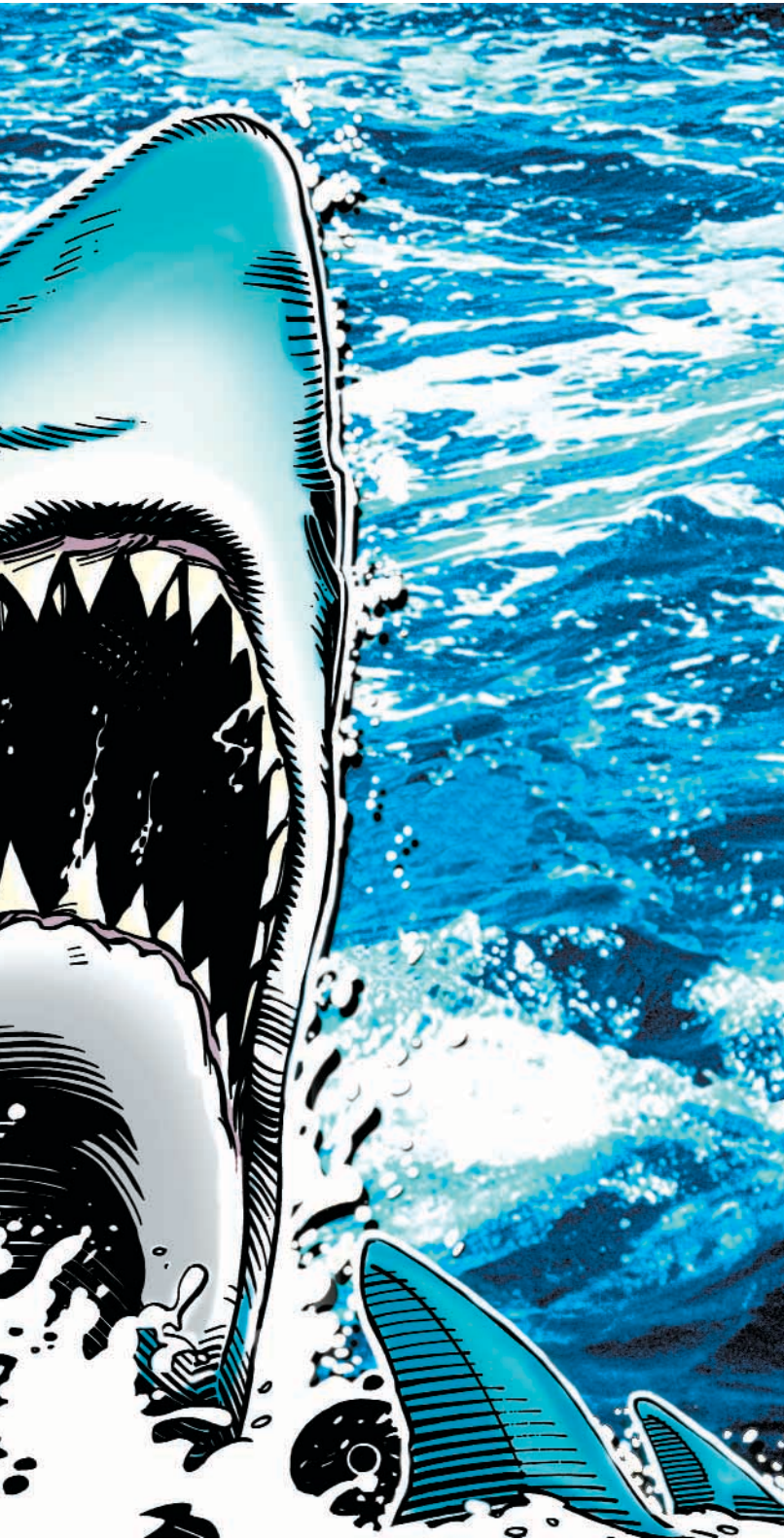
# Sharks!

**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

The sky was a beautiful light blue as the sun shimmered on the water around our 14-foot boat. As we slowly cruised along, I looked through the clear water and could see a kaleidoscope of colors reflecting from the reef below. My friend, Eric Van Winkle, and I had rented the boat to spend the day fishing off Long Key, Fla. We had already caught some beautiful tropical fish that amazed me with their brilliant colors.

The outboard barely idled as we moved to another spot over the reef in hopes of catching some red snapper. Seated in the back of the boat, I let my right hand trail in the water, enjoying its pleasant warmth. Then something caught my eye. I thought it was the shadow of our boat as we moved over the reef. But something was wrong. The dark shape was too shallow to be our shadow and it moved with the sinuous smoothness of something alive — not like the static, rectangular shape of our boat. I twisted more to the right and leaned slightly over the side to see around our wake, which was distorting my view through the water. Then I pushed the steering handle on the out-





board to the left, using the boat's hull to temporarily blank the waves and smooth the water behind us so I could see more clearly. I was still more curious than anything else. Maybe it was a giant sea bass or a jewfish like I had once seen during a glass bottom boat tour in the Keys.

The boat angled to the right. Through the temporarily smoothed surface, the image that had trailed us by a dozen or so feet and five or six feet beneath the surface suddenly came into view. My heart froze. I jerked my hand from the water and yelled to Eric to get into the center of the boat. Some shapes in the ocean can never be mistaken for anything else. Our curious

"shadow" was no jewfish or giant sea bass. It was a hammerhead shark — about an 8-footer.

The sinister-looking shape glided off to our right — but it would not be the last time I would see one of the ocean's most remarkable predators. I often saw young hammerheads in the boat lights at night along the docks in Key West — some even swam up the ditches that ran through Air Force housing on the island. Sharks also frequented the waters around my next duty station, Oahu, Hawaii. During the summer of 1973, several swimmers, surfers and divers had close encounters with a large group of sharks that had congregated unusually close to shore off Waikiki Beach.

Shark attacks, such as the one that happened to 8-year-old Jason Arbogast last year at Pensacola Beach, Fla., get a lot of attention in the news. During 2000, there were 79 reported shark attacks, 34 occurring in the waters around Florida. Yet, despite the terrifying potential consequences of a shark attack, most people are more likely to be struck by lightning than become a shark attack victim. Still, when in the shark's environment, swimmers, divers, surfers and even those wading in waist-deep water need to exercise care. The Hawaiian Division of Aquatic Resources recommends the following safety tips:

- Swim, surf or dive with other people, and don't move too far away from assistance.
- Stay out of the water at dawn, dusk and night when some species of shark move inshore to feed.
- Do not enter the water if you have open wounds or are bleeding in any way, including women during their menstrual cycle. Sharks can detect blood and body fluids in very small concentrations.
- Avoid murky waters, harbor entrances, and other areas near stream mouths (especially after heavy rains), channels or steep drop-offs. These types of waters are known to be frequented by sharks.
- Do not wear high-contrast clothing or shiny jewelry. Sharks see contrast very well.
- Refrain from excessive splashing; keep pets, which typically swim erratically, out of the water. Sharks are known to be attracted to such activity.
- Do not enter the water if sharks are known to be present, and leave the water quickly and calmly if one is sighted. Do not provoke or harass a shark, even a small one.
- Be alert to the activity of fish or turtles. If they start to behave erratically, leave the water. A shark may be present.
- Remove speared fish from the water or tow them a safe distance behind you. Do not swim near people who are fishing or spear fishing. Stay away from dead animals in the water.
- Swim or surf at beaches patrolled by lifeguards, and follow their advice. ■

**Editor's Note:** We all assume we are safe from shark attack if we are in fresh water. However, the Bull Shark, considered by some experts as the most pugnacious shark species and one that has attacked man, is tolerant of fresh water. Bull sharks have been seen in the Mississippi River above St. Louis, more than 700 miles from the ocean.



# Joelle's Story

**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

*Mariah Venus lives alone in a house she'd hoped to share with her husband. In "his room" — the place he kept all his sports mementos — she keeps a picture of the two of them smuggled together on a soft chair. In a special place she keeps a polished wooden box that holds her husband's service medals and an American flag. It's a box filled with a mixture of joy, memories and pain. Joy in having married a man she*

*loved so much. Memories splashed with laughter that her husband drew from his overflowing well of humor. And pain for memories that will never be because their time together came to an end far too soon. But that's not how the story was meant to end. When it began in February 2000, Joelle's story was full of life.*

Mariah recalled the first time she ever noticed Joelle, "He had just gotten off of a flight coming back, I believe, from Kuwait ... He, with a couple of buddies, showed up at Hoss's Deli wearing a sarong and a T-shirt. He was full of himself and had this smile that



would eat you alive."

Staff Sergeant Joseph L. Venus — "Joelle" to his friends — was a 28-year-old computer software designer assigned to Langley AFB, Va. He was too busy celebrating being back in America to notice Mariah, who was working as a bartender at Hoss's that day — but that would change. Hoss's sponsored the rugby team Joelle captained and he came back a couple of months later to set up a team party for the following day. This time he noticed Mariah and asked her to come in early the next day and join the party.

His smile caught her again and she agreed. The party turned into their first date, despite a few "friendly" interruptions.

She explained, "He asked me out amongst a bunch of the rugby guys who couldn't get the clue and others that were specifically getting in our way. They were being "rugby guys" — doing what they do."

They didn't succeed. The magic between Joelle and Mariah worked right from the start.

"I guess the term 'love at first sight' described us. From the beginning we were both incredibly enamored with each other — from the very first time we actually sat down and talked," Mariah said.

The confirmed bachelor fell in love almost immediately. He proposed to Mariah in February of 2001 on the one-year anniversary of their first date. On April 16, the two were secretly married in Hampton, Va. In early May 2001 they bought a house, a fixer-upper in a quiet residential area in Newport News. A stream ran through the backyard and tumbled down some rocks into a nearby river. Joelle had reenlisted the previous year and the couple had plans for his reenlistment bonuses. For Joelle, those plans included a 22-foot Wellcraft Scarab powerboat for weekend cruises on the Warwick River. The newlyweds had only been in their house for a couple of months when the Fourth of July came.

"We stayed here and had a barbecue with all of the guys and I said that I wanted to go see the fireworks," Mariah said. As it turned out, they didn't see any fireworks that evening, so Joelle promised to take her out on the boat Saturday night to see another fireworks display. The couple planned to stretch the holiday, which had begun on a Wednesday, into a five-day weekend — but it didn't quite work out. Joelle was called in to work Thursday morning, so Mariah stayed home to clean house. But they could still reach each other that day by e-mail.

While Joelle was at work that day, he tracked down Jay, an old friend from his previous assignment at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. Joelle, Jay, and another friend named Bob, had all been confirmed bachelors during their Wright-Patterson days — but that had changed for all of them. Joelle was excited and e-mailed Mariah about the news. Being in a good mood, Joelle asked Mariah if he could go out that night with friends to Philly's Pub and Sub for the 7 to 9 p.m. happy hour.

"I told him it was fine," Mariah said. "He asked if I was angry and I told him, 'No, I wasn't,' we had a weekend to spend together."

Joelle came home and spent some time on his computer. He then changed clothes and borrowed Mariah's 1997 Chevrolet Camaro and drove to Philly's, located on J. Clyde Morris Boulevard in Newport News. It was less than 10 miles from home and he was there by 7:30 that evening. When he showed up at Philly's, he immediately bought three beers for himself. Joelle typically liked his beer at room

continued on next page



temperature, so he would often order two or three beers, drinking one while letting the others sit and get warm. He met a couple of friends at Philly's and spent much of the evening talking about going out boating the next day. Although the Scarab was used, the "new" still hadn't worn off for him and he got a kick out of driving the powerful boat.

Mariah stayed home that night, watching TV and doing some cleaning, trying to keep up with the fur shed by a pair of large dogs they were fostering at the time. Joelle had agreed to give her a call after happy hour if he needed a ride home. The phone rang about 9:30 that night as she was sitting in bed watching TV. Joelle called Mariah to tell her that he'd decided to stay later than he'd planned.

"I told him that was fine and call me if he needed a ride," she said. "He said that he would. He said that he loved me and that was it."

Mariah went to sleep, expecting to hear again from Joelle later on. But it was much later — perhaps around 12:20 a.m. — when Joelle left Philly's.

It was 12:36 a.m. when Virginia State Trooper Wendell K. Cosenza pulled his cruiser behind a temporary concrete barrier on the left side of the fast lane on westbound I-64. The barrier helped conceal his car as he sat there, his rearward-facing radar registering the speed of the traffic approaching from behind. Less than 20 minutes earlier he'd stopped a driver for speeding, catching the entire event on his dash-mounted video. Things were quiet now as he watched the flickering numbers from the radar as the headlights from the traffic flashed by to his right.

Alone in her home, Mariah awoke at 12:41 a.m. in fear, thinking someone was in the hallway. She woke her two dogs, a rottweiler and a husky-shepherd mix, and called out in the darkness — but the house was silent. And Joelle was not home.

It was also 12:41 a.m. on Interstate 64. Trooper

Cosenza had settled down and was watching his radar when the radio suddenly crackled. The message from the dispatcher shook him — a motorist had made a 911 call to report a wrong-way driver in the westbound fast lane! The Trooper acted immediately.

"I put my car in gear and pulled out, traveling to overtake the wrong-way driver," he said. "I would overtake his vehicle so I could be in a position to stop him — to stop the oncoming traffic — whatever I could do."

Three miles separated the Trooper from Joelle — the wrong-way driver. Originally thinking Joelle was on the other side of I-64, the Trooper raced to catch up to him. Perhaps he could flash his lights across the median, run his siren — somehow alert Joelle. As Trooper Cosenza raced down the highway, his mind played back a horrific

accident that happened earlier that year on I-64. A drunk driver was going the wrong way in the fast lane when a fellow Trooper caught up with him. The two cars were close enough the Trooper could look across the median and see the drunk driver's face. Moments later the drunk driver's car slammed into another car head-on, killing its pregnant driver and two of her three passengers. Trooper Cosenza could see it happening all over again.

But as he sped down I-64, something was terribly wrong. In an instant he realized he'd made a horrifying mistake. The glare of oncoming headlights flashed through his windshield!

"Oh my God, he's coming at me! Oh my God — he's right there!" flashed through his mind. "He's maybe a couple hundred yards away and he's coming right at me!"

There was nowhere to go. An 18-wheeler blocked the lane to his right and the Jersey Wall bordered his lane on the left. He realized there was only one choice. Acting instinctively, he rapidly stopped his cruiser just past where the temporary Jersey Wall ended on his left. He would use his vehicle as a collision barrier to take the head-on impact and protect the other drivers approaching from behind him.

"This is the most heroic thing I ever did for the state police," he said. "It was by luck that I was able to position my car where I was (so) that his car couldn't get past my car."

The cruiser's dash video recorded the events. A driver in the fast lane ahead of Trooper Cosenza saw the oncoming Camaro and instinctively braked and swerved to the right. The Trooper turned on his siren — his last hope for alerting the oncoming driver. As the car approached, Trooper Cosenza realized it would not hit him head-on — the Camaro was in the uncompleted carpool lane to his left. As the headlights flashed past the cruiser's



left side, he watched in his rearview mirror. The Camaro, going almost 80 mph, hit the end of the Jersey Wall and spun 180 degrees, ending up beside the concrete center median.

Trooper Cosenza keyed the mike for his radio, "Chesapeake — 1050 PI, 1050 PI. Call Hampton, tell them to expedite — tell them to come to J. Clyde!" The code words "1050 PI" signaled a crash with personal injuries.

The impact toppled the Jersey Wall onto its side and pushed it part way into the westbound fast lane. The Camaro's left front wheel and other vehicle parts were strewn into the roadway.

The Trooper radioed a second time, "Wrong way

driver is 1050 PI — major PI! We are westbound at J. Clyde. Tell Hampton they're going to have to get here fast!"

He knew he must warn the oncoming traffic of the accident scene. Stopped just past the damaged Jersey Wall with his lights running to warn approaching drivers, he retrieved a handful of flares from the trunk and began tossing them onto the road. His microphone, still on, recorded the sound of passing vehicles running over debris from the crash. He turned his attention to the Camaro's driver.

"Hey buddy, are you awake? Hey, hey, talk to me!"

He knelt next to Joelle. The driver's side door was open and Joelle was lying partly outside the vehicle. It appeared the seat belt hadn't been worn. Joelle was unconscious and barely breathing. Trooper Cosenza held Joelle's head, using a modified jaw thrust to help the injured airman breathe. "I was committed to him — to keep his airway open, to keep him breathing and monitor his respirations and pulse until the rescue squad got there."

Emergency personnel from both Hampton and Newport News responded very quickly. The only good news was that the crash had occurred at the interstate exit closest to the Riverside Regional Medical Center, the location of the nearest level-one trauma treatment unit. However, identifying Joelle was proving a problem. He wasn't carrying any kind of identification, but then the Troopers found a marriage certificate in the car. The woman's name on the certificate matched the registered owner of the Camaro. It was likely that Joelle was her husband, but the only way to be certain was to talk to her. That responsibility fell to Trooper Vernon Smith. He went to Mariah's house and knocked on her door at 3 a.m.

Mariah recalled, "When I first heard it I thought it was Joelle — that it was 3 o'clock and he was just getting home. I couldn't figure out why he was banging on the door, unless somebody had brought him home and he didn't have

the keys. So, I went to the door and opened it ... There was a state trooper standing there. I stepped outside and he told me that they thought that my husband had been in an accident and that I needed to go to the hospital. He asked if I was OK to take myself, and I said I was, and he left. I came in, got dressed and went to Riverside."

When she arrived she saw a man lying on a gurney with his back toward her.

"It was a younger guy and his hair was about the color of Joelle's," she said. It took a few minutes for the hospital staff to convince her it was not Joelle. "Finally they sat me down and explained that he was in the trauma unit. They said that he was in a very bad acci-

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dent and that I should go see him in a minute and they would explain to me what was wrong."

A doctor met Mariah and Trooper Cosenza and took them to the family room — a small, quiet room next to the Emergency Room. The news he gave Mariah was crushing.

"Joelle's brain no longer worked to tell him to breathe — there was no way he was ever going to wake up," she said. "He explained to me that people would be coming to talk to me about organ donations, and to be ready for that."

Mariah and Trooper Cosenza walked to the room where Joelle was. The Trooper had to be sure of Joelle's identification and also knew Mariah needed someone with her at that moment. In the room Mariah met the on-call trauma nurse who'd followed the ambulance to the hospital and taken care of Joelle since he'd arrived. "She told me that I could talk to him and hold his hand — then explained the doctors would be coming soon to talk to me," Mariah said.

She had a difficult phone call to make. Joelle's mother lived in Wisconsin and needed to know what had happened. Joelle's unit also needed to know about the accident and as Trooper Cosenza waited in the emergency room, he called security forces at Langley. Within minutes, the Trooper's cell phone began to ring. "I told them, 'Joseph Venus works for you. There has been a tragic crash and you need to get to the hospital,'" he said.

Senior Master Sergeant Ryan E. Petersen was asleep at home when his phone rang. Technical Sergeant Victor Overton — Joelle's supervisor — was on the other end.

"'Vic' told me that Joelle had been in a bad accident and that they had him on life support at the time and he wasn't sure what the outcome was going to be," he said.

Petersen quickly dressed then drove to the hospital where he met Joelle's flight commander, Major Bob Hunt, and first sergeant, Master Sergeant Scott Jenrette. He also met Mariah and found out for the first time that she was Joelle's wife.

The three airmen stayed with Mariah throughout the rest of the night. In the morning, Petersen drove to Langley to talk to Joelle's coworkers.

"I don't think anyone said a word," he said. "I think they got it from me that it wasn't good. I didn't maintain very good composure. It was tough. We had a couple of females that worked in the office and they cried when they realized how serious it was."

Joelle's friends got to the hospital quickly to see him. Mariah was touched by the concern they showed that day.

She said, "The flood of people that came in that Friday was just incredible. He was in the cardiac intensive care unit and they broke all of the rules for us. There was no such thing as 'visiting hours.' Anybody that wanted in to see him could see him."

As the hours passed that day it became clear that



Joelle's injuries were irreversible. He was a registered organ donor and now that had become the only course left. But the decision to approve the organ donation surgeries — to accept that Joelle's life was over — was one Mariah could not make alone.

Joelle's mother arrived from Wisconsin about 7 p.m. The two women met with a representative from LifeNet and together signed the paperwork for the organ donations.

At 6:30 p.m. — 23 hours after he had shown up at Philly's to party with his friends — Joelle was declared brain dead. That night Mariah went to his room to be alone with him, to lie next to him one last time and hold him. Words cannot describe the pain she felt in those empty, agonizing moments.

Joelle was taken into surgery at 9 a.m. the next day. Mariah went home an hour later. "They called me about noon and let me know that it was done," she said.

Joelle's friends remembered him during the days that followed. On Monday there was a wake at a local funeral home and on Tuesday there was a memorial service at Langley in the chapel, followed by a full honor guard at Airpower Park. On Wednesday, Mariah flew to Milwaukee to be with those of Joelle's family who couldn't be at Langley and to give them

the urn holding his remains.

That was almost a year ago. During the months that have passed, Mariah's and Joelle's friends have often met in the backyard of the home, re-telling his jokes, remembering his sense of humor and holding onto the memories of a friend they've lost.

But in the end is the awful question — why did Joelle die that night? Why did an airman who had a plan to get home safely never make it? Was it because he was a habitual drunk driver? Those who knew him best knew he didn't drink and drive — he knew better than that.

Was it because the friends he met at Philly's didn't look out for him? In the months that have passed, that question may have haunted their thoughts. Yet, they had no reason to believe he wouldn't call Mariah — or someone — for a ride. He'd been careful to do that in the past.

Was Philly's responsible for serving him alcohol when he was already intoxicated? Joelle's BAC, according to Trooper Cosenza, was .23 that night — almost three times the legal limit for intoxication. That issue has raised legal concerns.

Nor did it help that Joelle was apparently not wearing his seat belt. But that is so often the case when alcohol is a factor in an accident.

Whatever role these other issues may have played, Trooper Cosenza believes the real problem is what happens when alcohol influences a person's thought process.

He said, "When you drink alcohol — from the very first sip — it affects your judgment. Before it changes your physical hand-eye coordination, it



affects your reasoning and your thought process. If you've had a few drinks, when you're walking out to your car talking to yourself and saying, 'I can make it home this time,' remember you're talking to a drunk man. You have to understand that you will talk yourself into risking it by telling yourself, 'It'll never be me — I'll make it home, it's always someone else.'"

Joelle's story ended much too soon. He was outgoing and popular and had a personality that attracted others like a magnet. His story should have gone on — he should have had a full life with Mariah. But in the shadow of that night she lives with a reality that so many families have learned through tragedy: **Alcohol not only steals the lives of its victims, it shatters the lives and steals the dreams of those who are left behind.** ■

# Three's Never A Crowd



Reprinted Courtesy of **Safety Times**

**M**ick had owned a bass boat for years, but his kids really wanted him to get a boat they could water ski behind. So, he gave in and bought the best motorboat he could afford. When his wife asked him what he knew about water skiing, he told her experience is the best teacher.

*His experience was almost disastrous, as he learned in the hospital as doctors stitched together the head wound caused when Mick steered too near the shore and his son crashed into the piling.*

**According to the American Water Ski Association, nearly 17 million Americans water ski each year. Thousands of them are involved in accidents. Many are the result of carelessness and poor preparation, like Mick's reluctance to study the do's and don'ts of safe water skiing.**

Here are some of the things Mick needed to know.

## Where to Ski

- Do not ski in unfamiliar waters

where there could be unseen dangers. When skiing in new waters, take along someone familiar with the area.

- Never ski in rough waters, shallow water, at night, or in front of another boat.
- Operate in a corridor about 200 feet wide, giving a safety area of 100 feet on both sides of the boat. The ski path should be about 2,000 to 3,000 feet in length.

## Responsibility in the Boat

- Know and obey the "rules of the road" on water.
- It always takes three to water ski:
  - the skier
  - the tow boat operator
  - an observer in the boat because the driver cannot watch the skier or know if the skier has fallen and see where the boat is going at the same time.
- The boat driver is responsible for keeping the skier away from dangerous areas. Keep the boat a safe distance from the shore, docks, and other objects in the water.





- Be alert for other boats entering the ski area. If one does, shut down your engine and wait for the area to clear.
- Always pull novice skiers slowly. High speeds are not essential for pleasurable water skiing.
- Always approach a skier in the water on the driver's side of the boat.
- Picking a skier from the water is a dangerous proposition. Your boat engine must be turned off and the propeller must be fully stopped.
- The tow boat should run parallel to the shore and come in slowly when landing.
- When your skier is down, raise a ski flag to alert other boaters.
- Equip your boat with a wide-angle rear-view mirror.
- A towing pylon, boarding ladder and speedometer are also advisable.

#### **The Skier's Duties**

- **Know how to swim!**
- Always wear a properly fitting U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flota-

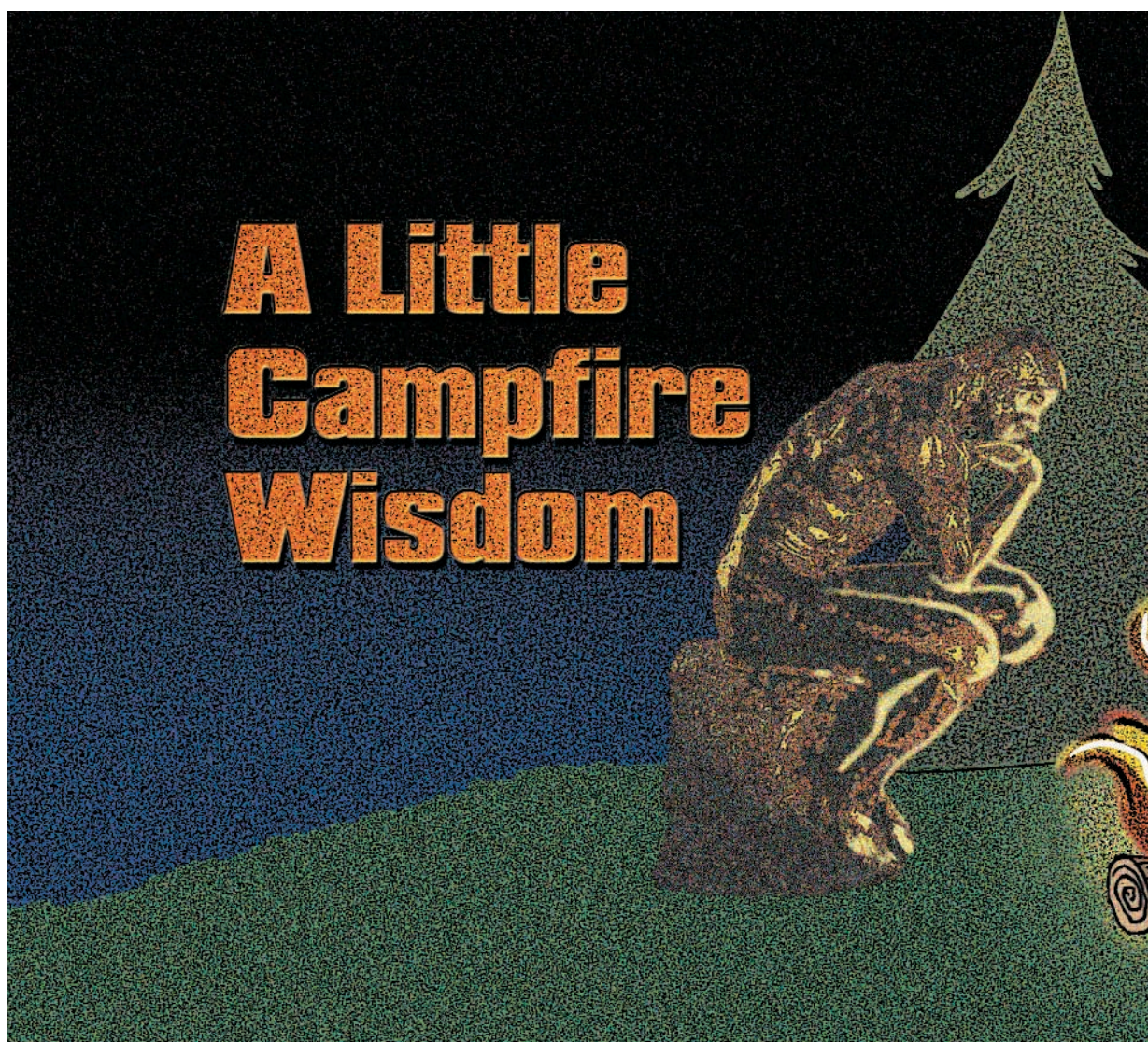
tion device (PFD). PFDs are required in most states.

- The PFD must have enough buoyancy to keep the skier face up in the water if he or she falls.
- The skier and the boat driver should agree in advance on the general path of the boat, and the signals to use.
- If a skier falls, he or she should clasp both hands overhead to be seen and to signal they are OK. In a congested boating area, a downed skier should hold up a ski to show that everything is OK.
- Buy skis that fit. Skis should be sturdy and free of sharp points and edges that could cause injury. Tips should be rounded to avoid injuries.
- Wear a helmet to protect against head injury.

#### **Good Advice for Anyone Involved**

Whether you are pulling or being pulled, do not drink alcohol, take prescription drugs or over-the-counter medications or use illegal drugs that could impair your judgment.

Don't stay on the water too long. The sun, wind, waves and vibration can make you tired. ■



Reprinted Courtesy, **Safety Times**

**I** looked at my watch. It was just past midnight on a Friday morning and my wife and I were freezing in our tent at the Jemez Falls campground, just west of Los Alamos, N.M. In my haste to pack the truck the previous afternoon, I'd neglected to bring most of our blankets, not to mention the propane bottles for our cook stove.

I had given my wife the one blanket we had and told her to wrap up like a cocoon. Doing my best to stay warm in my jacket and a light sheet, I was becoming increasingly miserable every minute. Finally, at 1 a.m. I could take it no longer. Giving my wife my jacket and telling her I would be back as soon as possible, I unzipped the tent and headed out to my pickup. It was roughly 105 miles back home. I made the two-hour trip back to our house, gathered up the needed items, got a couple hours of sleep, then headed back. And, oh yeah, I picked up a breakfast burrito and some hot chocolate for my wife. I wanted to spend the next night in the tent, not the doghouse.

The experience taught me the value of relying on a checklist — not memory — when packing for a camping trip. Proper planning makes for a much more pleasant experience. Here are some good tips that can help make your camping trip a more enjoyable outing.

### **Before Leaving**

- Pack a first-aid book and a well stocked kit.

Bring warm clothing and rain gear for bad weather.

- A short list of necessities includes: cooking utensils, insect repellents, lanterns, tool kit, sunscreen, matches in a waterproof container, toilet paper, soap, hooded sweatshirt, a hat, and a compass.

- Bring bottled water for drinking or to mix with food. Always assume stream and river water is not safe to drink. Some campgrounds may not have potable water.

- Learn as much as you can about the area's weather patterns and hazards before you leave home. Plan accordingly. Take a radio to get weather updates.

- Have a fire extinguisher or pail of water available at all times.

- Teach and practice the STOP, DROP and ROLL method of putting out a clothing fire.

- Take foods that don't require refrigeration or careful packing; e.g., peanut butter and canned foods.

- Bring emergency telephone numbers and a cell phone, or know where the nearest phone is located.

- Read the safety labels before erecting your tent. Only buy a tent that is flame resistant.

### **Setting Up Camp**

- Arrive well before sundown to select a suitable campsite.

- Camp on high ground. Do not camp on gravel bars or near a river or creek bank, no matter how



dry it appears.

- Beware of trees with dead branches, and low areas that could become muddy in heavy rain.
- Inspect the area for poisonous plants, nests and other dangers.
- Clear away any rocks, roots or debris that might present hazards.
- Pitch your tent at least 15 feet upwind from grills and fireplaces.
- Leave at least a 10-foot area clear of leaves, dry grass, and pine needles around grills, fireplaces and tents.
- Store flammable liquids only in safety cans, a safe distance from your tent, camper or any source of heat or open flame.
- Apply insect repellent as recommended by your doctor.

### At Your Temporary Home

- In stormy weather, avoid solitary tree lines or small groupings of trees. Go deeper into the forest.
- If lightning gets close, crouch down with your feet close together (this minimizes the surface area that ground current might be able to flow through). If you have a dry sleeping pad available, stand on it to further protect yourself. Do not lie flat or sit down. Stay as far away from any metal as you can.

- Use only flashlights or battery-operated lanterns inside a tent.
- Develop a fire escape plan with your family.
- Use a funnel to pour flammable liquids. Wipe up spills.
- Fill lanterns and stoves a safe distance downwind from heat sources.
- Do not use a flammable liquid to start a fire.
- Don't wear loose-fitting clothing around fire.
- Build a campfire where it cannot spread. Never leave a burning fire unattended. Put it out with water and soil. Be extra careful on windy days.
- Don't pour fire starter on a smoldering fire.
- Do not surround your fire with river rocks (they can explode when heated).
- Do not dump hot charcoal on the ground where someone can accidentally step on it. Place coals in designated ash cans.
- Wash your hands well before handling food. Use disposable wipes if safe water is limited, or use an antibacterial liquid cleaner.
- Never barbecue inside a tent, camper or vehicle.
- Store food in coolers or in your vehicle, out of the reach and smell of animals. Don't encourage wild animals into your campsite by offering food.
- Teach children not to disturb or provoke any animals.
- Shake out all clothing before putting it on. ■

# Rocky Raccoon



## Ain't Your Pet!

**ATCS (SW) KEITH M. OLSON**  
VAW-117  
Reprinted Courtesy, *Ashore*, Fall 2002

**A**s a geographic bachelor at NAS Point Mugu, I've found that life can get exciting anytime it involves one of those four-legged "bandits" otherwise known as raccoons. My evenings in the

BEQ usually are calm, but that wasn't the case one October evening.

I had just put in a long day at the maintenance desk and was looking forward to retiring to my third-deck barracks room for some much-needed rest. By the time I was ready to hit the rack, I had accumulated some trash and decided to take it to the dumpster. It was just a matter of walking to the end of a passageway and tossing the trash



bag down to the open dumpster.

I always watch out for any of the critters — including cats, dogs, possums, raccoons, and buzzards — that hang out at the dumpster. If I see any, I make a noise to alert them to get away from my well-aimed toss. As I was about to pitch the bag this night, I saw a small raccoon in the bottom of the dumpster, and he was making an awful racket.

He was standing on a bag of trash, trying to jump out. I couldn't help feeling sorry for the little fellow. I knew he would be trapped for a day or two because it would take that long for the trash to build up enough for him to climb out. Workers had recently emptied the dumpster.

I figured if I didn't help him, I wouldn't feel good about myself, so I made my way down the ladders and cautiously walked to the dumpster. In the meantime, half a dozen cats and a possum scurried out of my way.

As I peered into the dumpster, I realized this "bandit" was larger than the helpless little creature I had seen from the third story. "Hmm, now what?" I wondered as I looked around for something to put in the dumpster to give the victim a launch pad. I was stumped until I saw a tree.

After making sure the coast was clear, I climbed the tree, found a limb the suitable size, and broke it off. I then climbed down from the tree and placed the limb in the dumpster. I waited for the raccoon to return to his environment, but I only heard him thrashing around inside. Then the limb disappeared.

I now had to decide whether to find another limb or retrieve the one inside the dumpster. After looking at the tree I had just mutilated, I decided to leave it alone. With all the courage I could muster, I hoisted myself up onto the dumpster and prepared to jump inside. My little friend was backed up in the opposite corner, standing on his hind legs with his front ones raised in the air as if to surrender. As I would soon learn, though, surrender was the farthest thing from his mind.

I don't mind admitting that I was getting concerned about my safety at this point. I also was wishing I had taken a harder look at that tree. However, only one option was left now. I had to reposition the limb for this rascal before he went from defense to offense.

We stared each other down like a couple of old-time gunfighters as I reached for the limb, which

was partly underneath him.

That's when he made his move. He leaped for his best avenue of escape — and I don't mean the limb. The rascal jumped on my back.

I quickly spun around and tried to shake him off, but he held on like a bull rider. My heart was racing, and I think I could feel his thumping, too. I jumped for the edge of the dumpster, and, as I did, he saw his opportunity. He hopped onto my head and launched for safety.

I then hopped out of the dumpster, feeling relieved and embarrassed about the ordeal. By now, the raccoon was yards away and on his way home. I suddenly realized how lucky I had been. I looked around and, to my relief, saw no one who had been watching this ridiculous spectacle.

As I headed for the security of my room, I checked myself and found I had survived without a single scratch. It definitely was time to turn in. I'll probably always remember how a not-so-little raccoon and my stupidity combined to turn a long day into a wild night. What did I learn from this experience?

- Never take chances with wildlife. Sometimes it's better to think with your head than with your heart.

- Although raccoons may be protected on NAS Point Mugu, the chances for being attacked are the same as if they were in the wild. Because of all the critters that run free on the base, it pays to be alert for them. Even taking a walk with your kids can pose a risk. The chance of these animals having some kind of disease is fairly high.

- The first thing you should do when faced with an animal is to call the local animal control agency and let the experts take care of the situation. I unnecessarily put myself in harm's way when all I had to do was to make a phone call. ■

### **Having Uninvited House Guests?**

***This incident did not involve a raccoon in the attic of a home, but not everyone is as lucky. If these "bandits" ever move into your attic, here's a tip: Put a small radio and a flashlight in the attic, switch on the light, and turn the radio to loud rock. The raccoons will leave because they like a place that is warm, dark, and quiet.***

# Getting Hitched Properly

Reprinted Courtesy, *Safetyline*

**S**ummer vacationers tow campers and boats behind their trucks. Do-it-yourselfers haul supplies. Also, military families are on the move, often carrying their household goods in rental trailers. Here's how to have a happy marriage between your vehicle and whatever you're towing.

## 1. Change Your Habits.

Driver error is the most frequent cause of towing accidents, with excess speed a close second. Allow one "car-trailer" length between your car and the vehicle ahead for every 10 mph you are traveling. Brake firmly, but gradually. On long downgrades, use lower gears to slow you down so your brakes won't overheat.

## 2. Don't Get Overweight.

Never exceed the manufacturer-imposed weight limit for your trailer. Here are a few weight guides:

- Household goods. Allow seven pounds of weight for every cubic foot of trailer space used.
- Wood, food or appliances. Load your trailer no more than one-third full.
- Sand, dirt and gravel. Load no more than five inches above the trailer floor.

If you're unsure if you've overloaded your trailer, you can use the scales at a truck stop or public scales on the highway.

## 3. Get Loaded the Right Way.

Improper loading is the third most frequent cause of car-trailer accidents. Make sure about half of your cargo weight is in the front half of the trailer or your car will be dangerously unstable and hard to control. If your car springs become too

depressed, get temporary helper springs. Be sure you tie everything down.

## 4. Prevent Separation.

The fourth major cause of towing accidents is trailers coming unhitched. Check with truck rental or RV companies to see if you have the right hitch for the trailer you are using. Adjust your safety chains to make sure they keep the trailer tongue from dragging the ground in case you do become separated. You can do this by crossing the two chains under the trailer tongue and hooking them to form a "safety cradle." If you have too much slack, wrap the chains around once. Inspect them every time you stop.

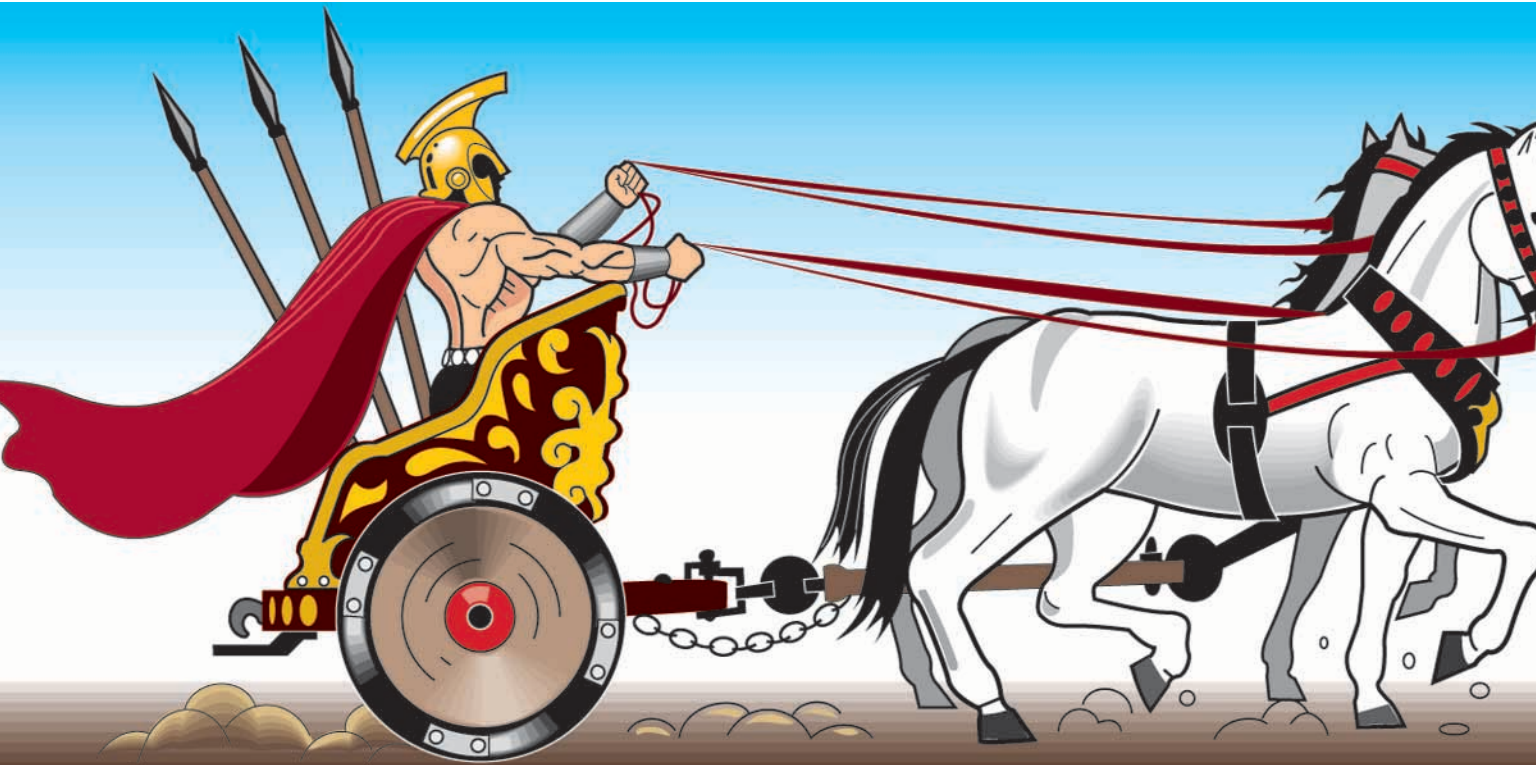
## 5. Make Sure It's Legal.

All trailers should have taillight, brakelight, license plate, side and rear reflectors and safety chains. Also, fender-mounted mirrors are a good idea. (You can rent them if you don't want to buy them.) Don't let anyone ride in a trailer. Check to see if the states you will be traveling in have any special requirements for vehicles towing trailers.

## 6. Prevent Whippings.

If your trailer begins whipping or swaying, reduce speed gradually. Never increase your speed. Hold tight, steer straight and don't jam on the brakes. Five things usually cause trailers to whip or sway:

- (a) too much weight in the back of the trailer
- (b) too much weight in the trunk or back seat of the car
- (c) low tire pressure on the car or on the trailer
- (d) suspension or alignment problems because of the weight
- (e) flat tire on a trailer



### 7. Handle the Pressure.

To handle the extra pressure on the rear tires of your car, inflate them to manufacturer's specifications based on the additional trailer weight. Trailer tires should be inflated to the pressure recommended by the manufacturer. Incorrect tire pressure will cause uneven ride and poor gas mileage. Always check the pressure when the tires are cold.

### 8. Learn How to Back Up.

When you back up a trailer, it goes in the opposite direction of the way the steering wheel is turned. Try this to learn how to control direction while backing: Place your hand at the bottom of the steering wheel. To move the trailer left, move your hand to the left. To back it to the right, move your hand right. If the trailer starts to jackknife, stop and start over. Practice in a parking lot. Also, when taking a corner, start turning later than you normally would so the trailer doesn't jump the curb.

### 9. Protect Yourself.

Make sure your automobile or homeowner's insurance covers borrowed or rented vehicles. Carry proof of ownership and registration in your vehicle. Inspect the vehicle and trailer at each stop. Before driving at night, make sure the trailer plugs are tight and the lights work. Don't carry flammables such as gasoline or paint thinner; vehicle movement or static electricity can cause these liquids to ignite.

### 10. Some Valuable "Fellow Travelers"

Though not required by laws, here are good traveling companions for you, your car and trailer:

- a basic tool kit
- spare tires for your car and trailer

- extra water for thirsty radiators or people
- a tire gauge
- a flashlight, lantern or warning reflectors
- "help" signs for emergencies
- cellular phone

Before you leave with your trailer, use this checklist:

- Make sure heavy items are loaded in the front of the trailer.
- Inspect the tires and all fluid levels on the tow vehicle to ensure it will safely tow the trailer.
- Check the ball on the bumper hitch or on the gooseneck plate for tightness, security and proper fit.
- Check the coupler on the trailer to make sure it is locked into closed position on the ball.
- Connect and check security of safety chains or cables.
- Plug in the electrical connector on the trailer to the tow vehicle.
- Check operation of all lights and the brake system.
- Inspect tires for proper inflation, adequate tread and even wear.
- Check the spare tire to make sure it is the correct size and is properly inflated.
- Check that all the lug nuts are tight.
- Inspect the floor for weak spots.
- Inspect the security and strength of all tie rings and trailer ties.
- Adjust roof vents and windows for proper ventilation.
- Check all partitions and posts to ensure they are pinned or fastened in place.
- Put all breast and butt bars in place and close and secure all doors.
- Check the electrical connection between the trailer and the tow vehicle and that the coupler is securely locked onto the tow vehicle. ■

**W**e always appreciate it when you submit digital images and charts with your stories and thank you for your efforts. However, there is a problem when you send images that are part of a Power Point presentation, or are intended for use on a website. Images that look great on the screen, look terrible in print.



The tiny image at the top right is a 72 dpi (screen resolution) Power Point slide that has been converted to 300 dpi for magazine printing. This is the actual size we could print a 3x4 inch, 72 dpi image without losing any quality.

When the image resolution is changed from 72 dpi to 300 dpi and kept at its original 3x4 inch size, the result is the middle image on the right. You can already see how the image looks soft or out of focus and detail is indistinct.

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So when you submit digital images, we'd like you to make sure that, at **their original size**, they are at least 5x7 inches at 300 dpi. This allows us to use them at a reasonable size.

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**Thank you**

