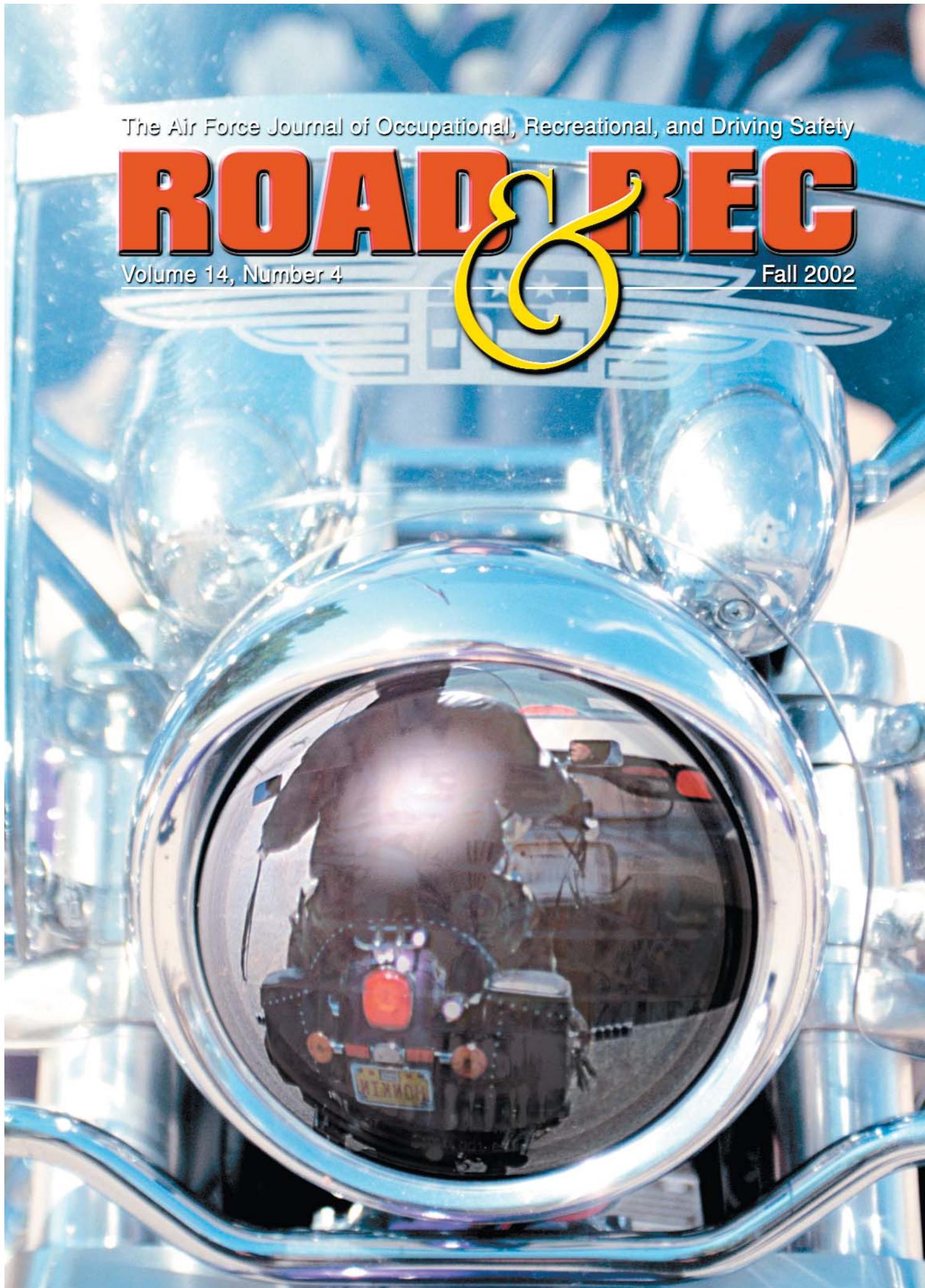


The Air Force Journal of Occupational, Recreational, and Driving Safety

# ROAD & REC

Volume 14, Number 4

Fall 2002



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page 6



page 16



page 22

## Features

- 3 Tanked, Tired and Almost Torpedoed!
- 4 Mama Moose Has A Temper!
- 6 A Spooky but Safe Halloween
- 8 Fall Into Safe Driving Habits
- 10 Weekday Warrior — Weekend Mechanic
- 11 Help, Dad! It's Eating My Hair!
- 12 Swinging Into Trouble
- 14 What Was I Thinking?
- 16 This Isn't a Field Trip to the Zoo
- 22 Too Close on Two Wheels
- 24 Motorcycle Riding — Ready or Not?
- 26 A Gardener's Nightmare — Close Encounter With a Poisonous Caterpillar
- 28 Head-On Into Trouble

## Departments

- 27 Short Circuits
- 30 Snapshot on Safety

Front and Back cover photos by TSgt Michael Featherston  
Photo illustrations by Felicia Moreland



USAF Photo by TSgt Michael Featherston  
Photo Illustration by Felicia Moreland

**CHUCK DORNEY**  
HQ AFMC/SES  
Wright-Patterson AFB OH

It was several years ago and I was by myself on a beach near Corpus Christie, Texas, enjoying the warm afternoon sun. I had quaffed two or three beers when I decided to go in for a dip to cool off.

Shortly after I entered the water, I noticed a small sandbar a couple of hundred yards out from the beach. As I swam out to the sandbar, I noticed the water was over my head. When I reached the sandbar, I stood in shallower, knee-deep water, then noticed another sandbar a couple of hundred yards further out. So, naturally, I swam out to it, once again going through water that was over my head.

I got out to the second sandbar and was standing in knee-deep water again, thinking, "This is pretty cool." However, I quickly got bored and decided to swim non-stop back to the shore. And, oh yes, did I mention I'd

quaffed a few beers earlier in the afternoon?

As I tried to swim I couldn't believe how much the alcohol slowed me down and caused me to be short of breath. I struggled to make it back to shore and became thoroughly exhausted and almost gave up. I wondered, "Is this what it is like to drown?" Then another voice inside of me told me to keep going, even if my arms fell off. I finally made it back to shore, shook-up but safe.

I learned some valuable lessons that day. First, don't swim alone. You'll have no one to help you if you get into trouble. Second, if you've had any alcohol, don't get into water above your head — better yet, don't get into the water at all! It doesn't take that much water to drown. I wonder how many people have lost their lives because they were tanked, tired and torpedoed by alcohol? ■

# ROAD & REC

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**JAMES G. ROCHE**  
Secretary of the Air Force

**GENERAL JOHN P. JUMPER**  
Chief of Staff, USAF

**MAJOR GEN KENNETH W. HESS**  
Chief of Safety, USAF

**JOHN RUSSELL**  
Chief, Ground Safety Division  
DSN 246-0780

**COL MARK K. ROLAND**  
Director, Safety Education and Media  
Editor-in-Chief  
DSN 246-2968

**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor  
DSN 246-0983

**MRS. PAT RIDEOUT**  
Editorial Assistant  
DSN 246-1983

**FELICIA M. MORELAND**  
Electronic Design Director  
DSN 246-5655

**TSGT MICHAEL FEATHERSTON**  
Photo Editor  
DSN 246-0986

**Web page address for the Air Force Safety Center:**  
<http://safety.kirtland.af.mil>

**Commercial Prefix (505) 846-XXXX**  
**E-Mail - Robert.VanElsberg@kafb.saia.af.mil**

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**  
**CHIEF OF SAFETY, USAF**

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**CONTRIBUTIONS**  
Editor  
**Road & Rec**  
HQ AFSC/SEMM  
9700 G Avenue SE, Ste 282B  
Kirtland AFB NM 87117-5670

# Mama Moose Has A Temper!



**TSGT JEREMY O'BRYAN**  
354 FW/PA  
Eielson AFB AK

**M**ax the dog is sore — and so is his owner, Master Sgt. John Denning, 354th Transportation Squadron first sergeant. Running through knee-deep snow from an angry moose with rude intentions is no easy task, they'd say.

When Denning set out one morning to walk Max, his lanky, hyperactive, 6-month-old black Labrador retriever, he noticed the sky was darker than usual. He and Max take morning walks between 5 and 6 a.m. every weekday, and usually have some moonlight reflecting off the snow.

"The moon was real low in the sky," Denning said. "I almost decided to turn back, but didn't."

He and Max had almost made it home from their normal daily walk — nearly two miles from French Creek Housing along Arctic Avenue to Bear Lake and back — when he heard an unfamiliar tromping sound in the darkness. Denning, who had only been in Alaska since August, turned

to see the looming silhouette of a "very large" moose coming toward him, ears back, in a dead run.

"I knew right away either something behind her scared her or she was after me."

Denning ran.

"I thought if I could get near the woods she'd back off," Denning explained. The moose caught up with Max in the road and flung her hooves wildly at the dog. "I heard Max's high-pitched yelping and kept heading toward the woods."

A wounded Max got away from the attacking moose and ran toward his owner. Denning tried to continue getting away from the moose, moving along the Alaska Railroad's right-of-way to escape the confrontation, but the moose followed and drew closer.

"She was fast. She had such long legs ... nothing was slowing her down."

Then Denning fell in the snow. He was holding still and fearing the worst when Max circled behind the angry beast, which was now standing over the NCO. The moose turned to chase the dog, giving Denning a chance to continue his escape.

"I really don't know what would've happened, but when you're 'there' and a moose is staring down at you, you think the worst."

Denning scrambled to his feet and bolted through the woods toward the glowing lights of Heritage Park; but not before noticing the moose's calf loping along behind its mother, watching the events transpire.

**A hint:** Authorities, such as the University of Alaska Police (UAP), say a moose with a calf nearby will be especially aggressive when protecting its young. Denning, however, saw neither the moose nor its calf before the attack.

The aggressive nature of this moose's defense pushed Denning, and presumably his dog, to their limits.

"I'm used to working out, but I've never been motivated to work to exhaustion — then keep going. I'm still a little sore."

Once at Heritage Park, Denning and Max took refuge under a pavilion and watched the moose through the dark stands of trees as she lurked and watched them.

He decided to walk home along Central Avenue, a busier road that sports wide easements on either side. The moose never emerged from the forest again, but Denning said he worried a little during the walk home. Max worried too, threading himself in and out of Denning's legs trying to get as close as he could to his owner.

***The University of Alaska Police said while moose may appear docile and tame and may even eat out of human hands, they are still wild, unpredictable animals that have attacked and killed humans.***

Although the trip home took him near where he thought the moose was still lingering — and where animals have been spotted many times — he didn't see or hear the moose or her calf again.

Once back home, Denning sat on his living room floor to rest and reflect.

"My kids thought it was cool," Denning said. "I was just cold."

Max is none the worse for wear, playing like any large puppy with Denning's children, John Patrick, 8; and Gwendoline, 7.

"He's been acting pretty sore. He still has some marks on his snout, but the swelling has gone down."

Denning was stressed, but unhurt. He remains concerned for others walking, jogging, or traveling on a snowmobile through the area.

"You can see places in the woods where kids have built forts, there are trails all over the place and lots of people run on the road. I'm concerned about that now."

Alaskans know moose encounters can be deadly. The University of Alaska Police said while moose may appear docile and tame and may even eat out of human hands, they are still wild, unpredictable animals that have attacked and killed humans.

#### **Tips from UAP:**

- **Never feed a moose.** Feeding of any wild game is dangerous and against the law. Anyone caught feeding or harassing a moose will be charged. No pun intended.

- **Turn the other way.** If you suddenly happen upon a moose — stop where you are, slowly turn and quietly walk away. (**Officials say it's OK to run away as fast as you can, as Denning did. — Ed.**)

- **Recognize the signs of an angry moose.** Moose can become aggressive without warning or reason, especially during mating season. Their hair will bristle like an angry dog's, and they will lower their head and paw at the ground. A moose with a calf nearby will be especially aggressive when protecting its young.

If you see a moose calf, turn and walk away slowly and quietly while keeping a wary eye out for mother moose. ■



# A Spooky but Safe Halloween

**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

**H**alloween is quite an event for our subdivision. Trick-or-treaters flood our streets along with parents, some choosing to drive from block to block faster than is safe. These drivers have created a hazard that has caused some residents to close off their cul-de-sacs to everything but foot traffic. Also, with varying types of landscaping, there are hidden tripping dangers that can injure young ghosts and goblins. And, as the little ones show up at my front door peering through the slits in their Halloween masks, I often wonder how well they can see the dangers that can make their evening less than a treat.

Here are some suggestions to help keep Halloween from being a nasty trick:

## Motorists:

- Watch for children darting out from between parked cars
- Be especially watchful for children walking along streets or on curbs or medians
  - Look before you back-up
  - At twilight and later, be extra watchful for children in dark clothing
  - Enter and exit driveways carefully

## Parents:

- Accompany your kids or make sure they are supervised by a responsible older youth or adult
- Carry a flashlight and cell phone
- Plan and discuss a route for the trick-or-treaters to follow
- Establish a return time
- Teach children to only stop at houses or apartments that are well-lit and to never enter a stranger's home
- Have children eat a good meal before they leave to discourage them from eating treats before they get home

- Teach kids not to eat any treats before returning home. Inspect all treats for intentional or unintentional hazards and discard any homemade or unwrapped treats

- Remind kids to cross streets at corners and to not step into the street from between parked cars

- Have children wear bright, reflective costumes made of non-flammable material. Also, costumes should not be so long as to create a tripping hazard

- Masks can obscure a child's vision. Use facial makeup instead

- Knives, swords and other accessories should be made from cardboard or flexible materials. Don't allow children to carry sharp objects

- Remind children not to accept rides from strangers or walk through alleys or backyards

- Teach children not to walk through front yards as there may be unseen tripping hazards

- Pin a slip with your child's name, address and phone number in one of your child's pockets in case they get separated from a group or lost while trick-or-treating

- Consider community or church-sponsored Halloween children's activities as a safer alternative to traditional trick-or-treating

## On Your Block/In Your Community:

- Remove tripping hazards from your entryway
- Candlelit jack-o-lanterns should be kept clear of doorsteps and landings

- Patrol your streets to deter theft and criminal mischief. Thieves sometimes take advantage of Halloween evening to break into unoccupied homes or steal items that may be easily accessible in yards or driveways

- Report any suspicious or criminal activity to local law enforcement. Make sure you have the phone number on you so that you can act quickly ■

*(Editor's Note: Information for this article was provided by the National Safety Council and the 377 ABW Safety Office, Kirtland AFB, NM.)*



# Fall Into Safe

Reprinted Courtesy, *Countermeasure*

**T**he September 11 attacks last year caused the closure of the south gate into Kirtland AFB, N.M. As a result, I had to approach the base on Gibson Boulevard, driving eastward up a steep hill just as the sun rose over the mountains beyond the base. The glare was so intense I could barely see the vehicles in front of me, much less their brake or tail lights. That also meant that drivers behind me would have the same problem, which, in morning rush hour traffic left me with a very uneasy feeling. To compensate, I allowed extra following space so that I could slow down more gradually and allow the drivers behind more time to react. I also watched the traffic behind and around me very closely before changing lanes. Two sun-blinded drivers trying to cram their cars into the same spot could have nasty results.

Fall driving presents a variety of obstacles. Some are manmade, and others are created by the hand of Mother Nature. Don't let the invigorating season of change create lasting and unwanted changes in your life.

USAF Photos by TSgt Mike Featherston

## Sunrise, Sunset

Because of the seasonal change, dawn and dusk present special problems in the fall. To minimize them:

- Wear sunglasses to reduce the glare likely to occur at these hours. Never wear sunglasses or tinted glasses at night.
- Be wary of drivers who are approaching you when you have the sun's glare at your back.
- Turn on your headlights whenever you wonder if it's dark enough to use headlights. It will help you see and be seen, even in daylight.
- Clean your windshield inside and out, especially if you are a smoker. Smoke can cloud your windows and diffuse light.
- Keep paper towels or a rag handy inside your car.
- Keep your windshield wipers clean and new. Streaks can accentuate glare. Check your washing fluid frequently.

## The Glare of the Night

You are twice as likely to be involved in a fatal accident at night than during daylight hours. Everyone sees less well at night. One of the greatest dangers of night driving is the sudden light from street lights, neon signs,



# e Driving Habits

wet pavements and approaching cars. When confronted with glare:

- Try to look away from glare. Use the lines or edge of the pavement on your right side to help guide you.

- Don't use your high beams to try to "out-glare" an oncoming vehicle that does not switch to low beams. Be the first to be courteous. Retaliation for bad manners only results in two blinded drivers.

- The reduced amount of daylight during fall requires slower speeds. Drive below the speed limit, just as you would during inclement weather. Also, increase your following distance.

- Take curves slower, and never overdrive your headlights. Low beams are not made for speeds above 40 mph, according to Dr. Merrill Allen, author of *Vision and Highway Safety*.

- Take time to clean and check your headlights. Dirty or misaligned headlights can reduce the distance a driver can detect objects at night by about 30 percent. The National Safety Council suggests the following steps to aim your headlights.

- You need 35-40 feet of flat or constantly sloped driveway.

- Shine your low beams on a garage door from two or three feet away.

- Outline the bright spots with a soft pencil or tape.

- Back the car to about 25 feet from the door. The top of the low beams should shine no higher than the top of the marks on the door or lower than the center of the marked circle. If you have two headlights, the beams are automatically aimed.

- If you have four headlights, aim the low beams first. Adjust the high beams until the center of the high beams is at the top of the low beam.

## Watch For Pedestrians

Just as drivers are more likely to suffer distractions during the fall, so are pedestrians. Whether the distraction is the sun's glare or the attractive natural colors of fall, both drivers and pedestrians need to exercise extra care and watch out for each other. The fewer hours of daylight, and increased morning and evening glare, add to the difficulty of seeing people. Drivers need to be extra alert for school children, especially the younger ones who may not be paying attention to the traffic on the streets around them. ■

**Editor's Note:** Information courtesy of *Safety Times*.

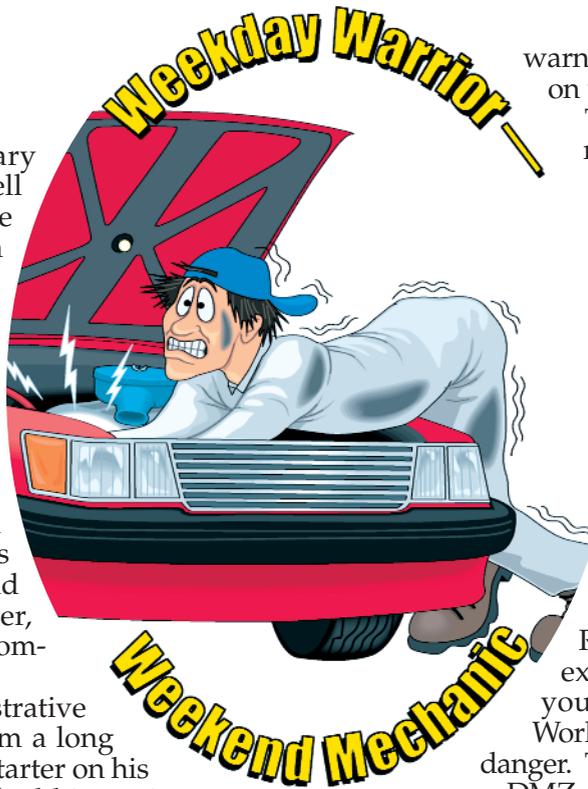


**CDR. NICHOLAS A. TRONGATE**  
Reprinted Courtesy of *Ashore*

Any doc at a military medical center can tell you about the people who visit the center on weekends after stretching themselves to the limit while playing sports. There is also another group they see — those weekend wrench turners. Anyone who has worked on a car, especially an older model, can attest to the scraped knuckles and annoying cuts they got when a wrench slid off a rusted bolt. However, those are minor incidents compared to what can happen.

An AZ1 (Aviation Administrative Clerk) had just returned from a long deployment to find out the starter on his car wasn't working. He parked his car in a lot at the housing area where he lived. The lot was sloping, so one side of the car was raised about two inches higher than the other. He jacked up the car on the side that was higher. Then a neighbor came over to borrow the lawn mower. When the neighbor left, the AZ1 went back to work on his car. About 15 minutes later, the neighbor returned the lawn mower. He found the AZ1 motionless under the car, which had fallen off the jack, crushed his chest and killed him.

This mishap is the "written-in-blood" part of why you should use jack stands or ramps while working underneath your car or truck. Get some and use them; make sure they are rated for the car or truck they are holding. Make sure the stands are on a flat, secure surface. Muddy ground won't do, nor will a sloping parking lot. Don't use hollow concrete blocks to support your car's weight. They can crack without



warning, dropping a 3,500-pound car on your chest.

There isn't very much space underneath a car on jack stands. Sometimes you have to be a contortionist to do anything but look at what you want to repair. So, be careful when removing heavy parts. The amount of leverage you can exert may not be enough to remove a 60- or 70-pound manual transmission. If you have ever had a steel flywheel from an old Detroit classic slide off a crankshaft and fall on your hand, you know what I mean.

If you're working under an older car, wear safety goggles. Rust from floor boards or the exhaust pipe can easily fall into your eyes.

Working under your car is not the only danger. The engine compartment has its own DMZ. Obvious dangers are spinning fans, which can slice off fingers and cut hands. Fans can also turn dropped wrenches or screwdrivers into deadly missiles. Many old cars don't have fan shrouds, and new cars have thermostat-controlled fans that can start unexpectedly.

Burns are another hazard shade-tree mechanics can expect — from hot exhausts, intake manifolds or hot water from the cooling system. An auto's pressurized cooling system raises the boiling point of engine coolant. A loose radiator hose can break loose from a water neck once pressure builds and can shoot coolant hotter than 220 degrees Fahrenheit as far as 30 feet.

A weekend mechanic often also has a following of wrench-turner "groupies," usually children who want to help mom or dad fix the car. Children can learn from observing and "helping," but keep them away from cars that are jacked up or have their engines running. Keep them away from dangerous tools — yes, that includes screwdrivers — and chemicals. Teach them precautions. If they're old enough to be with you while you are working, they are old enough to learn.

Whenever possible, use the hobby shops at the base. They have the right tools and equipment to make a tough job easier, and they aren't expensive. ■

**Editor's Note:** Think this only happens to Navy guys? Recently an Air Force technical sergeant attempted to change the right rear shock absorber on his vehicle, using a floor jack to lift his POV. While underneath the vehicle attempting to position a jack stand under the axle, the car slipped off the jack and fell on the sergeant, pinning him beneath the vehicle. He was able to call out for help and a neighbor helped him get out from underneath the vehicle. While he wasn't killed, he wound up with several fractured ribs and spent three days on quarters. He was fortunate, but luck is no substitute for being safe.



Photo by TSgt Michael Featherston



# Help, Dad! It's Eating My Hair!

Courtesy, *Ashore*, Spring 2002  
ATCS (AW) WALLACE WILLIAMS  
Naval Safety Center

I barely had relaxed a few days after returning from a Mediterranean-Arabian Gulf deployment when my wife handed me the dreaded honey-do list. The first priority was my backyard because everything had grown so much during the hot summer months while I was gone.

I attacked the job with gusto, yanking weeds, trimming bushes, and redistributing mulch. My 11-year-old daughter was an eager helper. She and I were joking around and having a good time catching up on everything that had happened in the past six months.

I was using manual clippers to knock down the shrubbery to a manageable size while she used an electric leaf-blower and vacuum to move all the clippings to a central site for bagging. The leaf-blower and vacuum was new; my wife had bought it during the fall, thinking it would come in handy when I got home. This new contraption promised to save me a lot of blisters I usually got from using a lawn rake.

All you had to do with the new piece of equipment was to install the right attachment, plug in the power cord, turn on the switch, and you were in business. It was so easy I decided to let my daughter use the leaf-blower and vacuum. Everything was going fine until I heard a cry for help. I turned around to see my daughter with the equipment on top of her head. At first, I thought she was clowning around, but she again yelled for help.

My daughter had lifted the blower-vacuum over her head to get the top of the shrubs. When she did, about 18 inches of her loose, shoulder-length hair

caught in the unit and wrapped around the armature of the motor. The unit was tight against her scalp.

By the time I reached her, the blower-vacuum had shut down, so I unplugged it to prevent further damage. I then removed the hose attachment and the air-inlet cover and reversed the impeller to free some of her hair — enough to cut it loose with scissors. She was scared but held back her tears until I freed her hair from the motor.

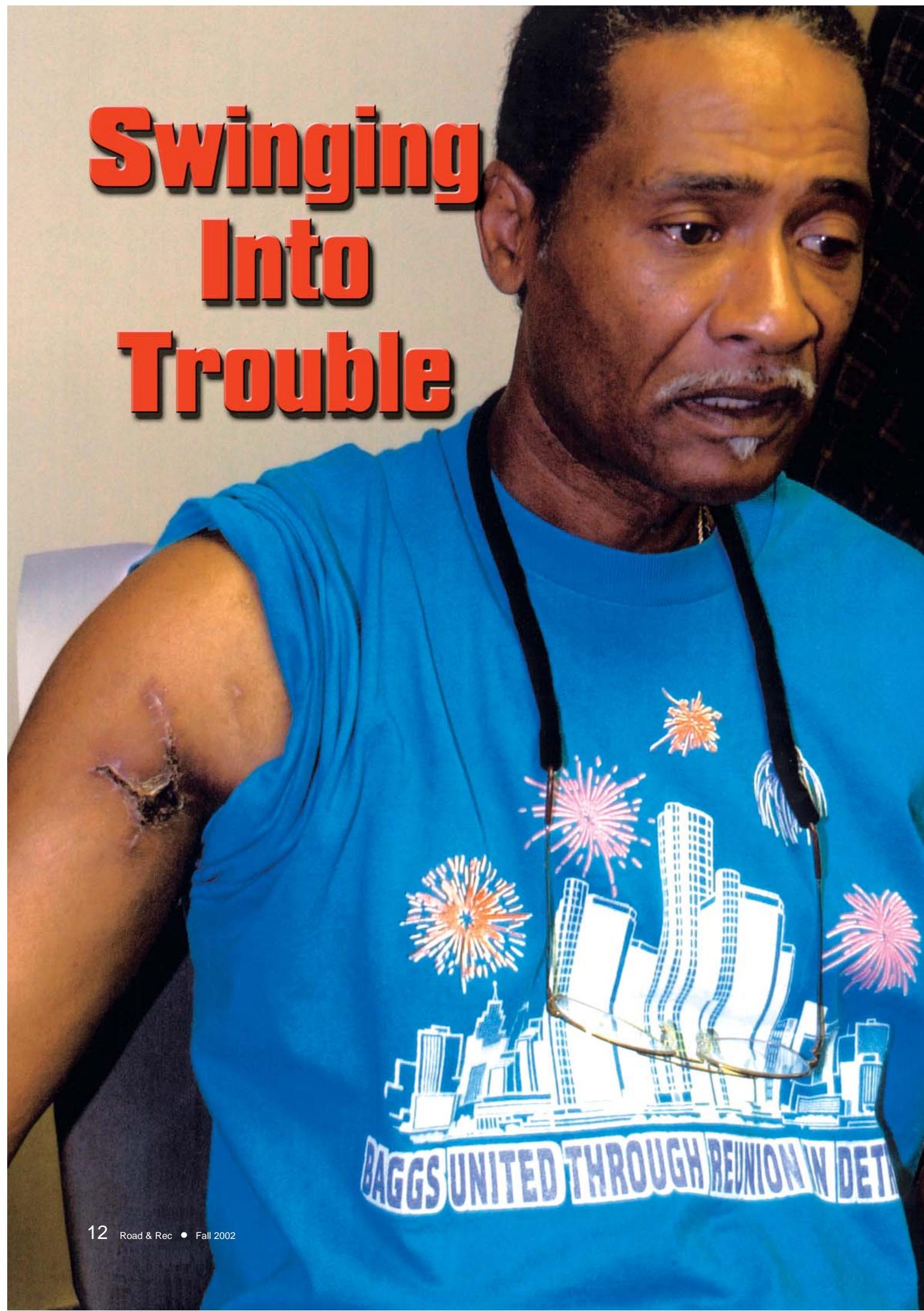
As she cried, I hugged and reassured her. I knew her mom would be upset that her hair was all chopped up and frizzy, but I also knew I'd be the one in trouble — not my daughter. We explained what had happened as soon as my wife returned from work that day, and, as I thought, I promptly was reprimanded for being careless.

She was right; I hadn't read all the precautions in the booklet, including a warning about long hair. I didn't even think about it. The men and women I worked with on my ship all meet military-grooming requirements, and you didn't have to worry about hair getting caught in equipment. Spouses and children, however, can wear their hair as long as they like.

In my own defense, I had looked at the air intake on the blower-vacuum and had warned my daughter not to let anything get near it. However, when she lifted the unit over her head, her hair was pulled into the cooling vents for the electric motor, not the air-inlet duct. The small cooling fins on the ends of the armature grabbed her hair through the very small openings, and of course, we know the rest of the story.

In the future, I'll be more careful around the house, and I'll always do a risk assessment before I let anyone in my family use a piece of equipment. ■

# Swinging Into Trouble



MSGT (RET) ANDY WEBB  
127 WG/SC  
Selfridge ANGB, MI

*Editor's Note: Remember how much fun it was when you were a kid and you would swing as high as you dared and "bail out?" I had friends who had a swing set in their backyard and each of us tried to swing as high as possible before launching into the air. To pull off this stunt with real style required a two-footed landing. None of these flirtations with flight resulted in anything worse than a slightly sore backside — usually the result of a less-than-perfectly executed landing. But it could have been worse. There are other dangers when playing on swings, and even adults aren't immune from painful, nasty injuries.*

**O**n June 17 last year my 7-year-old grandson and two of his friends went to play in the city park behind our home. I wanted to do something with my grandson on Father's Day, so I joined him and his friends on the playground. The father of the other boys also joined us.

The children started to play a game on the swings called "bailing out." As a child, this was one of my favorite games. We would try to get the right altitude, then jump from the swing and land on our feet. However, it seemed to me that the boys were not "bailing out" properly and were likely to have an accident. I commented to my friend that I'd show them how it was done.

As I remember, I was doing everything correctly and had gained the proper speed and altitude. As I tried to bail out of the swing, an S-hook caught my T-shirt above the armpit. The hook then went into my arm just above the armpit, causing a 3-inch-by-3-inch tear. Eighteen stitches were needed to close the wound.

The pain and the missed work hours reminded me that safety is a must, whatever you may be doing. It's our responsibility as adults to make sure that every piece of playground equipment is safe for our children. A five-minute inspection of the playground equipment that day would have revealed the hazard posed by those S-hooks. ■

## Staying Safe on the Swings

- Buy sturdy equipment that can be modified as your children grow older. Consider modular equipment that can be upgraded in phases.

- Swing seats should be made of soft materials like lightweight canvas, rubber or plastic.

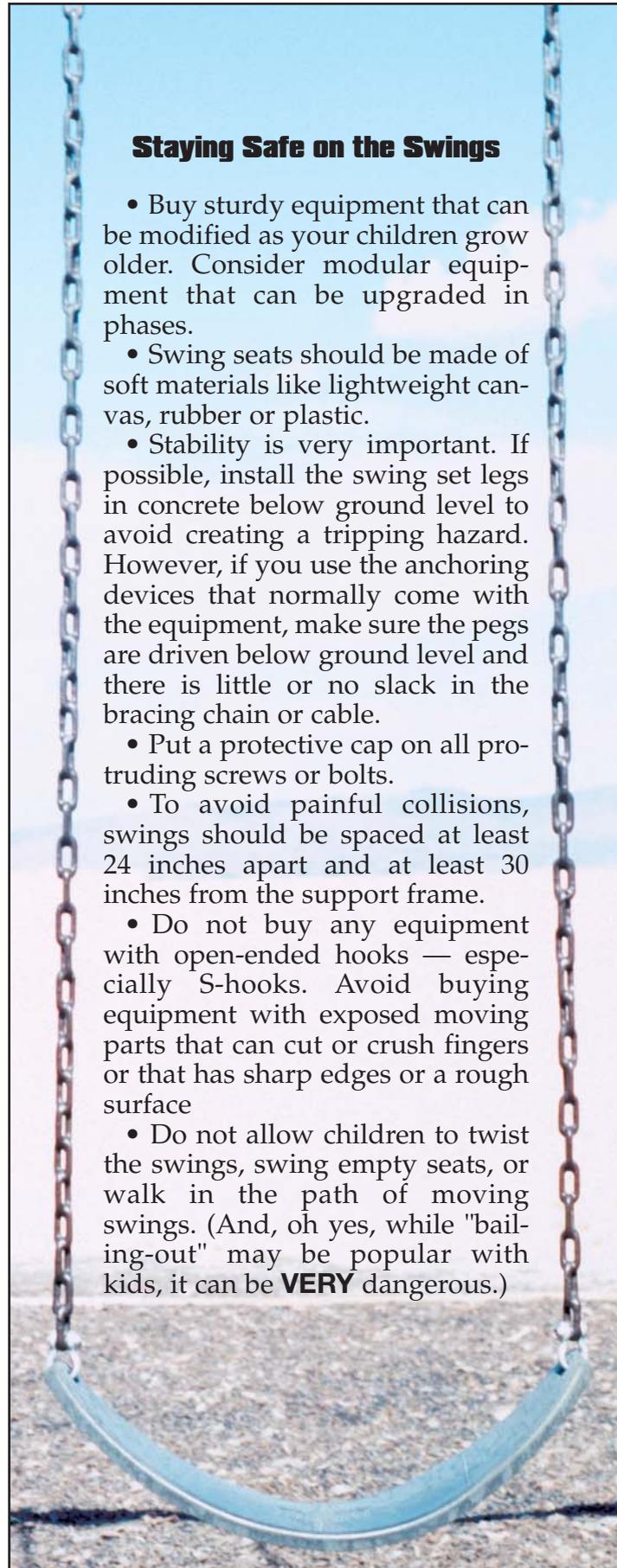
- Stability is very important. If possible, install the swing set legs in concrete below ground level to avoid creating a tripping hazard. However, if you use the anchoring devices that normally come with the equipment, make sure the pegs are driven below ground level and there is little or no slack in the bracing chain or cable.

- Put a protective cap on all protruding screws or bolts.

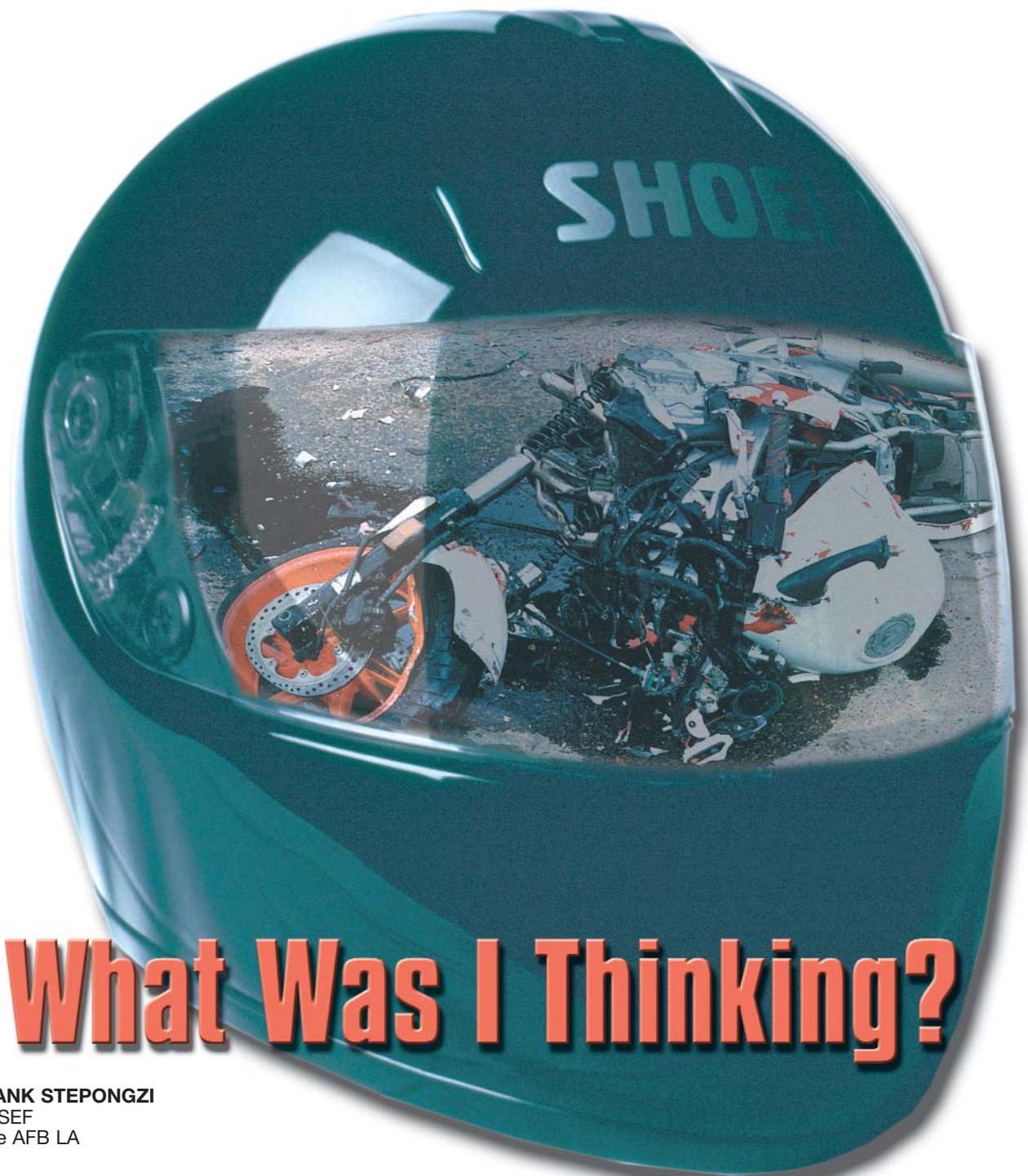
- To avoid painful collisions, swings should be spaced at least 24 inches apart and at least 30 inches from the support frame.

- Do not buy any equipment with open-ended hooks — especially S-hooks. Avoid buying equipment with exposed moving parts that can cut or crush fingers or that has sharp edges or a rough surface

- Do not allow children to twist the swings, swing empty seats, or walk in the path of moving swings. (And, oh yes, while "bailing-out" may be popular with kids, it can be **VERY** dangerous.)



USAF Photo by TSgt Mike Featherston



# What Was I Thinking?

**MAJ FRANK STEPONGZI**  
917 WG/SEF  
Barksdale AFB LA

I recently conducted a preliminary safety investigation for a fatal off-duty motorcycle crash. The wing ground safety manager was out on sick leave and it was up to the chief of safety, or me, to look into this mishap. We did the "military flip" (check rank) to see who was going to be the investigating officer (IO). As usual, I lost and was tasked to become the IO.

It brought chills up my spine as I did my prelim-

inary walk-through of the accident scene. Some 25 years ago, I was involved in a motorcycle mishap that happened almost exactly the same way. The only difference was that I walked away from the accident, while this guy didn't. Because of my experience, I had some clues into "why" this accident happened.

**Mistake #1: The motorcycle was too big and**

**powerful for the rider's skill and experience.**

I was 17 years old at the time and owned a high-performance motorcycle. Anyone who is old enough to remember a Kawasaki "Triple" knows that it was simply a rocket on wheels. In retrospect, it was more motorcycle than I should have been allowed to ride at that time with my level of experience.

**Mistake #2: Going too fast for the driving conditions.**

I remembered my accident as if it happened yesterday. It was after dinner and I was out riding my motorcycle with several friends. We had ridden for awhile and it was already nighttime. As we headed out of town, we approached an intersecting country road. The first two motorcycles were well ahead of me and turned right onto the road. I had never been down the road before, so I decided to catch up with the other riders to ensure I didn't get lost. As I rolled out of the turn, I opened up the throttle and ran through the gears, rapidly accelerating.

**Mistake #3: Failure to pay attention to the road in front (becoming distracted).**

As I picked up speed, I started catching up to the first motorcycle. He was cruising down the centerline of the road at about 50 to 55 mph and I passed him as if he were standing still. We estimated my speed to be between 75 — 80 mph. He was on the centerline and as I passed him on the right I looked over to ensure I had clearance from him. OK, I had passed one bike, now it was time to catch the other. Why did I have to do this? ***I don't know.*** As I looked ahead, I expected to see the taillight of the other motorcycle, but I didn't. Instead, I saw a chain link fence — and a house beyond that — directly in my path. There was also a sharp, 90-degree left turn in the road that I had not noticed until now.

I immediately jammed on the brakes, but left the paved surface before I could stop. Although I may have slowed down enough to make the turn, I was

no longer in control of the motorcycle. I was a passenger at this point. Once on the dirt, the bike did not slow down much. There was a 3-foot-tall rock about 25 feet in front of a fence. I was still doing between 20 — 25 mph when my motorcycle hit the rock and stopped. I was thrown off the motorcycle and landed facedown in a clearing about 15 feet away. I immediately tried to figure out where I was hurt. I moved my toes and my fingers and felt nothing out of the ordinary. As I stood up, I noticed my left leg was a little stiff. I examined my helmet after I took it off and noticed a large gash in the chin bar. That gash would have been a facial injury had I not worn a helmet. In fact, the ***only*** thing I did right all day was to wear my helmet.

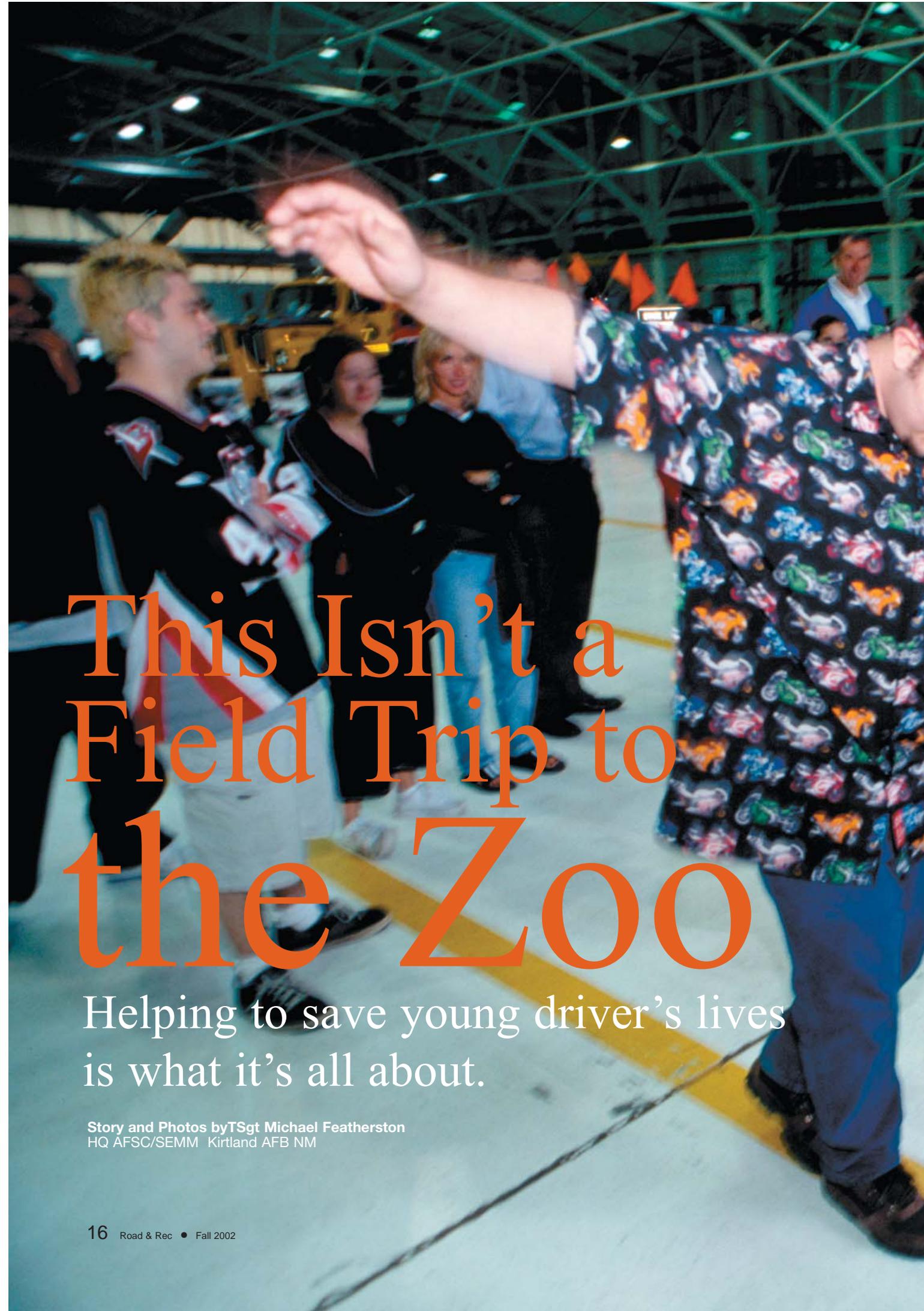
By this time, my buddies stopped to see if I was all right. After checking me over, we determined that I needed to go to the hospital because of the injuries to my left knee. Six stitches later, I was back on my feet. The stitches came out about a week later, and the swelling in my knee went away after about six weeks. I was lucky.

To this day, I still can't tell you why I felt the need to drive so fast to catch up with the lead motorcycle of our group. All I had to do was keep one of the two motorcycles in sight to find my way home. You don't need to be going fast to enjoy the thrill of riding.

**Mistakes #4 and #5: Failure to consider all the associated risks of motorcycle riding; and Failure to operate the motorcycle in a safe manner.**

Whenever you ride, consider the hazards involved. Ask yourself if the risks are worth taking and what you can do to minimize or remove those risks. In the Air Force, weighing the gains versus the risks is called Operational Risk Management (ORM), which is simply a formal decision-making process. If I had used ORM to look at the gains versus the risks, I would have realized I had nothing to gain and a lot to risk by riding fast that night. ■





# This Isn't a Field Trip to the Zoo

Helping to save young driver's lives  
is what it's all about.

Story and Photos by TSgt Michael Featherston  
HQ AFSC/SEMM Kirtland AFB NM



“Just one life be saved, Lord, is all we ask,” intoned New York State Fireman’s Association Chaplain Wayne Jagow, as he gave the invocation at the Niagara Regional Traffic Safety Program luncheon, “just one life.”

Preventing teenage traffic fatalities is exactly what this program, hosted by the 914th Airlift Wing and 107th Air Refueling Wing at the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, has been doing for the past seven years.

In 1995, the two wing commanders were approached by Niagara County Sheriff Thomas A. Bielein with a proposal for the base to help coordinate and host a traffic safety fair. What he wanted was an event that would do a better job of educating high school seniors about the dangers of drinking and driving, particularly at prom time.

What he got was a gritty program that would rip shouts of laughter and tears of genuine sorrow from more than 10,000 students.

A typical day of the program begins in an auditorium with the usual welcome speeches filled with do’s and don’ts — mostly don’ts. As the students wrestle to get comfortable in their chairs, they murmur and joke in a determined show of how unimpressed they are. About then, a New York State Police officer steps up to the microphone and speaks about an average DUI accident.

Glacial silence falls when the officer tells of informing the parents they have to go identify their son’s or daughter’s body at the morgue, and the high schoolers begin to realize the seriousness of this tragedy. The officer concludes the presentation and a 20-minute video begins.

Far from being the 1950’s or 60’s “Blood On the Highway” movie, the video is a series of current stories about teens and alcohol.

The film features three stories. One is about a teenage alcohol poisoning fatal-

ity as told by the best friend who bought the victim the drinks. Another describes a trio of young adults who see CAT scans of what heavy alcohol consumption has already done to their brains. A third story is about four youths who are escorted from a crashed vehicle, to an autopsy, to prison where they meet the juvenile driver who killed his three best friends in the crash. Ultimately, the teens are taken to a gravesite where they and their parents recite final goodbyes to one another as if the foursome were the ones who had been killed in the crash.

When the lights come up, the students are introduced to a representative from the Victim’s Impact Panel. This is the parent, child, sibling or close friend of someone killed in a DUI crash.

The speaker tells the story of the life that was cut short, and shows snapshots of the person as they were growing up. Then comes the story of the day **it** happened.

As the students listen to the final details of the tragedy, two state police officers wheel in a casket with pictures of the victim inside. On their way out of the auditorium, the teenagers

somberly walk past the casket, emotionally moved by what they have seen and heard.

“The one thing that our young people need to understand about being drunk behind the wheel or climbing into a car with a drunk driver,” said Victim’s Impact Panel speaker Lt. Col. (Ret) Richard DeWitt, “is that it’s a heart decision, not a head decision ... they need to care as much about others as they care about themselves.” DeWitt, a former deputy base commander for the 914 AW, lost his son to a drunk driver in 1997.

Just before lunch, the students are served some additional food for thought as they witness a 35-mph car crash. Even at this speed, the impact of one car smashing head-first into the other’s driver’s door is devastating.



Photo by SMSgt Michael Harvey



**Hosting the traffic safety program on base gives Air Force emergency response teams the opportunity to gain experience in working with their civilian counter-parts.**

"Both cars were shredded," said one of the seniors, "and I can't believe that a Cavalier shoved a Lincoln 10, maybe 15, feet."

Actually, the day isn't all torture. After noon, the students are given the chance to test their driving skills on a demanding low-speed emergency vehicle slalom course. They get to go through the course three times. The first with a police officer who is a certified emergency vehicle operation course driving instructor. The second time the high schooler drives to get familiar with the course. The third trip through is the high schooler's chance to show off in front of friends. Not many students complete the drive without knocking over orange cones.

Seatbelt usage is reinforced by a New York State Police demonstration called, "The Convincer," which allows the students to feel the force of a 5-mph impact. They also see how, without a helmet, the force of simply falling off the back of a stationary motorcycle can cause a fatal head injury.

The New York State Park Police let the high schoolers wear "Fatal Vision" goggles and attempt

to walk a straight line or catch and accurately throw a football. These goggles simulate the visual and equilibrium imbalances caused by varying degrees of alcohol in the blood stream.

The event takes on a party atmosphere as the students laugh at one another as they topple over while pursuing a football that is rolling little more than three feet from them.

"These are our least experienced drivers," says New York State Department of Motor Vehicles Commissioner Raymond P. Martinez. "They make up seven percent of our total driving force, and are involved in more than 17 percent of the motor vehicle fatalities.

"This course helps teach them that distraction-free driving saves lives, and shows them the consequences of not wearing seatbelts or combining drugs and alcohol use with driving."

Coordinating and conducting a program of this magnitude requires the commitment of strong leadership and the dedication of a support team. Production of the Niagara Regional Traffic Safety Program encompasses a team of more than 30 representatives from the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve units at Niagara Falls, local law enforcement agencies, and state, county and municipal agencies that coordinate the volunteer efforts of an additional 40 private and public sponsors.

Lt. Col. Scott Stuchell, 914 AW chief of safety, and Maj. Linda Blaszk, 107 ARW executive officer, are responsible for coordinating support at Niagara Falls ARS.

According to Lt. Col. Stuchell the monetary and manpower drain on the base resources is minimal, particularly in comparison to the huge return they get from this level of community involvement.

"These are our kid's lives that we're saving," says Lt. Col. Stuchell. "By giving lives back to the community we are providing a service that can't be measured in dollars."

Beyond normal security operations, the base commits little more than a handful of personnel as escorts, the use of two facilities, a picnic area and approximately 1,200 feet of ramp space. However, without the base's cooperation the program would falter.

"Without the support of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station," says Niagara County Sheriff's Department Capt. Anthony B. Berak, "it would be nearly impossible to put on this program. It would be very difficult to find a venue with the space and flexibility they provide, and the cost and logistics of using this kind of space in the private sector would be astronomical."

The cooperation between the base and the local

continued on next page



community has grown to include five counties and more than 30 high schools. The traffic safety program now runs for two weeks, educating as many as 4,000 seniors per year.

During the program's third season, the 914th AW and 107th ARW were awarded the Partners in Safety Award by the New York State Governor's Traffic Safety Committee for hosting a program which drastically helps to reduce the number of teen automobile fatalities in western New York.

By hosting this program the reservists and guardsmen at Niagara Falls ARS are helping save the lives of young people in their community. Yet as this massive effort takes place, the choices they encourage young drivers to make all come down to the individual. The hope is that by showing people the consequences of their decisions, more lives will be saved.

In closing his prayer, Chaplain Jagow asked for that hope to be answered.

"May we be so bold, Lord, to ask that another life be spared ... maybe just one more." ■

**Editor's Note:** Any organizations interested in obtaining more information on this program should contact Lt. Col. Stuchell, DSN 238-2142.





# Too Close on Two Wheels



“Keep your distance” and “use the two-second follow rule” are two warnings you hear repeatedly at driving school. As a firefighter and emergency-medical technician, I’ve often seen what happens when you ignore this advice. I didn’t know how close it would hit home, though.

It was another beautiful, sunny weekend, and I was enjoying the beachfront scenery as I rode my motorcycle up a coastal highway. I tried to keep a two-second interval when traffic picked up in a town I passed through, but the attitude of drivers that afternoon seemed to be, “There shall be little or no space between vehicles.”

A recent graduate of a motorcycle safety course, I had made this ride many times and was confident I could react to any change in the current situation. I closed up with the vehicle in front of me so no one else could cut me off. Besides, we’re talking ego here — motorcycles just can’t be cut off. Being in close quarters didn’t really bother me because I was keeping an eye on the car in front of the one I was following.

The next thing I knew, I was in a sea of red brake lights. My first thought was, “What the &\*\$%?” Then my safety school training clicked in. I let off the throttle and looked over my shoulder. Can I switch lanes? Nope, there’s a car on the right and a barrier on the left. “I’ve got to brake harder,” I thought. “This is going to be close!”

Suddenly, the traffic started moving again, and I didn’t have to stop completely, nor did I run into the car I had been tailgating. “OK, it’s back to the two-second following rule for me,” I thought. “I’d like to live to see tonight!”

If you don’t understand the point of this article by now, I’ll explain it. The rules of the road you learn in automobile driving and motorcycle safety schools are there for a reason: to keep a safe distance between you and the car you’re following! Two seconds is an easy way to tell if you’re too close to another vehicle. If I had been more concerned about that rule, instead of my ego, I wouldn’t have had such a close call.

Here’s how to ensure you allow two seconds between you and the vehicle in front. When the rear bumper of that vehicle passes a sign or post on the roadside, you should be able to count “one thousand one, one thousand two,” before the front bumper of your vehicle passes the same point. This rule only applies at speeds below 55 mph. For faster speeds, you should be able to count four seconds. Count three seconds at night, and allow four seconds or more during bad weather.

When drivers tailgate you, don’t aggravate them by hitting your brakes hard. You may end up the loser. Instead, check your mirrors, and when it’s safe, signal and change lanes, or stop to let the other drivers pass. ■

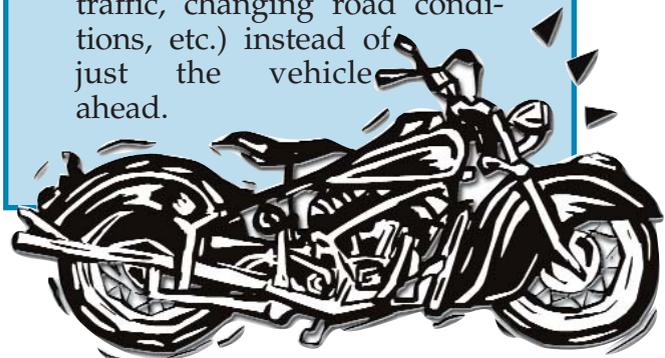
The Motorcycle Safety Foundation recommends motorcycle operators use the following simple strategies to avoid mishaps:

**1. SEARCH:** Motorcyclists need to develop the habit of aggressively seeking out vital information and identifying risks before they face them.

**2. PREDICT:** Prioritize the identified hazards based on their relative risk and attempt to predict the possible outcome.

**3. ACT:** Choose and take the action(s) that best manage those risks.

This method is as important as the time-distance rules for following vehicles because it addresses all the potential hazards (roadway obstructions, side traffic, oncoming traffic, changing road conditions, etc.) instead of just the vehicle ahead.



# Motorcycle Riding — Ready or Not?



USAR Photo by TSgt Michael Featherston  
Photo Illustration by Felicia Moreland

## MSGT MARK CIPRIANO

Motorcycle Safety Foundation Chief Instructor  
Sheppard AFB, TX

**Editor's Note:** *When I was a kid I used to think riding a motorcycle was like being a World War I fighter pilot. I was constantly craning my head, looking left and right and over my shoulder. I wasn't looking for the "Bloody Red Baron" but instead for some car, pickup or city bus that might be headed for the same part of the road where I was. I discovered early on how seeing the grill of a Greyhound bus filling my mirror could get my heart running faster than my engine. I wound up being lucky and avoided becoming southern California roadkill — but good riding habits beat good luck every time. The author of this article suggests some good habits to keep you from turning your Honda into a hood ornament.*

### Be a "Looker"

Remember when Clint Eastwood pointed his .44 Magnum at the bad guy in "Dirty Harry" and asked, "Do you feel lucky?" Well, do you feel "lucky" enough to trust your mirrors when changing lanes and skip doing a "head check" to scan your blind spots? Which blind spots, you ask? How about the ones that can hide a ton or so of Detroit steel that can flatten you like a Texas armadillo under a Peterbilt?

ALL vehicles — including motorcycles — have blind spots where their mirrors fail to cover a section of the roadway. Think of those blind spots as hours on a clock. If you are looking straight ahead (12 o'clock), you can effectively see everything ahead in an arc from about 10 o'clock to 2 o'clock. When you look at your mirrors, you can effectively see everything behind you in an arc from approximately 4 o'clock to 8 o'clock. So you got everything covered, right? Well not quite. Something's missing — the "dead zones" created by your mirrors' blind spots. Those zones are from 3 o'clock to 4 o'clock on your right and from 8 o'clock to 9 o'clock on your left.

As motorcyclists, we get upset when a car driver changes lanes without checking his blind spots and crowds us out of our lane. But, do we do it to ourselves by changing lanes without taking the time to check our own blind spots? All it takes is a simple turn of the head. It only takes a second — a second that can save your life.

### "Check Six"

Have you ever peeked in your mirrors and realized that a vehicle suddenly came out of nowhere and was riding your back "bumper"? If you asked yourself, "Where did he come from?" then you asked the wrong question. The question should have been, "How did I not see him coming?" The

answer to that is simple — you weren't using your mirrors properly. Sure, speed and forward movement mean you should give the area ahead constant attention, however, risks can also come from behind. For instance, is there an emergency vehicle overtaking you or some hurried driver on a cell phone? How about a "road-rager" who wants to get ahead of you and is tailgating to give you the hint to move over?

On average I check my mirrors about every ten seconds because **what I can't see can hurt me**. It doesn't take much time or distract me from what is ahead, but it can give me information I need react to.

Sooner or later you have to stop and, when you do, you need to be scanning your mirrors and watching the vehicle behind you. Is the driver "multi-tasked" — adjusting the radio, changing CDs, chatting with a passenger or talking on a cell phone? Is that person basically doing everything but paying attention to driving? Is the driver slowing down to stop, or are you in imminent danger of being hit from behind? You can "read" that information in your mirrors and decide if you need to move out of the way, flash your lights, or try some other strategy to help you avoid any dangers.

Also, if you come to a stop and no one is behind you, that should raise a red flag in your mind. If you have an unblocked rear — meaning there isn't a vehicle stopped behind you to protect you from being hit — you should be scanning your mirrors for any approaching traffic. If you see a vehicle approaching, watch to see if the driver has seen you and that the vehicle is stopping. You can make yourself more visible by applying your brakes to alert any approaching drivers that you are stopped in front of them. If need be, you can flash your brake light on and off to help get the driver's attention. As part of your routine maintenance test your foot and hand brakes to ensure they will independently activate your brake light.

### Don't Get Boxed-In

No matter how congested the traffic, always leave enough room behind the vehicle ahead so that you can pull forward and alongside it. That gives you a route of escape and allows an approaching driver more space to stop or, at worst, to hit the car instead of you. Does this work? During the 22 years I've been riding I've done this three times. I wouldn't want to think what the alternative would've meant for my bike or me.

Enjoy your riding and keep your safety skills sharp by using them often enough to make them habits. Remember, in an emergency you will resort to your habits — so make sure they are good ones. ■



# A Gardener's Nightmare — Close Encounter With a Poisonous Caterpillar

Courtesy, *Torch*, March 2002  
LT. CMDR. JANET STOCK, USN

On a Sunday afternoon in July, I was trimming crepe myrtle shoots near the ground using a small hand tool. The tree is planted in a flowerbed and mulched with bark mulch. Suddenly, while I held some small plant shoots in my left hand, I felt a burning sensation. I pulled my hand from the foliage. I wasn't wearing gloves at the time. Two of my fingers were burning badly within minutes.

My first thought was that a snake bit me. But there were no puncture wounds, and I hadn't seen a snake or any other critter.

I went into the house to wash my hands and returned to continue my task. I put on work gloves, but the pain got worse. Within a few minutes I decided I should wash-up in case I needed to go into the emergency room. As I changed clothes, the pain was so bad I almost couldn't stand it. I drove 15 miles to the emergency room at Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB, Texas, wondering if I would make it.

The pain was so intense I thought I was going to lose my entire hand. The few minutes wait at the emergency room check-in was so difficult that I sat on the floor, writhing in pain. The affected fingers were weeping a clear fluid and were beginning to turn purple.

Fortunately, the first nurse I saw knew immediately what was wrong. He told me I'd had a "close encounter" with a lepidoptera.

"A butterfly?" I asked.

"No," he said, "the most poisonous caterpillar in North America."

The puss caterpillar, or tree asp as it is known locally, is found throughout North America. It's a small (1/4-to 1-inch long), teardrop/elliptical-shaped caterpillar that you may not even recognize as a caterpillar. It's yellow, gray, brown or white and is covered with hairy protrusions — stinging hairs — that are poisonous to the touch.

The caterpillars often are found on the

underside of oak leaves, plants, and fence posts or other wooden surfaces.

The caterpillar (larvae) attaches itself to wooden objects to pupate, making a whitish/gray, hard-shelled pupae. The pupae are commonly found on trees, decks and buildings. I've also seen them attached to exterior cement block walls. They hatch in the spring into the southern flannel moth.

Most people who have told me they were stung by this caterpillar never saw it. Several people I've met since this happened to me were stung when they rested their elbows on fence posts or wooden deck railings.

If stung, you will want to seek immediate medical attention. If a pet shows signs, seek immediate veterinary attention. Collect the caterpillar, if possible, for positive identification at a medical facility.

Treatment varies from locally injected anesthetic to 'round-the-clock' antihistamines for severe pain that can last for days.

Other stinging or poisonous caterpillars exist. If you want to learn more about these creatures go to: [www.uky.edu/Agriculture/Entomology/ent-facts/misc/ef003.htm](http://www.uky.edu/Agriculture/Entomology/ent-facts/misc/ef003.htm). ■

## IF STUNG BY AN ASP...

- Don't rub the affected area
- Use cellophane tape to remove the invisible hairs (stingers)
- Don't touch any residue left behind by the caterpillar because it also can be caustic.

## TO PREVENT BEING STUNG...

- Learn to recognize the caterpillar and the pupae and train your family.
- Wear gloves and other protective clothing when doing yard work.
- Take care when gardening and when leaning/resting on outdoor wooden surfaces such as fence posts or decks.

— *Brooks Army Medical Center*



# Short Circuits



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

## Auto Recalls

**2002 Chevrolet Trailblazer, GMC Envoy and Oldsmobile Bravada. Number involved — 60,044. Defect:** On certain sport utility vehicles, the fuel filter fitting can become disconnected. If this were to occur as the driver was attempting to start the engine, the engine would fail to start and fuel would be pumped out onto the ground. If the fuel filter fitting became disconnected while the engine was running, the engine would stop, which would cause the loss of power steering. Also, if an ignition source was present, fuel leaking from the disconnected fuel filter fitting could cause a fire. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V121, GM Recall No. 02016)

**2001 Hyundai XG300, 1999-01 Sonata. Number involved — 145,355. Defect:** On certain passenger vehicles, movement of the side impact air bag wiring harness connector could cause intermittent illumination of the Supplemental Restraint System air bag warning light. This condition could prevent the side impact air bags from deploying and increase the risk of injury to occupants during a side impact crash. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V105, Hyundai Recall No. 052)

**1999 Volvo S80. Number involved — 25,876. Defect:** On some passenger vehicles, the electric cooling fans may not be adequate in hot climates. This could cause the engine cooling fan components to overheat, melting electrical connections and adjacent components and possibly causing a fire. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V096, Volvo Recall No. 110)

**1997-99 Dodge Caravan, Plymouth Voyager, Chrysler Town and Country. Number involved — 545,311. Defect:** On certain minivans, trim material can loosen and drop into the rear-outboard seatbelt assembly, causing the seatbelt to become inoperative. In the event of a crash, the occupant may not be properly restrained by the seatbelt, increasing the risk of personal injury. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V076, Daimler/Chrysler Recall No. B09)

**1996-97 Pontiac Grand Am, 1995-97 Pontiac Sunfire, 1996-97 Oldsmobile Achieva, 1996-97 Buick Skylark, 1995-97 Chevrolet Cavalier. Number involved — 1,589,948. Defect:** On certain passenger vehicles, if the engine fails to start and the driver continues to hold the ignition to the "Start" position for an extended period, electricity flowing through the ignition switch can sometimes produce enough heat to melt internal switch parts. If the switch is

damaged, a fire could occur in the steering column even if the engine is off and the key is removed. (NHTSA Recall No. 02V070, GM Recall No. 02008)

**2003 Pontiac Vibe, 2003 Toyota Corolla. Number involved (Pontiac) — 2,701; (Toyota) — 8,483. Defect:** On certain passenger vehicles, the four bolts that join the rear brake and hub assembly to the rear axle carrier were not sufficiently tightened during the assembly process. If the vehicle is operated in this condition, one or more of the bolts could come loose, causing an abnormal noise from the rear axle area. If all four bolts came completely loose, the rear brake and hub assembly could separate from the rear axle carrier, causing the vehicle to go out of control. (For Pontiac — NHTSA Recall No. 02V074002, GM Recall No. 02010; For Toyota, NHTSA Recall No. 02V074001)

*Owners who do not receive a free remedy for these recall defects within a reasonable amount of time should call the following numbers: Buick, 1-800-521-7300; Chevrolet, 1-800-222-1020; DaimlerChrysler, 1-800-853-1403; GMC, 1-800-462-8782; Hyundai, 1-800-633-5151; Oldsmobile, 1-800-442-6537; Pontiac, 1-800-762-2737; Toyota, 1-800-331-4331; Volvo, 1-800-458-1552.*

# Head-On Into

# Trouble



USAF Photo by TSgt Michael Featherston  
Photo Illustration by Felicia Moreland

**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

**S**ome days you can't dodge the bullet — it just has your name on it. When Technical Sgt. Albert Watkins left Youngstown Air Reserve Base, Ohio, on June 7, 2001, he expected a 35-minute drive home. What he couldn't know was that it would be almost 35 days before he got there. Unbeknownst to him on State Highway 193 was a "bullet" with his name on it — a cell phone-distracted driver who would take the sergeant **head-on into trouble.**

"It was a typical day, very normal traffic," Watkins explained. He had traveled the road countless times commuting to and from his Reserve unit, the 76th Aerial Port Squadron. Passing through open, green farmland, the four-lane road was divided by a double yellow line and bordered by farm fields. As he drove in the southbound left lane, Watkins saw a vehicle stopped in the oncoming fast lane. There was nothing unusual about that — the driver was simply waiting for a break in the traffic to turn left across the southbound lanes. But what happened next would change the sergeant's life forever.

"I was traveling down my lane when a car just pulled out (head-on) in front of me," Watkins said. "I thought, 'It doesn't seem right — it doesn't seem possible that someone would do something like this ... I could understand if there had been an accident and someone had swerved or something. But all of a sudden, someone just pulled out — it seemed like for no reason.'"

That "someone" was a young woman talking on a cell phone. Not paying attention to her driving, she

didn't notice the stopped car in front of her in the northbound fast lane until it was too late to stop. At the last second she swerved left, moving into the southbound fast lane going head-on at Watkins.

"I had less than a second to respond. I couldn't do anything but hit the brakes," Watkins said.

Unable to avoid the crash, the sergeant was dependant on the seatbelts and air bag in his red 1996 Chevrolet Cavalier to protect his life. Jeff Elwood, a worker at Bel Air Mobile Home Park, glanced out at the road at that moment. What he saw was horrendous.

"I was standing by a maintenance garage about 50 yards away (from the accident) when I saw two cars get into a head-on — they hit nose-to-nose," Elwood said. "The red car (Watkins' Cavalier) went up into the air, flipped around and landed almost in the ditch ... I ran up to the guy to see if he was all right, and he was dazed like any other person would have been. All he wanted was to get out of the car. I told him, "'Sit and wait for help — I'll sit here and talk to you and try to keep you calm until the help arrives.'"

Watkins described what it was like for him when the collision occurred.

"It was devastating. I felt like I was going into a wall. The next thing I knew my car was spinning then, all of a sudden, it slid sideways and stopped facing a ditch."

According to the Air Force mishap report, the girl's car spun around after the initial impact and struck the front of Watkins' car a second time. The combined impacts crushed the front of the Cavalier, driving the dash and floorboards into the driver's compartment, severely injuring Watkins' ankles and legs. But at least he was alive. His seatbelt and air bag had preserved his life.

He described what happened after the vehicles stopped moving.

"The first thing I noticed was that the windshield of my car was gone — it was lying on my hood and the air bag was over it," he said. "There was something like a mist (caused by a powdery lubricant when the air bag deployed) and someone was concerned the car was on fire. There were a lot of people standing around and someone informed them that it was just the air bag.

"I guess I tried to get out and they told me 'don't go anywhere.' Someone had jumped into the car and was holding my neck and head to make sure I didn't have any injuries. When I actually did try to get out, I noticed that something was wrong with my legs. I couldn't move them. My left foot — it seemed like something was wrong with it — it was bent."

Police and rescue personnel arrived at the accident scene in less than 10 minutes. But those were very long minutes for Watkins.

"I was in tremendous pain in my legs. It was a pain like I had never felt before," he said.

The car was so badly crushed that rescue personnel had to use the Jaws of Life to force open the driver's side door enough to free him. Inside, the dash had crushed backward against his legs, pinning him inside the car.

"I remember saying, 'Be careful,' because I was afraid they might cut off my leg or something," Watkins said.

Once he was removed from the car, he was placed on a board and carried to an ambulance. He could straighten out one leg, but the pain in the other leg was so intense that he kept it bent as he rode in the ambulance to St. Elizabeth's Hospital. When he arrived, he was taken into the Emergency Room where they cut off his uniform and boots. Then they X-rayed him to determine his injuries.

Photos provided by TSgt Albert Watkins

His right knee was in bad condition. He was taken into surgery immediately.

He explained, "They had to put, I think, two pins and two cables in my right knee. I couldn't walk on it for a long time." He added that the surgeons had to place a rod between his left hip and kneecap because the femur had been badly broken.

His injuries were severe enough that he spent 32 days in the hospital, followed by 59 days on quarters. The most important thing for him was trying to walk again. For the first couple of weeks he could only do that with the help of hospital personnel. Later he was able to move about with a walker. Since leaving the hospital he has had several surgeries and today walks with the aid of a cane.

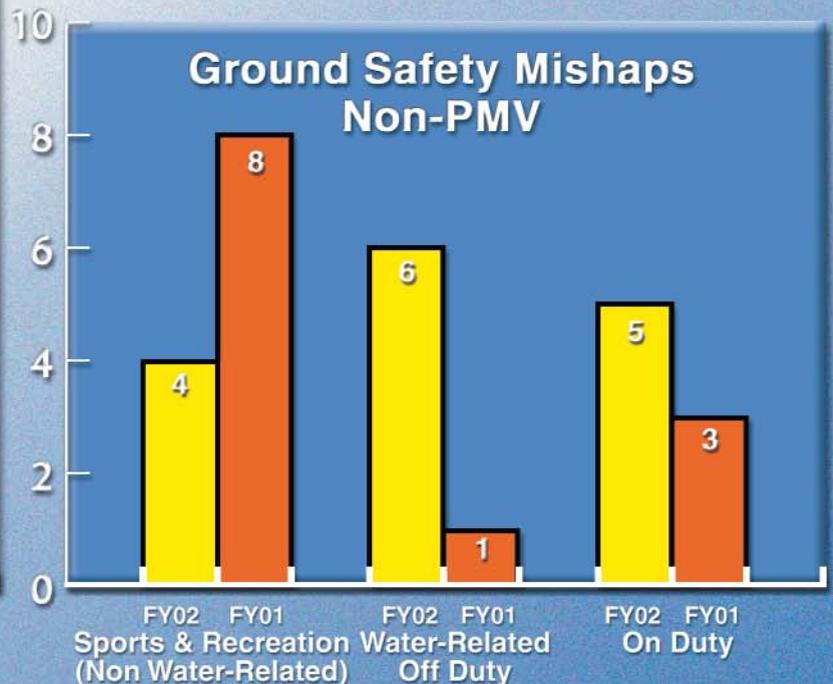
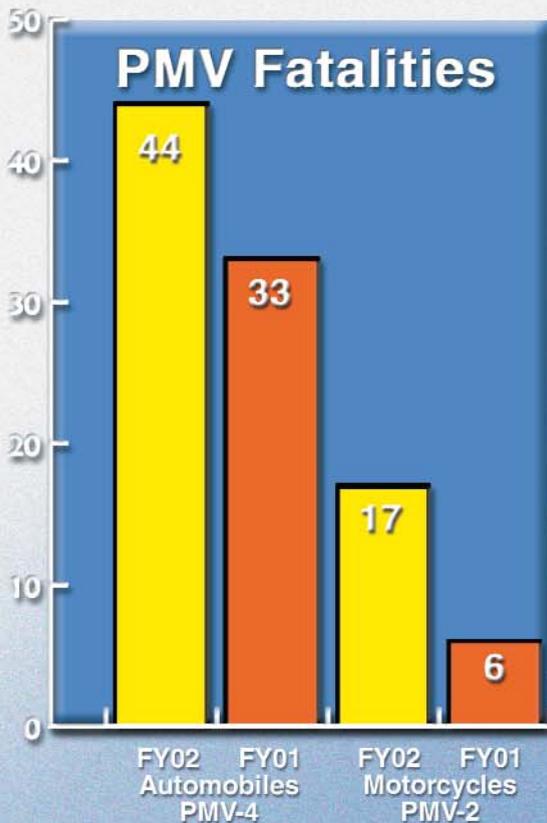
Still, he knows it would have been much worse had he not put on his seatbelt — which was the one thing he could do to protect himself before getting on the road that day. And he's not at all unhappy that wearing a seatbelt is a requirement on base. That requirement, he knows, means that airmen driving off base will leave wearing the most important piece of safety gear their car provides.

"If other airmen wear their seatbelts and get in an accident after they drive off base, then they'll have that seatbelt on — they will have taken that precaution," he said. "If it wasn't for my seatbelt and air bag, I wouldn't be around today." ■





# Snapshot on Safety



**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

**Editor's Note:** As we approach the end of fiscal year 2002, we are introducing our new "Snapshot On Safety" column. Beginning this issue, we will be providing a series of mishaps statistics charts along with some brief narratives. In this issue, we will look at the mishaps dating from October 1, 2001 through July 31, 2002. In future issues we will look at the statistics on a quarterly basis. Note: due to our publication production dates, the information will run one quarter behind.

There has been a disturbing rise in off-duty fatalities with 71 people having lost their lives. This is 24 more than at the same time last year — representing a significant increase in off-duty fatalities. While the majority of those fatalities resulted from automobile and motorcycle accidents, water-related and on-duty fatalities have also risen significantly.

#### Motorcycle Fatalities Nearly Tripled

The most dramatic of those trends is the number of motorcycle fatalities — 17 this year compared to six during the same time last year. This represents a major upward trend compared to the previous three years. The biggest contributing factors to





these deaths were a lack of motorcycle riding skill (proficiency) and excessive speed. As the examples below show, the human body is no match for utility poles, concrete barriers, trees or other solid objects:

- A 25-year-old A1C lost control of his motorcycle in a curve and struck a utility pole.
- A 22-year-old SrA was passing two cars when he struck a car that was turning left.
- A 32-year-old SSgt went off the road and struck a light pole and concrete barrier.
- A 22-year-old SrA lost control while in a curve, left the road and struck a tree.
- A 24-year-old SSgt struck a guardrail while entering the freeway.

### **Automobile Fatalities Up By One-Third**

Automobile fatalities also rose with 44 fatalities compared to 33 during the same time period last year. Alcohol, speeding and nighttime driving were significant factors in these deaths. In a number of mishaps, both the driver and a passenger were killed. The following are some examples of these fatal mishaps:

#### **Alcohol-Related**

- A 26-year-old A1C fell asleep at the wheel and left the highway, rolling her vehicle. (BAC .11).
- A 22-year-old SrA lost control of his vehicle in a turn and was ejected and drowned in a ditch. (BAC .17)
- A 23-year-old SrA struck a utility pole's concrete base, killing himself and a 20-year-old A1C who was a passenger. (BAC .22)
- A 24-year-old SrA and his 26-year-old SrA passenger were killed when their vehicle crossed a median and struck a limousine head-on. (BAC — Driver .17, Passenger .25)
- A 22-year-old A1C and his 23-year-old SrA passenger were killed when the driver lost control on a curve, rolled and struck a utility pole. (BAC — Driver .15, Passenger .10)
- A 25-year-old 1st Lt., along with two other lieutenants and a local national who were riding as passengers, were killed when he crossed into the oncoming lane and struck a bus. (BAC .20)

#### **Speed-Related**

- 19-year-old Academy cadet was killed when his vehicle crossed over railroad tracks at high speed and rolled.

- A 21-year-old A1C and his 19-year-old A1C passenger were killed when their vehicle crossed the centerline while racing and struck a pickup head-on.

- A 22-year-old SrA and his 21 year-old SrA passenger were killed when their vehicle left the road and submerged in a canal.
- A 20-year-old A1C was killed when he was ejected after his car left the road and rolled.
- A 21-year-old Academy cadet was killed when he lost control, went off the road, then rolled and struck a ravine wall.

#### **Off-Duty Water-Related**

Drowning often accounts for the largest number of sports and recreation fatalities. The six fatalities we have experienced so far are described below:

- A 22-year-old SrA had been drinking and went swimming with friends when he drowned. (BAC — .07)
- A 23-year-old A1C drowned in a pool while taking scuba diving lessons.
- A 46-year-old TSgt fell out of a fishing boat and drowned. He was not wearing a PFD.
- A 41-year-old SSgt swam out into a lake to retrieve his son's inner tube. The wind blew the tube out of reach and the father drowned before he could return to shore.
- A 31-year-old SSgt drowned while playing in shallow water in a lake.
- A 25-year-old SSgt riding in a 4-wheel-drive pickup drowned when the vehicle rolled over and went into a river.

#### **On-Duty**

Five airmen have died on-duty, three of those fatalities being the result of being crushed while working around vehicles or facilities.

- A 35-year-old SSgt pararescueman died when he was ejected from a Zodiac boat being lowered into the water by a large commercial vessel.
- A 27-year-old SSgt mechanic was killed when he was crushed while working inside the wheel well of an aircraft tow vehicle.
- A 22-year-old special purpose vehicle mechanic was killed when he was crushed between the frame and dump bed of a 5-ton dump truck.
- A 33-year-old SSgt died when he was caught between a hangar door and an I-beam.
- A 36-year-old MSgt civil engineer was killed when he was struck by a dump truck tailgate. ■





**RIDE SAFE**