

**+ FACING THE MONSTER: PTSD DIAGNOSIS DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THE END OF A CAREER**



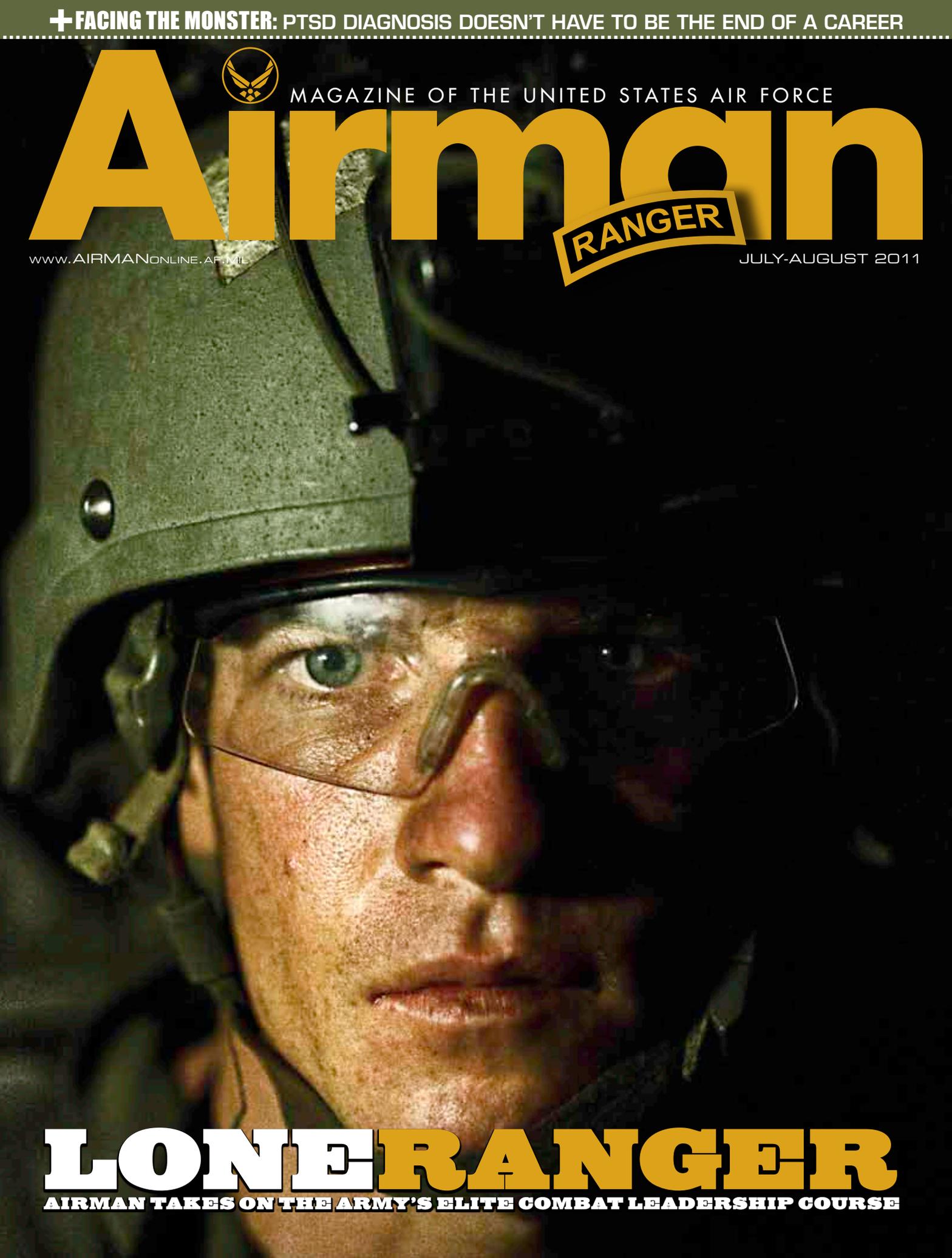
MAGAZINE OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

# Airman

**RANGER**

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JULY-AUGUST 2011



# **LONE**RANGER

**AIRMAN TAKES ON THE ARMY'S ELITE COMBAT LEADERSHIP COURSE**



# INDEPENDENCE DAY



4 JULY 2011

Airman



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### OPERATION TOMODACHI: MISAWA HELPS

"As long as there is a need out there, we want to get people to help."



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### OPERATION TOMODACHI: TEAM YOKOTA

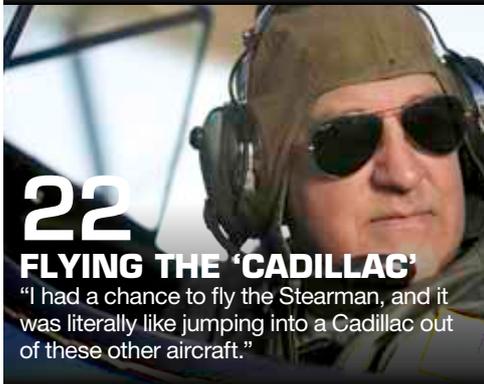
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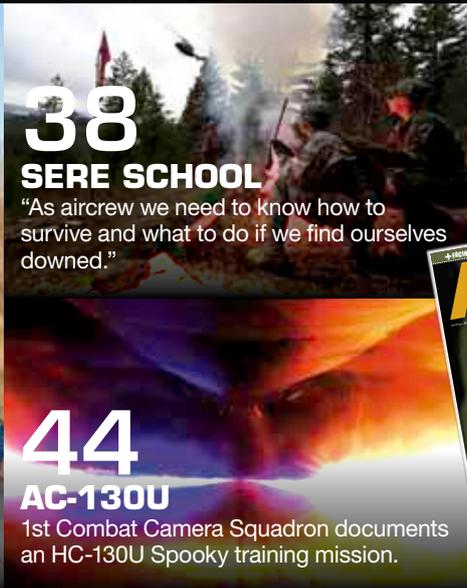
"What we do is teach these guys breaking points ... they're learning what's down here, in their hearts."



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### On the Cover

Air Force Staff Sgt. Edward McCorkell recently graduated from Army Ranger School, the Army's elite combat leadership course.

photo by  
Tech. Sgt. Bennie J. Davis III

design by  
Luke Borland





# Airman

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publish and it helps me to stay informed with what is Air Force is doing worldwide. The stories and information this magazine provides is vital for me and my fellow Airmen because we are a geographically separated unit stationed in Marietta, Ga., on the Lockheed Martin facility and this magazine helps us stay connected to the Air Force. Please keep producing this great magazine.

**Master Sgt. Ronald A. Tann Jr.**  
*Aviation Maintenance Manager*

I received a copy of **Airman: The Book 2011**. At first glance at the cover, I thought it was an Army or Marine publication.

I was further dismayed when I saw the occupational badges. Everybody has a badge now and the pilot's wings are down at the bottom.

I understand it is now politically correct to downplay the role of the pilot in the USAF.

While all those badges represent important roles, when it come to delivering the goods in peacetime or war, it doesn't go without the pilot, but it can go without many of those represented by the many badges.

**Ashton Violette**

## "JAKE" ON DISPLAY



I was thumbing through the **Airman Magazine** [from] November-December 2010. On page 2, you have an article about "The Best of Jake." Just to let you know, we have 13 original Jake cartoons hanging in our USAF Enlisted Art Gallery here at Lackland [Air Force Base, Texas].

**Minnie Martinez**

photo by Staff Sgt. Levi Blendeau





**Staff Sgt. George Rincon, 447th**

Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron, observes an Iraqi airman during a firing drill. Members of the 447th ESFS train Iraqi Security Forces airmen on weapons and teach defensive tactics, vehicle searches and other force protection measures.

**1. Tech. Sgt. Mark Shertzer**, 535th Airlift Squadron, watches a C-17 Globemaster III as its engines start up. The C-17 delivered supplies from Yokota Air Base, Japan, to Sendai Airport for humanitarian assistance after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Steffen



1

**2. Senior Airman John Pura**, 353rd Special Operations Maintenance Squadron, works through the night on an MC-130P Combat Shadow at Yokota Air Base. The MC-130P supported Operation Tomodachi emergency relief efforts.

**3. An F-15E Strike Eagle** from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C., demonstrates its maneuverability at the Charleston Air Expo at Joint Base Charleston, S.C. The F-15E is a multi-role fighter aircraft, capable of air-to-surface attack and air-to-air combat.

**4. U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Eddie Morgan (left) and Airman 1st Class Kyle Selsor (right)** drag Royal Air Force Senior Aircraftsman Gareth Dight to safety during a Desert Eagle exercise at the Nevada Test and Training Range.

photo by Staff Sgt. Chad C. Strommeyer



2

photo by Senior Airman Brett Clashman



4

photo by Airman 1st Class James Richardson



3



**Tech. Sgt. Robert Graham,** 375th Operations Support Squadron S.E.R.E specialist, moves toward an oncoming aircrew during a combat survival training at the Illinois Army National Guard's Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Ill. S.E.R.E instructors train aircrews on the basic to advanced techniques of survival, evasion, resistance and escape.

## 1. U.S. Air Force Academy

senior Brittany Dutton prepares for the uneven bar competition during the 2011 USA Gymnastics Collegiate National Championships, held at the academy's Cadet West Gym. Dutton tied for first on the uneven bars. The Falcons placed third in the team championships the following evening.

photo by Mike Kaplan



## 2. A Romanian Air Force High

Altitude Low Opening paratrooper awaits his signal to jump out of a U.S. Air Force C-130J during a combined HALO jump over a landing zone near Campia Turzii, Romania.

This jump was conducted as part of Carpathian Spring 2011, an exercise promoting understanding and strengthened alliances between U.S. military members and their Romanian counterparts.

## 3. Senior Airman Samantha

Whisman looks over her tools before preparing an F-22 Raptor for a training mission during Red Flag at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev. Airman Whisman is a crew chief assigned to the 90th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska.

photo by Tech. Sgt. Jocelyn L. Rich



photo by Tech. Sgt. Michael R. Holzworth





1

**1. An Airman from the 1st Special Operations Security Forces Squadron** takes notes during a simulated burning vehicle scenario in an Emerald Warrior exercise at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. Emerald Warrior is a U.S. Special Operations Command-sponsored, multiservice exercise designed to leverage lessons learned from operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom to provide trained and ready forces to combatant commanders.



2

**2. A B-1B Lancer releases a Guided Bomb Unit-32** during a sortie on the Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., range. The bomber from the 7th Bomb Wing at Dyess AFB, Texas, participated in the week-long air-to-ground weapons system evaluation program known as Combat Hammer. (Courtesy photo.)

**3. Senior Airman Kevin Benberry**, 51st Maintenance Operations Squadron, carries a box of flares at Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea. The base is practicing increased security measures during the 2011 Pacific Air Forces Command Operational Readiness Inspection.



3

**4. U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Mathew Harrington**, a Precision Measurement Equipment Laboratory journeyman assigned to the 57th Maintenance Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., conducts maintenance on a 53 plug-in unit, which is used to calibrate an oscilloscope. An oscilloscope is a electronic instrument used for measuring electronic sound waves.



4

# OPERATION TOMODACHI:

## MISAWA HELPS

PHOTOS AND STORY BY SENIOR AIRMAN JOE W. MCFADDEN

**H**irosaki Naozo waded knee-deep in sludge while searching for anything salvageable where his living room used to stand.

Four months ago, the 79-year-old bought a brand new house along the coast of Northern Japan. He and his wife had hoped to spend the rest of their lives together there.

During the afternoon of March 11, an estimated 60-foot-high wave, moving 500 miles per hour, decimated his house and the entire village in seconds.

Mr. Naozo had little time to head to higher ground on a motor scooter with his wife and their two grandchildren, carrying only the clothes on their backs. Instead of spending their nights in the new house's spacious bedrooms, he and his family sought refuge in the gym of a local junior high school.

"I spent so much money on our home, and now it's gone," he said. "We can't move back here. Not after this."

Countless others lost everything in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami. After the waves subsided, the Japanese people would not be alone in their recovery efforts.

In the early stages of Operation Tomodachi, Misawa Air Base's 35th Fighter Wing Airmen created Misawa Helps, a consolidation of manpower, resources and logistics dedicated to lending a hand outside the base gates.

Airmen could, as their mission requirements and supervision allowed, give their time and energy to work alongside civilians, dependents, joint service members and Japan Self-Defense Forces in areas requesting assistance.

Capt. Tyler Harris from Misawa

said the aspect of volunteerism is second nature for Americans.

"For me, this is part of the culture of being an American," Captain Harris said. "This is what we do. We try to get in and help as quickly as possible to provide relief and sustain it. As long as there's a need out there, we want to get people to help."

Misawa Helps projects are self-sustaining. Teams bring their own food, tools and vehicles and do not seek anything from the villages they assist.

Within a month of the disaster, nearly 2,000 people participated in more than 40 missions in Japanese communities like Misawa, Hachinohe and Noda-mura. "As a member of the Air Force, I'm very proud that we're able to help and that the leadership has been so supportive of this effort," Captain Harris said. "It's a really great



feeling to know that everyone in the community is behind this effort.”

According to Captain Harris, Noda-mura’s officials contacted Misawa Helps requesting aid after reading news articles about Americans’ assistance in Hachinohe.

On March 29, 40 Airmen, Sailors, Marines, Soldiers and civilians left Misawa for the first cleanup effort at Noda-mura. Volunteers spent the two-hour bus ride to the village sharing their experiences from Operation Tomodachi. They all fell silent as the farmland scenery gave way to the devastation of flattened houses, overturned cars and the endless horizon of former possessions and wreckage.

“I had seen stuff on TV about the damage, but to see 50-foot fishing vessels in the middle of parking lots was just breathtaking,” Captain Harris said.

Staff Sgt. Seth Russell had less than 24 hours notice to go to Japan from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, to serve as an

**FOR ME, THIS IS PART OF THE CULTURE OF BEING AN AMERICAN... THIS IS WHAT WE DO. WE TRY TO GET IN AND HELP AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO PROVIDE RELIEF...**

— Capt. Tyler Harris

interpreter between Japanese and American military members.

Between removing debris and translating, he carried a stack of photo albums to a collection point. The pages reminded him of his own

family and their special ties to the country.

“My wife Seika is from Hachinohe, which is not very far from here,” Sergeant Russell said. “My grandfather was a Navy gunner on the USS Illinois. His job was to shoot down kamikazes in World War II. He told me he was very proud of me when I married [Seika] and that it was a sign of how far we’ve come. Now that I’m here, I feel like it’s part of my home and I’m going to do whatever I can each day until it’s done.”

When U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Garret Williams, a motor transport operator at Camp Foster in Okinawa, Japan, heard about the quake on the TV news, he had no idea he would see the damage firsthand.

While hauling fallen tree trunks and ruptured walls to designated collection points, he became aware

**Nearly 40 volunteers** traveled from Misawa Air Base to Noda-mura, Japan, to help clean the coastal village after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. These salvageable items, found among the rubble, were sorted, cleaned and returned to village leadership for redistribution.



**(left) Volunteers** lift a car that was overturned in Noda-mura during the tsunami. Noda-mura's leaders requested cleanup aid after hearing from other villages about the Misawa Helps program.

**(top right) Misawa Helps** volunteers remove a damaged building wall from the cleanup site in Noda-mura.

**(bottom right) U.S. Marines** carry a downed tree away from the wreckage. The Misawa Helps volunteers who participated in Noda-mura included Airmen, Sailors, Marines, Soldiers and civilians.

of personal items, buried under layers of seawater and dirt, left behind by villagers. As he stooped down to pick up them up with his leather gloves, he noticed a concentration of plastic toys in a particular area.

He asked an interpreter to translate the figures on the lonesurviving gatepost and realized the area he and his fellow Marines had been clearing out was once an elementary school.

The interpreter told him the children evacuated before the wave arrived, but their belongings struck a chord with Corporal Williams.

"This was a toy that probably belonged to a three-year-old, and now I was holding it in my hands," Corporal Williams said. "It makes you stop and think about what happened to these people. Seeing all this destruction, I can't imagine what they're going through."

Not all volunteers wore military uniforms. Joe Conley, a range patrol officer at the Misawa Air Base bombing range, removed housing fragments alongside both American and Japanese service members.

Mr. Conley has lived at Misawa for the last 16 years. His team had a ten-minute warning to evacuate their Oceanside range, but he said he

understood how many people didn't have time to blink.

"You just go through this stuff and feel like you're prying in someone's life," Mr. Conley said. "When you pick up the Sheetrock of a wall, that's one thing, but when it's someone

**IT MAKES YOU STOP AND THINK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THESE PEOPLE. SEEING ALL THIS DESTRUCTION, I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT THEY'RE GOING THROUGH.**

— Lance Cpl. Garret Williams

else's dishes, cups or glasses that they recently used and washed, it's really different. This isn't just 'debris,' all of this belonged to someone, and it's what they had to decide to leave behind. It makes you think what you would do if you were in the same situation and what you would leave, too."

While disasters can force people to part with their possessions for good, they can also influence others to leave their surroundings to help.

Matthew Szymanski sat on his living room couch and watched the tsunami's damage unfold on his television in Oxford, Mich. Less than a year after completing 16 years of service, the retired U.S. Army first lieutenant decided to buy a plane ticket to Japan on St. Patrick's Day.

He wanted to help others for as long as he possibly could. The former Soldier said it wasn't devastation like the kind in Noda-mura alone that motivated him to make the trip.

"This is a phenomenal culture, and [the Japanese] deserve all the help they can get," Mr. Szymanski said.

"Being back with my brothers and sisters in uniform while doing what we're doing here is as close to the military as I can get. It still holds true that when people need help, we'll be there to do it."

During a break, Captain Harris and a Japan Self-Defense Force soldier surveyed the village to see how much progress had been made and which areas to concentrate on next. Shingori Wada, an administrative specialist assigned to the 35th Civil Engineer Squadron, translated between the two officers.

Like many people at Misawa Air Base, his memory of the tsunami's



effects on the Eastern shoreline was fresh. In signing up with Misawa Helps, he wanted to help his homeland.

“This is my country’s national crisis, and I thought I needed to do something,” Mr. Wada said. “I appreciate the American people’s support for Japan, and I’m honored to work as a channel between our peoples.”

He eventually became the program’s lead coordinator with the Japanese community and played an integral role in communication and arrangement of future group projects. Mr. Wada said he will remember those tasks for a long time.

“When we finished our work at Oirase Town Beach, we asked some of the local people if what we did was OK, and some of them were about to cry,” Mr. Wada said. “I almost did, too, because, any time we can see that type of cooperation with the local community, it makes me feel happy.”

After collecting the various toys, dishes and clothes, volunteers handed the personal effects to U.S. Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Thachbich Dinh, who used available rags and water to clean and sort the items before handing them back to the villagers.

Petty Officer Dinh was walking beside his Japanese fiancé at a zoo

when the quake struck. Within days, he and his fellow Sailors from the USS George Washington flew on the same Navy C-9s and helicopters he maintains to deliver supplies and personnel for Operation Tomodachi.

“This isn’t a training mission, but rather something that we just do,” Petty Officer Dinh, an aviation structural mechanic based at Atsugi Air Base, Japan, said. “This is assistance for the people who need it the most right here. If America went through a similar situation, I know they would help us. We’re all human beings.”

As they prepared to leave Nodamura, the Misawa Helps group took all the salvageable items they had collected throughout the day, including stacks of retrieved cups, teapots, plates, books, toys, containers and other items to a collection point headed by the Japanese military.

Japan Self-Defense Force Col. Takeshi Hirano, 26th Regiment commander, expressed his appreciation to the group.

“The U.S. Forces are a well-disciplined and well-managed organization and know how to support a disaster relief mission,” he said. “I was inspired by both their hard work with the buildings and attention to detail for smaller things like books

and glasses. To me, when we support operations, it is important to get the same feeling with the people at the site who lost houses and family members.”

In addition to addressing the progress the teams made that day, Colonel Hirano pointed out the significance of the timing of Operation Tomodachi.

“Last year, I supported a field training exercise with military soldiers in Aikado during the 50th anniversary of the U.S.-Japanese bilateral alliance,” he said. “It was no coincidence that we can cooperate together again for these relief efforts.”

Although the tsunami forever altered the landscape of Nodamura and the charge of its recovery remains, the town’s residents can count on the help of a united force of American Airmen, Marines, Sailors, Soldiers and civilians to help them recover.

As Mr. Naozo heads back to the school gym with a few of the recently uncovered items to comfort his family, perhaps the most valuable items cannot be measured in dollars or yen.

“I’m grateful that my family is all right,” Mr. Naozo said. “I give my thanks to the U.S. military and the Japan Self-Defense Forces for helping us here.”

**(left) Tech. Sgt. Marcel Colombo** carries a concrete block from the cleanup site to an area for salvageable items and materials.

**Capt. Tyler Harris** (left) discusses the relief effort with Japan Self-Defense Forces Col. Takeshi Hirano.



# OPERATION TOMODACHI:

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## TEAM YOKOTA

STORY BY BETH GOSSELIN AND STAFF SGT. J.G. BUZANOWSKI  
PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. SAMUEL MORSE

**M**arch 11 started out as a promising Friday at Yokota Air Base. It was the last day of the 374th Airlift Wing's week-long operational readiness exercise and Airmen were looking forward to spending time outside of work with family and friends. At noon, Col. Otto Feather, the wing commander, declared the exercise officially over and Airmen breathed a sigh of relief.

No one could have known that the real work was about to begin.

That afternoon, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake struck the coast of Japan, triggering a devastating tsunami. Entire towns were destroyed; people's lives changed forever. The earthquake not only moved the entire country of Japan eight feet, it shifted the planet's axis.

Yokota's Airmen prepared to respond. Many of the skills they'd been practicing that week were about to be put to the test. Around the rest of the Air Force, Airmen stood by, waiting for the call to do their part.

Officials dubbed it Operation Tomodachi, meaning "friends" in Japanese. Airmen around the globe would call it the highlight of their careers.

## "WELCOME TO YOKOTA AIR BASE"

The lessons learned during the ORE immediately paid off when 11 airliners were diverted to Yokota because they couldn't land at Narita Airport, 80 miles away. After refueling each aircraft, two planeloads of people, about 600 in all, asked to stay the night. Yokota Airmen took responsibility for their care and feeding.

In phase I of the ORE, Airmen had actually practiced receiving an influx of people and cargo in a contingency scenario.

"During the exercise, we used the Taiyo Community Center and specifically practiced how we'd bed down and feed a large number of people," said Chief Master Sgt. James Russell, the 374th Force Support Squadron superintendent. "When we knew how many people would be staying from the diverted planes, we put our plan into play: 'X number of people means we use X facility and need X number of meals.' Having a plan ready to go allowed us to make it happen with little to no notice."

The next morning, the civilians were escorted back to their planes and the flights continued their journey to Narita.

## REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE

Over the next several weeks, service members and civilians from each service arrived at Yokota, the main hub for humanitarian relief efforts. Representatives from several government agencies and non-governmental organizations traveled to Yokota to do their part as well.

Kadena Air Base sent six HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters and four MC-130P Combat Shadow aircraft as well as Airmen from several units.

"This is the kind of thing most of us joined the Air Force to do," said Tech. Sgt. Michael Fletcher, an air transportation craftsman with the 353rd Special Operations Group.

In addition to the more than 1,600 people supporting Operation Tomodachi, thousands of pounds of relief supplies were shipped to Yokota. To handle the increase in work, Airmen from the 730th Air Mobility Squadron partnered with their 374th Logistics Readiness Squadron "port dog" brethren.

"Neither of us could accomplish the mission without the other squadron's help," said Master Sgt. Stanton Murrell, 374th LRS section chief, small arms terminal. "On routine missions, we both have our part to do. But here we had to come together, or else this never would have worked."

With plans in place to handle the additional cargo deliveries at Yokota, officials needed a way to get it all to the Japanese people.

## STANDING UP AT SENDAI

The Air Force found that Sendai Airport in Miyagi Prefecture was the most important target to begin supporting relief operations. Although severely damaged from the tsunami, experts determined it was in the best location to become a forward-operating staging area for relief forces.

Aerial reconnaissance showed Sendai Airport was a disaster — cars littered the runway, debris had piled up inside the terminal, there was no power.

"We'd seen photos of the airfield, and it was just a mess. But we were confident we could get a plane in

there, so we headed out." said Col. Dwayne Lott, the 353rd Special Operations Group senior representative at Sendai. "It took us two days to get to Sendai because of the weather. We made our way by Humvees with all the capabilities special operations forces have to bear. We were surprised when we arrived, because the Japanese had already cleared most of the cars off the runway. To us, that meant we were in business."

With cooperation from Japanese aviation authorities, the Airmen were able to land an MC-130P there March 16. With Sendai Airport open to fixed-wing aircraft, loadmasters and schedulers from Yokota's 36th Airlift Squadron worked to process the first large load of U.S.-provided humanitarian assistance.

## HEAVY LIFTING

The first C-17 Globemaster III arrived at Sendai Airport March 20 with a forklift, four pallets of water and six pallets of blankets and food.

"That was a big day for us; there was so much Japanese media here for that first C-17 landing," said Capt. Joseph Booker, director of operations for the 320th Special Tactics Squadron from Kadena. "Landing the C-17s here meant more cargo per mission and larger pieces of equipment could be delivered, but really, it was bigger than just greater airlift capability. If the Japanese saw we could land a C-17 at Sendai, they'd realize it was only a matter of time before commercial aircraft would be back."

After Airmen unloaded the planes and sorted everything in their makeshift supply yard, representatives from the Japan Self-Defense Force delivered it to the hardest-hit communities.

In addition to the food, blankets, medicine and other relief supplies, C-130 Hercules crews from Yokota Air Base's 36th Airlift Squadron and Globemaster crews from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, moved more than a million pounds of bottled drinking water donated to the government of Japan by three Japanese companies.

Sendai reopened as a functional commercial airport under Japanese control April 13, just one month after the disasters.

**A UH-60 Blackhawk** helicopter prepares for takeoff during an aid and relief mission March 28 at Sendai Airport, Japan.



**(top left) Airmen,** Marines and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force members load cargo onto a JGSDF truck at Sendai Airport.

**(bottom left)** Members of the 353rd Special Operations Group from Kadena Air Base, Japan, unload a pallet of humanitarian aid from a C-17 Globemaster III at Sendai Airport.

**(right) Demolished** cars sit in rows at Sendai Airport, waiting to be towed away. The March 11 tsunami left a wake of crushed cars and other debris that needed to be cleared before the airport could resume normal operations.

“Sendai had been written off forever,” Colonel Lott said. “The key to our success was maintaining respect for our Japanese hosts and partners. They asked us for our help, and we were there. That’s what ‘tomodachi’ — good friends — do for each other.”

### PREVENTING NUCLEAR MELTDOWN

With the humanitarian relief efforts in full swing, officials had another issue at hand. The 23-foot tsunami severely damaged the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant, 130 miles away. While workers labored around the clock to prevent any further catastrophe, Yokota Airmen were called to help.

A team of five Airmen and two Japanese nationals drove through the night March 15 to deliver a P-22 fire truck to experts working to stabilize the plant. The 36th AS also delivered seven pallets of boron via C-130 Hercules to aid the effort. The chemical absorbs radiation, keeping it from affecting an area.

The 374th Contracting Squadron helped the government purchase Australian water pumps, which were then delivered to Yokota by two Royal Australian Air Force C-17s.

The pumps, however, didn’t fit the Japanese hoses. Airmen from

the 374th Maintenance Squadron designed and built a series of components to link the two.

Two teams of four Airmen on 12-hour shifts designed and created the necessary adapters, pressure valves and other pieces so Japanese crews could use the pumps to augment the plant’s cooling system. The pumps were put into use the next day to transport fresh water into the plant instead of ocean water, which leaves corroding salt residue when it evaporates.

One of the designers, Airman 1st Class Jeremy Hamblin, a 374th Maintenance Squadron metals technician, said he was excited about the challenge of the project and the chance to aid the Japanese people in their time of need.

“We were all wishing we could be a bigger part of everything that was going on,” he said of Operation Tomodachi. “Now we know we’ve had a direct impact in helping cool the reactors. It’s nice to know we were there for (the Japanese) when they needed us.”

### PREPARING FOR THE WORST

With the proximity to the Fukushima reactor, bioenvironmental engineers from the 374th Aerospace Medicine Squadron developed strategies for a hazardous material waste removal

system as well as radiation decontamination procedures for aircraft, vehicles, equipment passengers and military working dogs.

The Airmen partnered with the 374th Civil Engineer Squadron and Soldiers from the 71st Chemical Company to provide radiation screening for more than 550 aircraft. The joint team also provided 24-hour air sampling, personal dosimeter monitoring and occupational health tracking for every active duty, DOD civilian or DOD contractor who worked in the immediate vicinity of the Fukushima plant.

Additionally, the team ensured all food products at Yokota were safe for consumption by working side-by-side with the Army’s Veterinary Command.

“Airmen of the 374th Airlift Wing were well trained and prepared for the critical task of ensuring the safety of our food, water and air — both for Yokota residents and our Japanese hosts,” said Lt. Col. Norman West, 374th AMDS commander. “It’s what we do every day, and we do it well.”

As a further precaution, Pacific Command officials directed bases to distribute potassium iodide tablets to all active duty, civilians and family members March 21. Airmen from the 374th Medical Support Squadron’s Medical Logistics Flight acquired,



stored and distributed tablets to all parties within days.

## MANAGING THE DEPARTURES

When the U.S. State Department announced March 17 that family members based in Japan could voluntarily leave the mainland, Airmen coordinated the process to help more than 1,100 Team Yokota members relocate.

For the Airmen and family members who remained at home, child-care became a primary concern. Like most organizations around base that employed family members, manning at the child development centers at Yokota was a challenge.

Although combined, the Yume and Kibo CDCs lost a total of 24 staff members and 75 children, the standard of care provided to children remained the same. The staff even incorporated natural disaster training into lesson plans to help kids cope with the changes.

"I think it helps that we talk with the children about what happened," said Esther Brown-Robinson, director of the Kibo CDC.

## MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH

In the wake of the voluntary departures, natural disasters and long hours at work came new and

added stressors. The 374th Medical Operations Squadron facilitated a seminar called "Thriving through Adversity" specifically designed to help those who stayed behind.

Medical professionals taught ways to deal with stress, including how people should focus on being positive and productive and how they can take control of elements in their own lives. The seminar taught how situations can bring out an inner strength and fortitude some might not know they possess.

"Going through a natural disaster, coping with the aftermath and dealing with family separations are ultimately things that make people stronger," said Maj. (Dr.) Mikel Merritt, a clinical psychologist with the 374th MDOS.

## KEEPING INFORMATION FLOWING

Keeping the base population and families abroad informed about Operation Tomodachi took a great deal of effort by the wing public affairs office.

Capt. Tania Bryan, 374th AW chief of public affairs, expressed her appreciation for everyone at Yokota who supported the public affairs mission. Airmen at all levels helped with engagements with American and international media outlets, as well as with community relations

events, such as the open house cherry blossom viewing.

Through stories and photos posted on the Yokota website, base-wide emails, media engagements and postings on the wing's Facebook page, the PA team helped keep the public informed about current events and issues, ultimately providing rumor control and quelling panic.

The staff also produced the daily, "Tomodachi Times," a newsletter with news and features about Airmen supporting the operation.

## AND THE NUMBERS DO THE TALKING

Since the natural disasters hit, Airmen have flown more than 630 missions. On those sorties, they've delivered more than 2.4 million pounds of cargo; 74,913 gallons of fuel and more than 900 passengers to support Operation Tomodachi.

Behind these statistics stood a team of Airmen who from day one continually rose to the occasion and completed the mission.

"This was truly a team effort by everyone at Yokota, both those permanently stationed here and those who deployed in support of Operation Tomodachi," Colonel Feather said. "The call to help came from our host nation and our Airmen stood up and answered it proudly." 

### (top left) Tech. Sgt.

Eugene Scott (left) from Misawa Air base, Japan, acts as a translator, coordinating cargo movement with members of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force at Sendai Airport, which became a hub for aid missions after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

### (bottom left)

Senior Airman Steven Nizbet, 320th Special Tactics Squadron pararescueman, looks for trapped survivors. Members of the 320th STS deployed to Sendai Airport to help clear the runway and make it ready for fixed-wing aircraft traffic.

### (right) Members of

the 320th Special Tactics Squadron assess the damage at Sendai Airport.

# TEAM CARE



STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✪ PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. DESIREE PALACIOS

## WILFORD HALL'S ER STAFF WORKS TOGETHER TO TREAT ANYONE AND ANY AILMENT

**W**hen Danielle Fino, the wife of military training instructor

Staff Sgt. Joseph Fino, first walked into the Wilford Hall Medical Center emergency room because of ear pain, the lobby was virtually empty, and she was on her way home in 20 minutes.

When she returned a day later at the end of a four-day holiday weekend, nearly 80 patients were waiting in the lobby.

Unpredictability was the way of life in the WHMC emergency department at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, said Airman 1st Class Gina Calcaterra as the medical technician took Mrs. Fino for a computed tomography scan that helped determine an infection in the mastoid bone behind her ear.

"Part of what draws people to emergency medicine is you never know what's coming through the door next," said Maj. (Dr.) Craig Goolsby, 59th Medical Wing staff emergency physician. "You just have to be ready to take care of whatever happens and stabilize their emergency. It's like any other job, some of it becomes mundane. But on the other hand, there's always that

excitement of never really knowing what you will see next."

However, the WHMC emergency department staff members fully knew what was coming this summer, when what was once the Air Force's only Level 1 trauma center was scheduled to consolidate with trauma and higher acuity functions at Brooke Army Medical Center on Fort Sam Houston, on the east side of San Antonio.

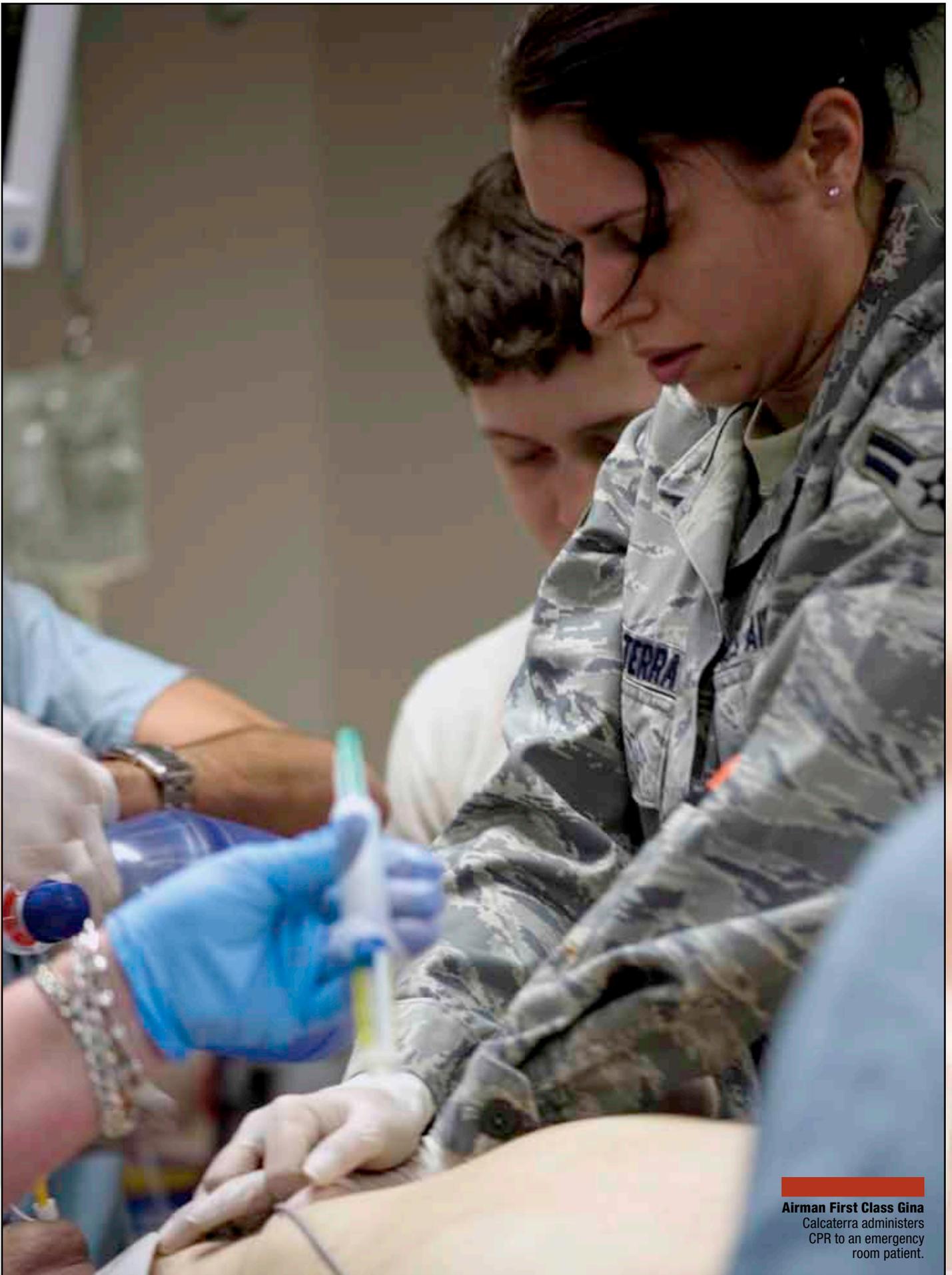
The Defense Base Realignment and Closure law of 2005 mandated the realignment of the wing's inpatient medical function to BAMC to create the San Antonio Military Medical Center. WHMC's emergency department would transition into an urgent care center called the Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center. About half of the patients who were coming to the WHMC emergency room will be able to receive treatment in the new urgent care center, which would provide acute and non-emergency care to eligible Department of Defense beneficiaries 24 hours per day, according to the 59th MW's emergency medicine chairman. The emergency department staff advised patients with severe symptoms to go to BAMC or their closest emergency department after the move, Dr. Goolsby said.

Unlike urgent care centers, emergency departments are prepared for all types of medical emergencies, and Wilford Hall's was no exception, Dr. Goolsby said. While the active-duty emergency department didn't see as many severe cases as its counterparts in civilian hospitals, the staff was prepared to respond to its share of life-threatening emergencies. The ER staff treated an average 50,000 patients a year.

"A lot of civilian emergency departments tend to be really busy on Saturday nights," Dr. Goolsby said. "Everybody here is assigned to a primary doctor and insured through Tricare, so they don't get the advanced stages of untreated disease you see in a community practice. We have a very compliant patient population overall. I think that tends to keep them out of the end-stage disease states you see in a community setting.

"Now certainly, when we're deployed, the emergency departments there see very high acuity and much more severe trauma than what we'd typically see in civilian emergency room departments. We're fully equipped to see all the stuff everyone else does."

About an hour after Airman Calcaterra took her patient for her



**Airman First Class Gina Calcaterra** administers CPR to an emergency room patient.



**Capt. Joseph Maddry** checks a CPR patient's foot for indications of a pulse and blood perfusion.

CAT scan, she and registered nurse Capt. Paige Warren received a page for a call that demonstrated Dr. Goolsby's point. A San Antonio Fire Department medic team was bringing in an 84-year-old cardiac arrest patient who had been found unconscious in his home about a mile and a half from Lackland. The rescue team arrived about 8:45 p.m., and the emergency medicine team, including Captain Warren and Airman Calcaterra, surrounded the patient's bed. They worked for about 45 minutes, trying to revive the patient, but were unable to save his life.

Fortunately, the majority of patients the emergency department staff treated came in for considerably less life-threatening situations. Administrative assistants signed in the typical patients, and a triage technician usually screened them to determine the most severe cases.

"The physicians will then see them," Captain Warren said, "and [nurses] try to see them at the same

time, so patients don't have to tell their story so many times. It doesn't always happen like that because we get busy. Once the physician orders X-rays or lab work, we try to communicate with [the patients] to let them know when the results will be back."

Less critical patients were diverted to the Super Track program, Dr. Goolsby said. Physician assistants treated Super Track patients so doctors and examination rooms were reserved for more critical patients, and allowed those with colds and sore throats to receive treatment more quickly.

"This process is designed for patients who need very few resources, such as only one X-ray or lab test," Dr. Goolsby said. "The process allows exam rooms to be saved for sicker patients, while less sick patients get in and out quicker than if they went through the traditional process."

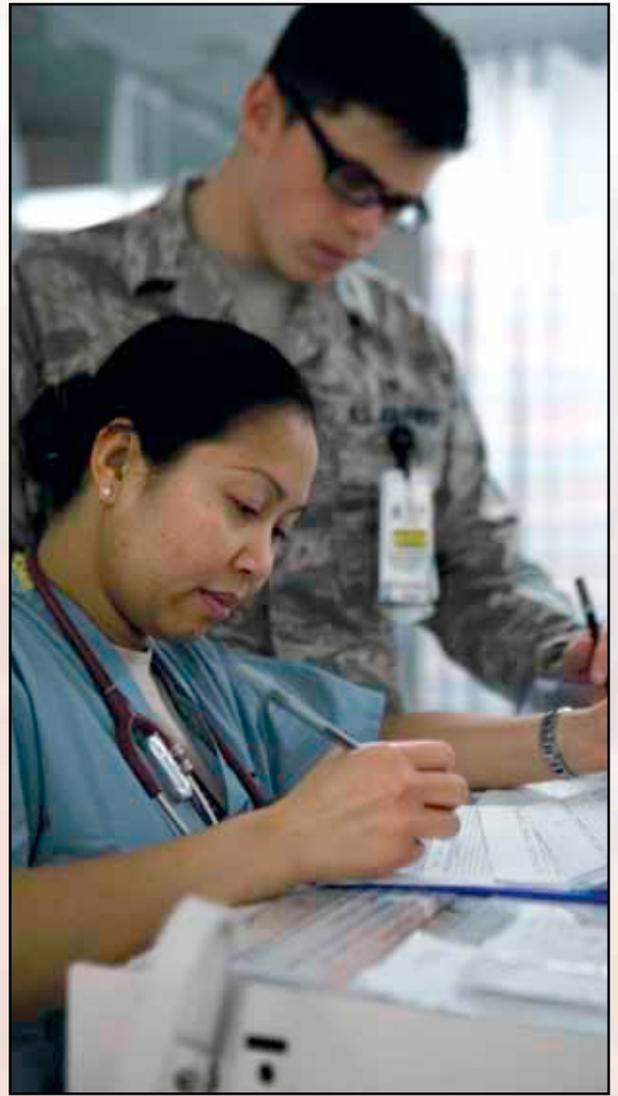
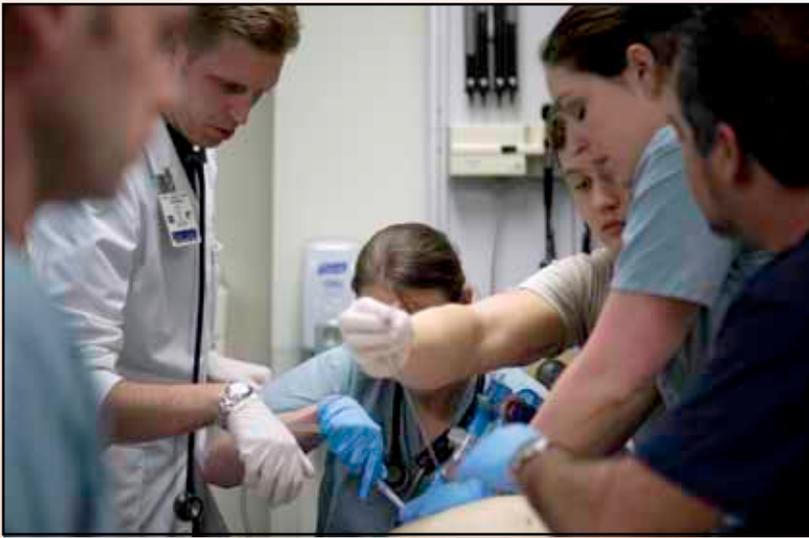
Staffing the WHMC emergency department requires the

collaboration of everyone from physicians, nurses and medical technicians to administrative assistants and support staff like radiology technicians and emergency medical services crews who transport patients.

"Emergency medicine is definitely a team sport," Dr. Goolsby said, "probably much more so than many other areas of medicine. You work routinely with a wide variety of people in different roles."

When medical technicians like Airman Calcaterra arrive for duty, they ensure all rooms are stocked and they have all the equipment the staff will need for the shift. Airman Calcaterra's first responsibility was to check on the ambulances because her primary duty that night was EMS. The department received an average of four EMS calls a night, along with about 150 patients per day, Dr. Goolsby said.

"Working in the ER as a med. tech. is definitely different from any



other clinic you can work in,” said Airman Calcaterra, who expected to be deployed to Iraq during the department’s move to BAMC this summer.

first choice in nursing school at East Carolina University, but she spent four months in an emergency department and found she loved the variety of the cases, especially

## EMERGENCY MEDICINE IS DEFINITELY A TEAM SPORT, PROBABLY MUCH MORE SO THAN MANY OTHER AREAS OF MEDICINE. YOU WORK ROUTINELY WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT ROLES.

— Maj. (Dr.) Craig Goolsby

“The hours are different, and you get a lot more hands-on training. With [intravenous therapy], chest compressions and running EMS, we get to do a lot of things other med techs don’t get to do.”

Before Captain Warren joined the Air Force, she worked in a Level 1 trauma center in Greenville, N.C. Labor and delivery was the captain’s

trauma. However, just as the WHMC emergency room rarely resembles those depicted on TV, working in an emergency department also has been different than she imagined.

“I guess you always think it’s going to be like it is on TV, and it’s definitely not,” Captain Warren said. “A lot of times, you get your butt kicked. Obviously, sometimes

you get really sick patients, and one minute they’ll be talking to you, and the next minute, they’re not.

“Regardless of how hard you work or how much effort you put into it, some patients still don’t have a good outcome. It’s especially hard with pediatric patients, and you just never forget some of them. You just have to learn from it.”

Like Airman Calcaterra, what Captain Warren loves about working in the emergency department is that every day, like almost every patient, is different. Each day brings a new challenge, like the tail end of a four-day holiday weekend when there are 84 patients in the waiting room because all clinics and doctor’s offices are closed.

“I like that it changes every day,” Captain Warren said, “and I like the different challenges the ER brings. It’s never like when you work certain floors, and you only see orthopedic or cardiac patients. We see a little bit of everything.” 🦋

**(top and bottom left)** Maj. (Dr.) Craig Goolsby oversees medical personnel as they try to revive a patient paramedics brought into the emergency room.

**(right)** 1st Lt. Maria Inguillo and Airman First Class Austin Wylie fill out patients’ paperwork at Wilford Hall Medical Center, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

**Air Force Reserve**

Tech. Sgt. David Brown takes flight in his PT-17 Stearman. Sergeant Brown is a medical materiel craftsman with the 459th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Joint Base Andrews, Md.





# Flying the Cadillac

RESERVE NCO SHOWS OFF  
PT-17'S ACROBATICS FOR  
AIR SHOW PASSENGERS

STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✦ PHOTOS BY TECH. SGT. BENNIE J. DAVIS III

**N**avy pilots called the PT-17 Stearman "The Yellow Peril." Former President George H.W. Bush considered it one of the most challenging planes he flew during World War II. Army Air Corps and Navy pilots trained in the planes, and fewer than 3,000 remain today. But an Air Force Reserve technical sergeant chose to buy one of the blue and yellow two-seat biplanes because of their acrobatic versatility and their history.

Tech. Sgt. David Brown in his PT-17 was the first to fly over the U.S. Air Force Memorial during its dedication ceremony on Oct. 14, 2006. He discovered the plane after first flying the Piper J-3 Cub, Piper L-4 Cub and 1929 Fleet Biplane in the Flying Circus Air Show in Bealeton, Va.

"All of those were kind of cramped on the inside," Sergeant Brown said. "Then, I had a chance to fly the Stearman, and it was literally like jumping into a Cadillac out of these other aircraft."

"The Navy called it 'The Yellow Peril' [because] cadets would sometimes wreck them when they would land a little crooked," Sergeant Brown said. "A new pilot without a lot of experience will land in a crosswind, flip off the runway, and the next thing you know, you're upside down in a ditch, and you don't know what happened."

"But the fact that it is challenging makes it an airplane that's respected in the aviation community." The medical materiel craftsman with the 459th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Joint Base Andrews, Md., paid \$12.50 for his first ride in a PT-17 at the Flying Circus when he was in high school. He's been with the Flying Circus himself since he first joined the show as a ground crew member in 1975 and now takes passengers for about 10 minutes of loops, spins, rolls and hammerheads, a maneuver in which he pulls the plane upward and stalls in mid-air before making a steep, spiraling descent.

**(top) Sergeant Brown** stands on top of his PT-17. He offers open-cockpit rides and flight instruction in addition to working his full-time civilian job as an area maintenance engineer with the Virginia Department of Transportation.

**(bottom) Before** taking to the skies, Sergeant Brown straps on his leather flight helmet.



“When we pull away, I get [passengers] on the microphone and talk to them about what we’re going to do,” Sergeant Brown said. “I find out if they have any flight experience and if they’re a thrill-seeker or not, so I’ll know what to expect.

“If I get somebody who’s a little apprehensive, I’ll take it easy on them. I always tell them, ‘You’re in control of the flight. This is your ride and I want you to enjoy it.’ I want them to come down and say, ‘This is the best thing I ever did. I want to come back and do it again.’”

Sergeant Brown earned his private pilot’s license in 1979 and first entered active duty after he earned an ROTC commission, but was denied pilot training because his eyesight didn’t meet Air Force standards. Instead, he served four years on a Titan II missile crew in the 373rd Strategic Missile Squadron at Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark., and received his discharge in December 1986, just before the missile system was deactivated the following year.

Next, he tried to land a job with the commercial airlines, but opened Brown Aviation after he earned his flight instructor’s certificate. He gives open-cockpit rides and flight instruction, while working at his full-time job as an area maintenance engineer with the Virginia Department of Transportation. Sergeant Brown joined the Air Force



Reserve as a staff sergeant in 1996, 10 years after leaving active duty as a first lieutenant.

He flies with the call sign, "Air Show," but calls his plane, "No Bucks, No Buck Rogers," a reference to a line in the movie, "The Right Stuff."

Sergeant Brown bought his first plane, a 1946 Aeronca Champ, while still on active duty and later bought a Jungster 1 biplane. In 2002, he bought his PT-17 for \$75,000.

"I jokingly say the Air Force would never let me fly one, so I had to go buy my own," Sergeant Brown said. "My first official mission was when I flew over the [Air Force] Memorial. I said to myself, 'I had to wait a long time, and I had to buy my own Air Force airplane to do it, but I've got my first mission here.'"

Retired Gen. John P. Jumper, Air Force chief of staff at the time, wanted a PT-17 as the first airplane in the lineup, Sergeant Brown said. Organizers discussed using Ross Perot Jr.'s Stearman, but due to the logistics of flying it from Texas, they searched the Washington area and found the sergeant through the Stearman Restorers Association.

Just flying into Andrews alone turned into an adventure. Sergeant Brown filed his flight plan with Potomac Approach, but when he pressed the button to talk to air traffic controllers, it broke and

swung on a wire under the panel. He peeled off his gloves, grabbed the wire and flew the plane with his elbow on the stick while he held the two wires together to talk on the radio.

"Every time I would hear the guy, I'd put my elbow on the stick and put the wires together to talk to him," Sergeant Brown said. "I did that all the way to Andrews with no co-pilot in the airplane. I said to myself, 'Please don't call me while I'm on the approach because I can't land this airplane and hold the wires together at the same time.'"

"When I landed on the runway, I switched the radio to ground control, and the guy in the tower at Andrews told me, 'For the oldest airplane on the field, you sure have the clearest radio.'"

While he wasn't able to fulfill his dream as an Air Force pilot, Sergeant Brown is proud of the role he plays in introducing air show passengers to his historic airplane and his

work as a reservist in an aeromedical squadron. He especially felt the importance of his job while on annual tour with his squadron at Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

"That really hit home with me when we were working on a trailer with medical supplies that were going to Afghanistan to set up a field hospital," he said. "I knew that [trailer] wasn't going to be opened again until somebody needed it in a combat situation. When it got over there and they opened this thing up, they were going to be saving soldiers' lives with this equipment."

"I'm not flying [F-16 Fighting Falcons], but I'm in a flying unit, I still get to ride on the aircraft occasionally and I'm still associated with the best Air Force in the world." 🦅

**(top) Sergeant Brown** takes in the view from the cockpit of his PT-17.

**(bottom) Sergeant Brown** flies over the Air Force Memorial, located in Arlington, Va., during its dedication ceremony in October 2006.



courtesy photo

# LONE RANGER

## AIRMAN TAKES ON THE ARMY'S ELITE COMBAT LEADERSHIP COURSE

STORY BY TECH. SGT. MATTHEW BATES ✪ PHOTOS BY TECH. SGT. BENNIE J. DAVIS III

**S**ixty-one days. Sixty-one days of trudging through mud, rain, mountains and swamps. Sixty-one days of very little food and even less sleep.

Sixty-one days of running, shooting, climbing, rappelling and crawling. Sixty-one days of fighting with terrain, exhaustion and the demons telling them to quit.

This is Army Ranger School, the U.S. Army's elite course that takes top notch Soldiers, breaks them down and turns them into efficient and capable combat leaders.

But the school isn't just for Soldiers. Any male service member in any branch of the military, including some foreign militaries, can attend Ranger school.

The Air Force has been taking advantage of this fact since the Vietnam era, sending hundreds of Airmen to Fort Benning, Ga., to earn the coveted Ranger tab. In today's military, where Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors and Marines can all be found working side-by-side on the front lines, having combat leadership skills is quickly becoming an essential tool in many Airmen's bags.

For some Airmen, these skills are more important than others.

Staff Sgt. Edward McCorkell is one of them. He's a tactical air control party member from Pope Army Air Field, N.C., and his job sees him spending a lot of time around the Army.

He's the latest Airman to attend Ranger school. If being the only Airman in Ranger school bothers him, Sergeant McCorkell doesn't show it.

"When I deploy, I eat with [Soldiers], sleep with them and am pretty much always around them," he said. "This is nothing new for me ... being around the Army."

Sergeant McCorkell is one of hundreds of young men who funnel into Fort Benning each year eager to take on the infamous Ranger school. Some come to prove they are up to the task; some because they have to; and others simply because they want to.

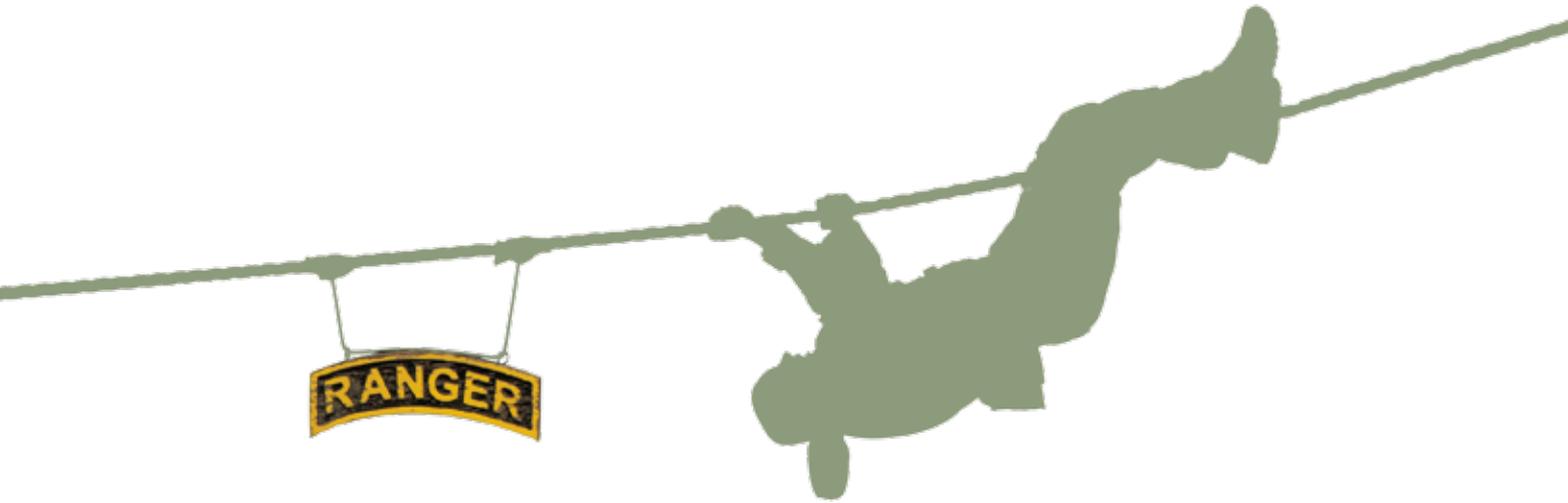
No matter his reason, each Ranger student has one goal in mind: make it through and earn that Ranger tab.

Unfortunately, many won't.

"Ranger school is tough. Real tough," said Sgt. Maj. Dennis Smith, command sergeant major of the Ranger Training Brigade. "But it's tough for a reason. We have to make sure these guys can lead and make decisions in combat situations, and if you can't hack it, you get weeded out."



**Staff Sgt. Edward McCorkell**, a tactical air control party member, participates in a simulated Taliban compound assault during field training at Army Ranger School.



## **HIS RESPECT VALUE AUTOMATICALLY GOES UP BECAUSE THAT AIRMAN DID NOT HAVE TO GO TO RANGER SCHOOL. HE CHOSE TO GO TO RANGER SCHOOL.**

— Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Clark

Statistically, for every person who graduates, one won't. The attrition rate at Ranger school is nearly 50 percent, a figure that is repeatedly hammered into the minds of the Ranger students.

"Before I even got here, I knew it would be tough," Sergeant McCorkell said. "The instructors are always saying things like, 'Only half of you might make it.' But they're just trying to get in our heads, playing mental games."

Which, at its core, is what Ranger school is all about. While the course is physically demanding, every phase is designed to break the students down and see how they can function in a high-stress environment when they are tired and hungry, weak and sore, and being asked to push themselves past normal limits.

"[The course] takes you to a whole new level," said Col. John King II, RTB commander. "It lets you see things, experience things you never thought possible."

This test begins from day one. The first phase

of Ranger school, the assessment phase, is a no-holds-barred, punch-you-in-the-gut-and-see-if-you-can-keep-going event. Here, the students will take a physical fitness assessment — which consists of doing 49 push ups in two minutes, 59 sit ups in two minutes, running five miles in less than 40 minutes and then knocking out at least six pull ups — complete an intimidating combat water survival course and navigate several exhausting obstacle courses.

All of this is designed to break the

students down and see where they stand physically.

"We call this the 'crawl' phase," said Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Clark, a Ranger school instructor. "And it's where we typically see a lot of students dropping out."

Some get injured, some fail and others simply quit. But for Sergeant McCorkell, neither of these was an option.

"I kind of knew what to expect coming in," he said. "A couple of the guys I work with already went through the course and let me in on what it would be like."

The sergeant listened to their advice and trained hard before getting to Benning, which he believes helped him significantly.

"I mean, were those first few days easy? No," he said. "But I definitely felt more prepared and ready to do it."

Still, making it through the assessment phase meant moving on to more frequent and difficult challenges.

The next phase, the mountain phase, takes the students to a small

**Ranger students** deploy from a CH-47 Chinook into the Florida forest to conduct assaults. During this 10-day phase of training, the students are challenged with fast-paced, highly stressful exercises to evaluate their overall Ranger training.



**During mountain phase training, Sergeant McCorkell (right) rappels past a fellow Ranger school student who loses control of his ropes.**

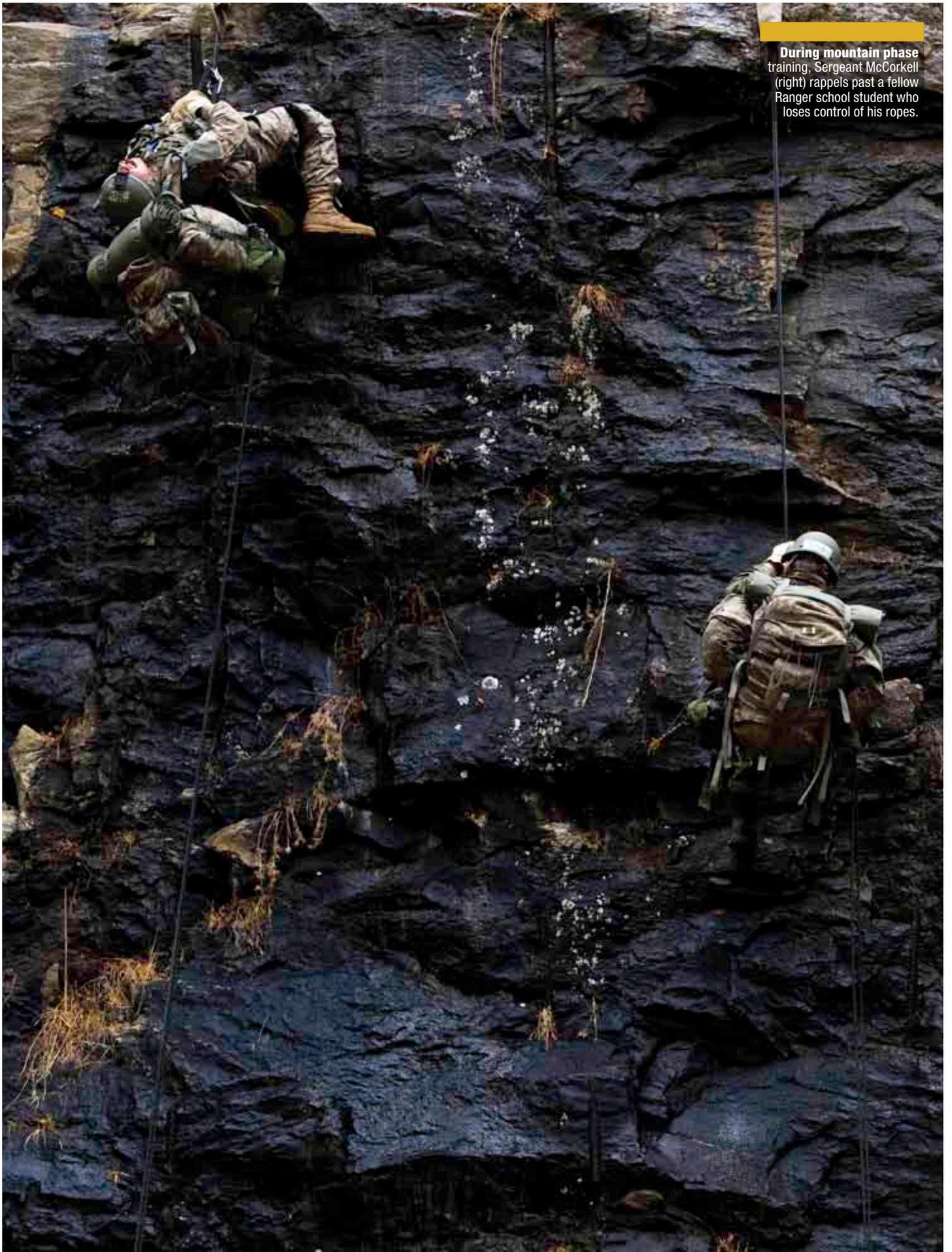
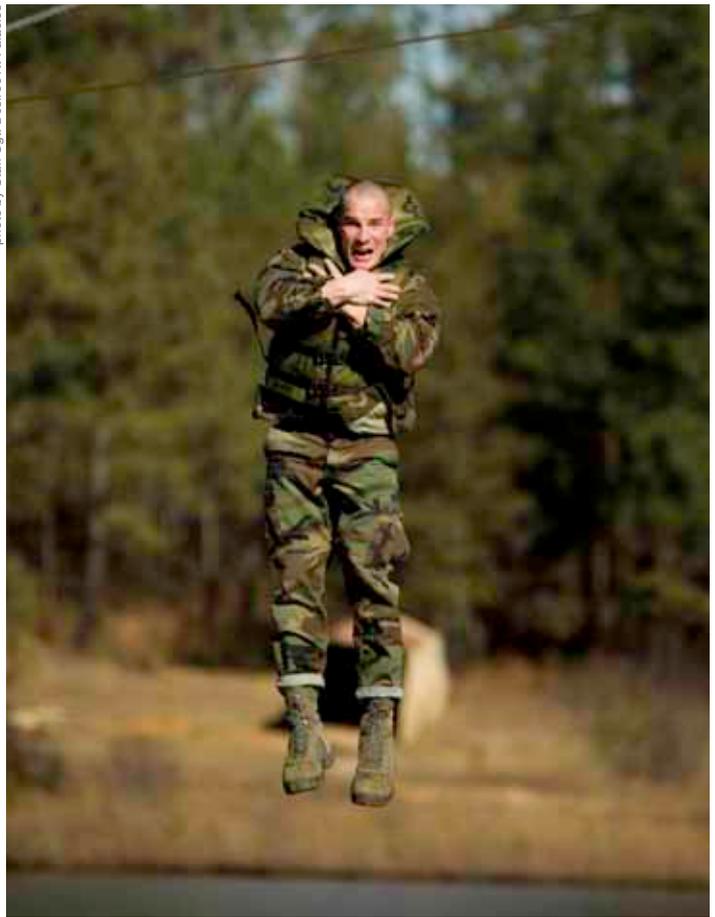




photo by Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios



**(clockwise from top)** Sergeant McCorkell controls the radio for his unit during a simulated assault of a Taliban compound on a day of field training in a Florida forest.

**Sergeant McCorkell** falls into a lake after letting go of a rope during training at Ft. Benning, Ga.

**While carrying his ruck,** Sergeant McCorkell utilizes a rope bridge to cross a stream during mountaineering training.

camp in the rocky slopes of northern Georgia, where they learn basic mountaineering skills.

Also called the “walk” phase, this part of Ranger school teaches students how to tie knots, rappel, scale a cliff and conduct patrol operations in a mountainous environment.

“For me, this was the toughest phase by far,” Sergeant McCorkell said. “It was cold, damp and lugging a heavy rucksack around that kind of terrain is just murder on your body.”

Life gets especially difficult when the students get very little sleep, a tiny bit of food and are fighting physical exhaustion.

“What we do is teach these guys breaking points,” Sergeant Clark said. “They aren’t necessarily learning Army doctrine; they’re learning what’s down here, in their hearts.”

Those who make it through the rigors of the mountain phase move on to the third and final phase in the swamps of Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. The students learn how to perform combat operations and movement in a swampy, jungle-type environment.

All of the tools and tactics the students learned up to this point are also now put to use. Instead of being told where to go and what to do, the

students are given missions and then are responsible for planning and executing them.

“If the first two phases are crawl and walk, then this is definitely the ‘run’ phase,” Sergeant Clark said. “It’s where we see if these guys can take what we’ve taught them and put it to use.”

The students do this by conducting several water- and airborne assault operations, where they are graded on their ability to lead, follow and execute the mission.

“They’re basically saying, ‘We gave you the tools, now go out and use them,’” Sergeant McCorkell said.

At this point, it’s basically a go or no-go for each student. The instructors evaluate each student and if he demonstrates effective leadership capabilities, then he graduates. If not, he is either recycled or sent home.

“It’s tough, because you start thinking, ‘I should’ve done this or that better,’” Sergeant McCorkell said. “Then you start wondering if they’re going to let you graduate.”

He didn’t have to wonder for long, though. The instructors gave him a go, and he graduated as part of the fourth class of 2011.

Tired, hungry, sore. A Ranger.

It didn’t matter he was an Airman,

or that he wore stripes on his arm. Now he was also wearing a small tab on his shoulder that said “Ranger.” Along with the tab, he earned respect from his Army counterparts.

“Most of these Soldiers are here because they had to be,” Sergeant Clark said. “His respect value automatically goes up because that Airman did not have to go to Ranger school. He chose to go to Ranger school.”

With the Ranger tab comes more responsibility. Each graduate is held to the high standards that make Rangers who they are.

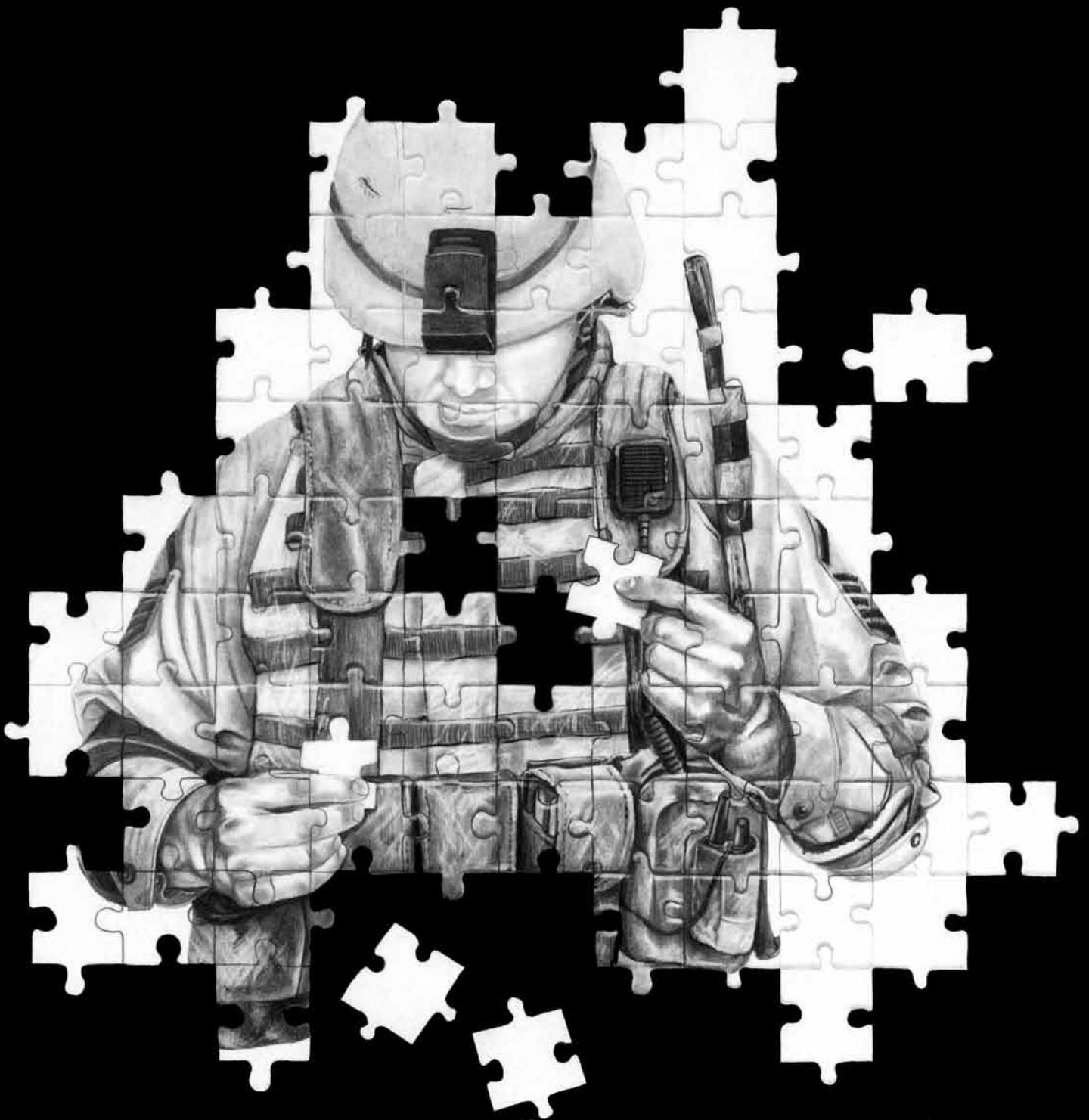
“Rangers lead the way,” Colonel King said. “These individuals will now go back to their units and push their Soldiers. They can speak with authority and from experience, knowing they have pushed themselves further than they thought possible. Knowing this, they can hold their Soldiers to a higher level as well.”

The sixty-one days have come and gone. The exhaustion, hunger and pain have vanished. In their place sits a small piece of fabric, embroidered with one word — a word that garners respect, exhibits dedication and sums up the wearer’s character.

Ranger. 🦅



**Air Force Staff**  
Sgt. Edward McCorkell (center) is the Lone Airman in his Army Ranger School class at Camp Frank D. Merrill, Ga., during the mountain phase of Ranger training.



# Facing the Monster

COPING STRATEGIES AND AVAILABLE TREATMENTS OFFER HEALING FOR AIRMEN SUFFERING FROM PTSD

STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✦ PHOTOS BY TECH. SGT. BENNIE J. DAVIS III

**T**he sound of a helicopter hovering above a Boston park snapped Maj. (Dr.) Derek Speten's thoughts from a relaxing day with his family back to a trauma bay in Iraq. For Capt. Kevin Lombardo, the sight of blood on his face in a recurring nightmare convinced him his mind was still struggling to cope with witnessing a deadly rocket attack on a Humvee. Master Sgt. Justin Jordan found himself disassociating for hours and driving 20 mph on an Albuquerque interstate.

Their symptoms and triggers may vary, but all three men were among the many Air Force members who have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder after returning from deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Something's going to trigger it," said Dr. Speten, commander of the 66th Medical Group Diagnostics and Therapeutics Flight at Hanscom Air Force Base, Mass. "That trigger could be a smell or a sound. You might hear a helicopter or the backfire of a muffler and see somebody jump to the ground and lie there for a second. Other people may laugh and think it's funny, but the thing that's not funny is that person has gone back to their trauma."

When Dr. Speten first saw the two Soldiers who were brought to the Joint Base Balad hospital trauma bay after being hit with an improvised explosive device Feb. 14, 2007, he initially thought his patient's wounds weren't as severe as the other patient's. The Soldier had third-degree burns, but he'd applied tourniquets to his companion's leg to keep him alive until they could reach the trauma bay.

When Dr. Speten looked into his patient's throat, he saw the Soldier was severely burned internally. the doctor's head trauma surgeon decided the burns weren't survivable, so the patient was moved to end-of-life comfort care. While they know they're easing the patient's suffering, playing a role in end-of-life comfort care is usually traumatic for any medical professional, Dr. Speten said.

"It's psychologically devastating to most people who are involved in it because you're in the career field to save people, not to euthanize patients out in the combat zone," he said. "You want to save everybody. The problem you have is you don't get that opportunity all the time. You just have to remind yourself you're not the reason they're there."

Before the patient was moved, he told Dr. Speten he didn't want doctors to cut off his wedding ring. Because the doctor didn't yet know the severity of the injuries, his main concern was the risk of cutting off circulation and losing the finger. This would haunt him later after he returned from Iraq.

"Before I looked into his throat and saw what his airway looked like, I would've thought he was going to come out of that trauma bay," Dr. Speten said. "The guilt factor came in for me when I had to stop him in mid-sentence. I told him we needed to secure an airway and he could tell me everything once he woke up. The problem was he didn't wake up."

Thirteen months after Dr. Speten treated the IED victim, on March 12, 2008, Captain Lombardo responded to an attack on an armored Suburban near the main gate at Contingency Operating Base Adder in Iraq. The

**THE SMELL, SOUNDS, SIGHTS, TOUCH AND EVEN TASTE ARE STILL THERE FROM THAT DAY. YOU GO FROM BEING IN IRAQ TO THE NORMAL DAY-TO-DAY SETTING ON AN AIR FORCE BASE.**

— Capt. Kevin Lombardo

attack killed three of the five Soldiers in the vehicle, but Captain Lombardo, an Air Force security forces officer serving as provost marshal for the base, saved one of the two survivors. He moved Army Sgt. Joel Tavera a safe distance from the truck, put a tourniquet on his leg and talked with him for the next half-hour to keep him conscious.

Later, Captain Lombardo dealt with the aftermath of the attack, including a memorial service for the three Soldiers killed in the explosion. Several months after he'd returned to his home station at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., he began to feel the emotional repercussions of seeing three comrades die so violently. The captain



photo by Mark Wyatt

**Inspired by a patient he treated at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, Maj. (Dr.) Derek Speten began running competitively to cope with emotions related to post-traumatic stress disorder. Dr. Speten ran the 2010 Boston Marathon in his patient's honor.**

**Major Lisa French,** a staff psychologist at Wilford Hall Medical Center on Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, demonstrates the virtual-reality system that addresses a post-traumatic stress disorder patient's desire to avoid revisiting violent and unpleasant memories from their trauma. Therapists can add in sounds, sights and even smells to help the patient access the experience.



"The smell, sounds, sights, touch and even taste are still there from that day," said Captain Lombardo, now the Security Forces Academy director of operations at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. "You go from being in Iraq to the normal day-to-day setting on an Air Force base. Physically, I was fine, but I knew I wasn't as mentally sharp as I was."

Recent Air Force efforts to address PTSD include the Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy Application for Post-traumatic Stress, now available at mental health clinics at Andrews, Eglin, Elmendorf, Lackland, Langley, McGuire, Travis and Wright-Patterson Air Force bases. The virtual-reality program addresses the patient's avoidance to re-visit violent and other unpleasant memories from their trauma. In a controlled setting with a therapist's guidance, patients put themselves back among the sights, sounds and smells of the original trauma with either a scene of a foot patrol in an Iraqi city or a Humvee convoy in Afghanistan or Iraq. Therapists can add in sounds of helicopters, explosions and dogs barking and even smells such as burning rubber, body odor, diesel fuel, and weapons firing.

"The intent is to be able to utilize a variety of senses whenever you're doing the exposure," said Dr. Kellie Crowe, director of Wilford Hall Medical Center's PTSD Clinic at Lackland. One of the PTSD clinic's missions is to train psychology interns in PTSD treatment, so they can treat it at their next duty station and in Afghanistan and Iraq, Dr. Crowe said.

"Some people are unwilling or unable to do the imagining part that's

necessary," she said. "The virtual reality assists those people in bringing back those senses. Avoidance is the primary symptom that maintains PTSD. This kind of puts it right there in front of them and allows the therapist to work with them to start abating that emotional distress."

Sergeant Jordan's PTSD service dog, an English bulldog named Dallas, helps him fight the avoidance behaviors he's learned are part of his PTSD. Before he became the Air Force Inspection Agency's lead checklist program manager at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., the sergeant worked on numerous mortuary affairs cases at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz.

"On my last deployment, I sent 71 guys home in a box," he said as Dallas slept at his feet on the floor. "You just have to put it into a place in the back of your brain."

**EVERYONE OF US EXPRESSES GUILT  
BECAUSE AS YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN,  
WE'RE TAUGHT TO SUCK IT UP AND  
QUIT BEING LESS OF A MAN OR WOMAN.  
WITH PTSD, THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE.**

— Master Sgt. Justin Jordan

The one death Sergeant Jordan couldn't compartmentalize happened in September 2007 when a friend was killed in a forklift accident on base. He sought help and was treated with a form of rapid eye movement therapy. He thought he'd put his PTSD behind him after he left his mortuary affairs duties for the AFIA assignment, but within months after arriving at Kirtland, he witnessed a shooting at a building just outside the base gate. Two people

were killed and four were wounded before the shooter killed himself.

"It reverted me right back to where I was, and the flashbacks were worse," Sergeant Jordan said. "I was driving home 20 mph down the highway because I was positive the tires were going to pop. It seems silly and juvenile, but you could be sitting right next to me and tell me, 'Dude, everything's going to be fine.' It wasn't going to be fine to me. This was about to happen now."

"The overwhelming thing that I think we all have in common is the unwillingness to want to have PTSD. Everyone of us expresses guilt because as young men and women, we're taught to suck it up and quit being less of a man or woman. With PTSD, that's impossible."

Just as the original traumatic events that trigger PTSD and the symptoms vary, each patient responds differently to treatment. The two most common effective types of treatment, according to a number of PTSD experts, are cognitive processing and prolonged exposure therapy. The WHMC PTSD Clinic staff predominantly has used these approaches with the approximately 170 patients who have been treated.

Cognitive processing allows patients to understand how their thoughts about what happened can intensify their symptoms. Often, this helps patients who somehow blame themselves for a traumatic event. Through exposure therapy, patients learn to change how they react to painful memories.

"Both therapies are exposure-based," Dr. Crowe said. "Prolonged exposure has the individual access the memory,

both in imagining while in a session with the provider, but also in real life, where they go out and do homework assignments to start re-engaging in things they were avoiding, like restaurants and movie theaters. That allows them to build confidence in reintegrating back into the things they enjoy.

"The face of PTSD has changed so much. PTSD is treatable, and we have evidence-based treatments to support that. Generally, there's not a

## DID YOU KNOW

**PTSD** is an anxiety disorder that may affect people who have experienced extremely stressful and traumatic events, including a violent attack or witnessing someone die.



**Master Sgt. Justin**  
Jordan shares affection his  
PTSD service dog Dallas, an  
English bulldog who helps  
him fight the avoidance  
behaviors he's learned are  
part of his PTSD.

## ACCORDING TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS WEBSITE, SYMPTOMS OF PTSD INCLUDE:

- ✦ Reliving the event (also called re-experiencing symptoms)
- ✦ Bad memories of the traumatic event come back, feeling the same fear and horror, having nightmares or flashbacks
- ✦ Avoiding situations or people that trigger memories of the traumatic event, including talking or thinking about the event
- ✦ Feeling numb and finding it difficult to express feelings
- ✦ Feeling an absence of positive or loving feelings toward other people and avoiding relationships
- ✦ Losing interest in enjoyable activities
- ✦ Inability to remember parts of the traumatic event or to talk about them
- ✦ Feeling keyed up (also called hyperarousal), jittery or being on the lookout for danger
- ✦ Suddenly becoming angry or irritable
- ✦ Developing a hard time sleeping or concentrating
- ✦ Fearing for one's safety
- ✦ Becoming abnormally or easily startled
- ✦ Drinking or drug problems
- ✦ Feelings of hopelessness, shame or despair
- ✦ Employment problems
- ✦ Relationship problems including divorce and violence



**Capt. Kevin Lombardo** and Army Sergeant Joel Tavera have forged a bond from their suffering. Sergeant Tavera was injured during a mission in Iraq. Captain Lombardo was the first on the scene to administer aid.

career impact just from seeking treatment. The career impact comes when the symptoms get out of control. It would be unfortunate for someone to get to that point when there are treatments available.”

Sergeant Jordan has found that his PTSD service dog, which was trained through the Paws and Stripes non-profit organization, helps him curtail his symptoms before they can get out of control. He received permission from the AFIA commander to bring Dallas to work each day. Dallas has her own area near Jordan's desk and will tug on his shirtsleeve several times an hour to keep him from “zoning out.”

“She can sense my brain chemistry,” Sergeant Jordan said. “When it changes, if I'm having an attack, she'll climb in my lap or bark at me because it scares her. She won't let me stay in that situation. A lot of times, I have to keep her calm, so I can't go to that place.”

Both Dr. Speten and Captain Lombardo benefitted from cognitive processing therapy as they gradually accepted their PTSD. With Dr. Speten, the breakthrough came when he found a therapist who'd actually experienced life in a war zone. They also each found something they considered special outside of counseling that had a direct impact on their recovery.

Captain Lombardo built a friendship with the Soldier he saved and found himself inspired by Sergeant Tavera's attitude through his long rehabilitation and numerous surgeries. Through his own therapy, Captain Lombardo learned the blood on his face in his recurring nightmare belonged to Sergeant Tavera. On the day of the attack, a firefighter poured a bottle of saline over his head and hands to wash blood from his face after the sergeant was taken from the scene.

“His inspiration and fight made



me realize I needed to stop second-guessing myself for that day," Captain Lombardo said. "Obviously, you have that line with officer and enlisted. The line's still there with us, but it merged a lot on March 12, 2008, just as the line did between Army and Air Force. He's my new wingman, and I'm hopefully his battle buddy now."

Dr. Speten took the wingman concept to a new level after losing his patient in the Balad trauma bay. When he learned the Soldier had been an avid runner who dreamed of running the Boston Marathon, Dr. Speten decided to run the race in his honor. The doctor trained for more than a year and competed in seven smaller marathons before he finished the Boston Marathon in April 2010. Whenever training became tough, he thought of the Soldier who'd not only endured a horrific attack before succumbing to his injuries, but helped save the life of his companion by

applying tourniquets to his partially severed leg.

"Whenever I thought about quitting, I just thought about what this person went through," Dr. Speten said. "Then, [my discomfort] became almost insignificant. It actually made me feel better and I think it was part of the healing process."

After Dr. Speten completed the race, he mailed his Boston Marathon jersey, T-shirt and medal to the Soldier's family. He continues to run races in honor of fallen service members and often runs with his 5-year-old son in a stroller in some of the smaller events. He believes this also has helped his recovery.

"Whenever you get deployed, your family's on the back burner, and when you come back, it's nice to be able to do something that allows you to be involved with them," Speten said. "He doesn't need to know why right now. He understands that we run, and we'll

give the medals to people who are deserving of them. Every time we do this, it gets people out there to know that there are people still coming back. These are people who had goals and dreams, and they're not just going to go away. Just because that person is no longer here to compete it doesn't mean somebody else can't pick up the torch and carry it for them."

One thing Airmen returning home from deployments can learn from stories like those of Dr. Speten, Captain Lombardo and Sergeant Jordan is to be proactive about their own treatment. Active-duty members can request an evaluation at their mental health clinic and have rights to confidentiality as long as they do not pose a threat of injury to themselves or others, Dr. Crowe said.

Simply because Airmen haven't identified symptoms yet doesn't mean they escaped unscathed from trauma they experienced or witnessed. The worst thing they can do is to try to hide their challenges for fear of losing their career, family and friends. After finding the help they needed, Captain Lombardo found peace when he learned the source of the blood in his disturbing dreams and Dr. Speten is no longer afraid of helicopters.

"It's a scar," Dr. Speten said. "Somebody's put holes in me, and you can't cover them up. The holes are still visible, but it doesn't affect how I live the rest of my life." 🕊

## SOME EXPERTS ESTIMATE

1 in 3 military members who deployed for Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom have PTSD.

In the five-year period between 2003 and 2008, the number of Airmen diagnosed with PTSD more than doubled, according to testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee by then-Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Carrol H. "Howie" Chandler. The number jumped from 600 to more than 1,500.

The Air Force is trying to help its Airmen who develop PTSD, especially while deployed in a combat zone. The service opened a \$5 million Deployment Transition Center at Ramstein Air Base, Germany last fall to address the rising number of PTSD cases and suicides.

The VA has created a mobile app to help service members learn about and manage PTSD symptoms. For more information, go to the VA website at [www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/PTSDCoach.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/PTSDCoach.asp). The agency also has recently simplified the application process for veterans' benefits related to PTSD to accelerate access to medical care and benefits. For more information, call 1-800-827-1000.

The Air Force has established a hotline for individuals who struggle with PTSD symptoms. Service members or family members can call 1-877-927-8387 (WAR-VETS).

The Vet Center offers **FREE** counseling. Call 1-800-905-4675 (Eastern) or 1-800-496-8838 (Pacific).

# COMBAT TRAINING SCHOOL



STORY BY STAFF SGT. MARESHAH HAYNES ✦ PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. DESIREE PALACIOS

**T**he temperature is a damp 38 degrees Fahrenheit in the mountains of Colville and Kaniksu National forests, 70 miles north of Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash. There's snow on the ground and a muddy slush has formed where some of it has begun to melt. Sunlight filters through the forest's misty treetop canopies. Off the proverbial beaten path, a group of Airmen is participating in an aircraft crash scenario, trudging through thick vegetation and a natural obstacle course of fallen tree trunks, branches and limbs to find materials to build a shelter as the group awaits "rescue."

These "survivors" are Airmen participating in the U.S. Air Force Survival School's Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape training.

The training, primarily for officer and enlisted aircrew members, teaches Airmen how to "return with honor," the SERE specialist motto, if they find themselves in a combat

situation where they have to survive if their aircraft is downed.

"Obviously, we have lots of contingencies going on around the world, and as aircrew we need to know how to survive and what to do if we find ourselves [downed], said 2nd Lt. Joe Tomczak, a student and T1-Jayhawk instructor pilot at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas. "The Air Force does a great job of providing us with training in our everyday jobs, so it's logical that they would provide us training for what to do in conditions like this."

Lieutenant Tomczak said the training is especially relevant to instructors like himself, who previously weren't required to complete the course, but as the Air Force mission evolves, instructor pilots are now teaching U.S. service members to fly and are filling adviser roles for foreign military aviators.

During the 19-day course of instruction, Airmen are psychologically and physically challenged as they've never been before.

Training begins in a classroom environment where the students learn about the physical and psychological stresses of survival. For the second half of training, Airmen travel to the mountains where they get hands-on training on building shelters, finding and preparing food, land navigation, evasion travel, camouflaging techniques and other lessons. The culmination of the course sees students returned to base for their final and perhaps most challenging lesson, conduct after capture.

"We're seeing examples in Libya right now of guys who used their training, so we know it's relevant. We know it's applicable," Lieutenant Tomczak said. "The instructors do a great job of giving us examples of guys who used their training to get out of a bad situation."

During the hands-on portion of the course, the Airmen have to combat fatigue, hunger, wintery temperatures and their personal fears to complete the course successfully.



**Airman First**  
Class Neal Troyer (right) assists Tech. Sgt. John Medcalf as he radios a rescue helicopter during vector training in Colville National Forest, Wash. The vector training familiarizes students with proper protocol for guiding a rescue helicopter into position.

### Airman First Class

Luke O'Banion cuts down a tree to use for shelter and fire during overnight SERE training held in mountains near Spokane, Wash.

### Airman First Class

Kendra Chaplin (left) gathers tree branches to line the inside of her sleeping tent for more comfort. Airman Chaplin and the other SERE students had to improvise overnight shelter during the crash scenario training.

### Tech Sgt. John

Hawley teaches students how to radio a rescue helicopter during vector training, which includes protocol, authentication and using a compass to guide the rescue pilot to the group's location.



Before beginning their journey in the mountains, Airmen receive other practical instruction. Urban evasion techniques is a relatively new addition to the program. In that training, Airmen must make it through a simulated city, which is fashioned after cities in countries where service members are currently operating.

The city is complete with a marketplace and the associated sights and sounds, including religious buildings; physical obstacles, such as barbed wire and sewer systems; people in traditional local garb; the sounds of traffic, foreign languages, calls to prayer and music; and the possibility of the enemy lurking behind each corner, fence and doorway.

"My dad went through this program back in the 70s, so I grew up with stories about survival training," Lieutenant Tomczak said. "He was in [during] the Cold War time in our country's history, but they have [updated] the training to make it relevant now. When I swap stories with him, the differences will be that I learned about the contingencies that we're currently dealing with overseas and the cultures we'll encounter."

Combatives training includes hands-on lessons. Students are schooled in the ways of stopping fights and permanently overcoming enemies.

In the mixed martial arts-style lesson, Airmen are supervised and paired up with partners of similar height and weight, regardless of rank, to practice what they've learned. The barefoot Airmen square off on the mats throughout the SERE gym and display newly acquired skills by taking down, grappling with, pinning, flipping, stomping and choking their opponents into submission.

For more hands-on training, students take a nearly two hour bus ride to the mountains surrounding Spokane, Wash. With 60 lbs. of equipment, the Airmen climb a mountain for nearly 30



minutes and set up camp in preparation for more training. Their home for the night is a crude shelter constructed of whatever resources they can find.

"We prepped at 12 p.m. [the day before] and left Fairchild AFB," said Tech Sgt. John Medcalf, who is training to become an HH-60 Pave Hawk flight engineer. "We haven't stopped since then except to sleep, and it was a cold night. We slept in a makeshift tent that we made out of two ponchos and our sleeping bags."

"We learned about vectoring helicopters, about signals and evasion and how to stay concealed," Lieutenant Tomczak said. "Basically what to do immediately when you hit the ground and from that point, how to hole up, how to get concealed and how to evade the enemy."

As the lessons on the mountain continue, with scarce minutes here and there to take a quick bite of food or sip of water, one of the most anticipated and dreaded tasks is procuring and preparing food. The menu for the supper under the stars: fresh rabbit and chicken that the students will take part in killing, skinning, gutting and cooking for the group meal.

The students receive an impromptu anatomy lesson as they peel back the rabbit's skin like a glove from a hand, and cut open his belly. Then, they'll inspect the internal organs to see if the rabbit is healthy. They'll also discard the digestive organs and keep the others for their stew.

"We've also worked on a fire and later we're going to work on a rabbit," Sergeant Medcalf said in anticipation of his first hot meal on the mountain.

The students also learn how to collect water and about wild vegetation that's suitable for eating.

Once the SERE specialists have taught these Airmen the skills they need to ensure they will be able to survive on their own, the Airmen engage in a culminating exercise that will put all they have learned to the test. Only those who have endured the physical and mental challenges of combat survival school are privy to the exact details of this last lesson.

"I think anybody going through the program needs to keep in mind that they are U.S. Air Force [members]," Lieutenant Tomczak said. "That should be your motivation

to make sure you're honoring your buddies, by performing your duties in an honorable way. I think that you're doing your duty if you're staying true to the code of conduct. That provides motivation to not only get through the program, but to be in the mindset to actually go and push the mission downrange."

Once the course is complete, these highly trained Airmen will return to their home stations armed with a new skill set, knowledge and confidence to execute their missions and return with honor.

"We all have, as Air Force aircrew [members], a job in the air, but once we find ourselves on the ground that job is to evade the enemy and get back home," Lieutenant Tomczak said. "I think I've been given the tools to be able to evade and make it back home. They're not just telling you that you have to evade and eventually make contact. They're saying this is how you do it."

"I feel like if I ever encountered that situation in real life, I would at least have the competency, even though the adrenaline is going to be rushing, to fall back on this training." 🦅

**Senior Airman**  
Jordan Nichols (left) observes as his students demonstrate their fighting techniques in combat training. While at the SERE school at Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash., Airmen receive mixed martial arts instruction on how to subdue an enemy.



STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON

# LESSONS FROM SPACE

## RETIRED COL. EILEEN COLLINS RELATES SHUTTLE PROGRAM CONCEPTS TO EVERYDAY LIFE

**T**he year 1978 was almost as big a year for the space program as it was for disco. That was the year NASA officials hired their first space shuttle pilots and also opened the field to women.

Retired Col. Eileen Collins was one of four women who were chosen that year for undergraduate pilot training at Vance Air Force Base, Okla.

Eleven years after Colonel Collins completed her pilot training, a Seattle Times article called her "as hot a property as the Air Force had." She eventually became the first woman to pilot and command a space shuttle.

Despite Skylab's demise and Voyager's rough start that year, 1978 proved to be a pivotal year for NASA and the 21-year-old training pilot who would accomplish so many firsts for the space program during her 16-year career as an astronaut.

While that year was the beginning of a string of firsts during her Air Force and NASA career, Colonel Collins never considered anything impossible because of her gender, dating back to reading about famous pilots as a child. She assumed no woman had done it yet because none had tried. She would try.

"About a week before I got there, NASA sent some of their shuttle astronauts to Vance for

parachute training," Colonel Collins said. "I remember reading about it because it was in all the newspapers: 'the first women astronauts at Vance Air Force Base.'

"That was when I thought I was learning to be a pilot, so there was no reason I couldn't apply for a pilot's job on the shuttle. That was the first year I had a no-kidding, realistic chance at becoming an astronaut. Everything prior to that was just a pipe dream. So, 1978 was a real turning point for men and women at NASA."

Interest in airplanes and astronauts began early for Colonel Collins, who grew up in Elmira, N.Y. She remembers her mother getting her out of bed when she was 12 to see Neil Armstrong walk on the moon in 1969. In fourth grade, she read a Junior Scholastic article about the Gemini program. As a teenager, she read books about Amelia Earhart, Jackie Cochran and Women's Airforce Service Pilots, but also books about male pilots, particularly those in combat.

"I would read about the military side of flying, mostly because there was so much written about it," she said. "I just couldn't get enough, not just of flying, but also of POWs and how the war was fought. I had this interest in military history and strategy."

After Colonel Collins completed pilot training, she stayed at Vance as a T-38

Talon instructor pilot. Three years later, she volunteered for duty in combat fighters: the F-106 Delta Dart, F-15 Eagle and A-10 Thunderbolt II, but she had to revise her wish list because of the combat exclusionary law, which limited women's participation in combat.

She flew the C-141 Starlifter at Travis AFB, Calif., and left in 1989 for Edwards AFB, Calif., where she became the second female pilot in the Air Force Test Pilot Program. Before long, NASA officials selected her as an astronaut. Colonel Collins always believed her experience in the T-38 and C-141 gave her a major advantage with the selection board.

"I can't emphasize enough how extremely important it was for me," she said. "The T-38 is a high-performance jet aircraft trainer. You can do acrobatics, formation and instrument flying. It's the real thing. It has an ejection seat. You can kill yourself if you make bad decisions, or if the aircraft has a malfunction and you're not prepared to handle it. I got to talk on the radio, fly and navigate, all at the same time. That training is critical for flying in space.

"The C-141, on the other hand, while it wasn't flip upside-down acrobatics, the important thing about a crew airplane like that is you learn to manage a mission and you manage a crew. As

an aircraft commander, your position is very important, not just to make sure the mission is safely completed, but you have to lead your crew and manage your mission. When the astronaut selection board asked me that question, I tried to be as humble as I could, but if you think about the shuttle mission, it's actually closer to the C-141 mission than it is to flying a fighter."

Colonel Collins first piloted a space shuttle in 1995 on Space Transportation System-63, a mission that involved a rendezvous and close-approach flight test of Discovery and the Russian space station Mir. She received the Harmon Trophy for completing the historic mission as the first female shuttle pilot and returned to space two years later as pilot for STS-84 on Atlantis.

In July 1999, Colonel Collins became the first female shuttle commander on STS-93 with Columbia, which deployed the Chandra X-ray Observatory, the third of NASA's four major observatories. She and her crew had to deal with two serious incidents in the first few seconds of the mission.

"The first one was a hydrogen leak in one of our engines that started prior to liftoff," Collins said. "The second problem was five seconds after liftoff. We had an electrical short that was due to all of the shaking. One of the wire

bundles had been rubbing against a screw head during maintenance, and some of the insulation was worn off.

"The wire-to-metal contact caused an interruption of power that caused some of our water pumps to slow down and the two main engine controllers completely failed. The short was intermittent, so the power came back and the pumps restarted, but once a main engine controller fails, it's gone. Fortunately, there are two main controllers on each engine, so we didn't lose an engine. But we lost the redundancy of the controllers and that scared a lot of people. The shuttle was grounded for six months until they fixed these problems."

After the Columbia disaster that killed all seven astronauts in 2003, NASA grounded the shuttle program for more than two years. In July and August 2005, Colonel Collins commanded the Return to Flight mission on STS-114 that tested a series of shuttle safety improvements, inspection tools and fuel tank modifications, and restocked the International Space Station. She also became the first astronaut to fly the shuttle through a complete 360-degree pitch maneuver so astronauts on the space station could photograph the shuttle's underside to ensure there was no debris-related damage that could destroy the shuttle upon re-entry into the earth's atmosphere.

Although the mission was successful, a large piece of foam still fell from the tank. The shuttle program was grounded for another year until NASA engineers completely corrected the problem.

"The big decision was whether the shuttle was ever going to fly again," Colonel Collins said. "To me, the answer was obvious: the shuttle should fly again. The mission of the shuttle was to build the space station and resupply



**Retired Col.** Eileen Collins, Return to Flight shuttle commander, prepares for the launch of STS-114 in July 2005. The shuttle flight was NASA's first since Columbia crashed in 2003.

the space station. Now, we've done that; the space station is 99 percent built. The shuttle will stop flying now because the mission is essentially over."

As when Colonel Collins was named the first female shuttle commander, she faced a whirlwind of media interviews before the Return to Flight mission. However, the tone had changed because of the nation's concerns over the space program after the destruction of Challenger in 1986 and Columbia 17 years later.

"Back in 1999, when I became the first woman commander, and in 1995, when I was named the first woman shuttle pilot, a lot of it was kind of hokey," Colonel Collins said. "How does it feel to be the first woman? 'What do people think?' It was a lot of fluff, and I didn't like doing that.

"But when we got the Return to Flight mission, people at that point didn't care if it was a woman commander or not. Things were much more serious. It was all about, 'Did we learn from the accident?' 'Are

we getting the shuttle back into space and are we going to get it back safely?'

"I knew there was a need to get our message out to the country [about] what we were doing, so I did every media request I could possibly do. We just had a horrible accident, and that changes people. It changed me." Since she retired from NASA in 2006, Colonel Collins has maintained a presence in the space program. She serves as chairperson of the NASA Advisory Council Space Operations Committee and has remained busy on the consulting and speaking circuit, along with spending time with her husband and their two children. Colonel Collins also hopes to write her autobiography soon and thinks the timing is right, as the shuttle program comes to a close.

One of her biggest concerns, whether she's sharing her expertise as a space shuttle expert on the major news networks or speaking to audiences, is whether or not lessons were learned from

the Challenger and Columbia tragedies.

"Many of the lessons learned from Challenger were forgotten, leading up to the Columbia accident in 2003, which is why NASA needs to keep teaching those lessons," Colonel Collins said. "I don't care if you're working in science, aeronautics, Earth observation or human space flight, you've got to learn those lessons. They are very good lessons and apply to your family life, as well as your school or work life, even if you aren't in the space program. They are also very heartbreaking lessons.

"These lessons include being a better listener and approaching your job with a sense of humility, relying on your co-workers, thoroughly testing all the hardware and creative thinking. Yes, foam can break a heat shield. We thought there's no way this light piece of foam could break a heat shield, but it can if it's going fast enough.

"Those are very big lessons I think we need to make sure we learn."

photo by Staff Sgt. Michael B. Keller



photo by Master Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock



photo by Master Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock

photo by Master Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock

# AC-130U

**1**st Combat Camera Squadron photographers based at Joint Base Charleston, S.C., recently documented a 4th Special Operations Squadron AC-130U Spooky gunship training mission at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

The 4th Special Operations Squadron is the largest of the 1st Special Operations Wing's nine flying squadrons and employs the AC-130U Spooky gunship. The squadron plans, prepares and executes AC-130U Spooky gunship missions.

The AC-130U Spooky gunship is the primary weapon of Air Force Special Operations Command. Its primary missions are close air support, air interdiction and armed reconnaissance. The U model is an upgraded version of the H and is equipped with side firing, trainable 25mm, 40mm, and 105mm guns.



photo by Staff Sgt. Michael B. Keller

photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Lovelady

AIRMAN

AIRMAN

AIRMAN

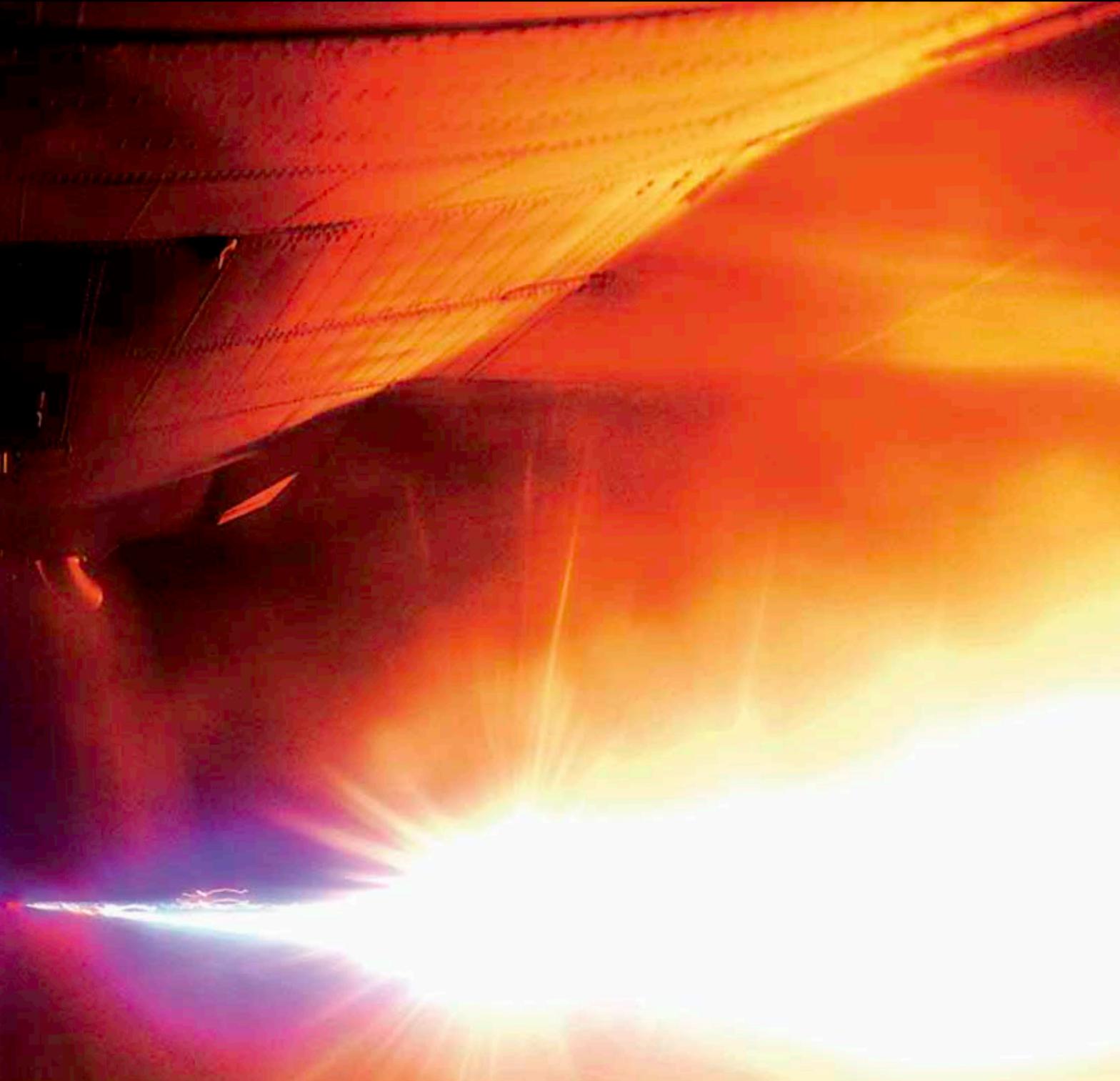


photo by Staff Sgt. Joshua L. DeWitts



photo by Master Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock



photo by Staff Sgt. Michael B. Keller



photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Lovelady



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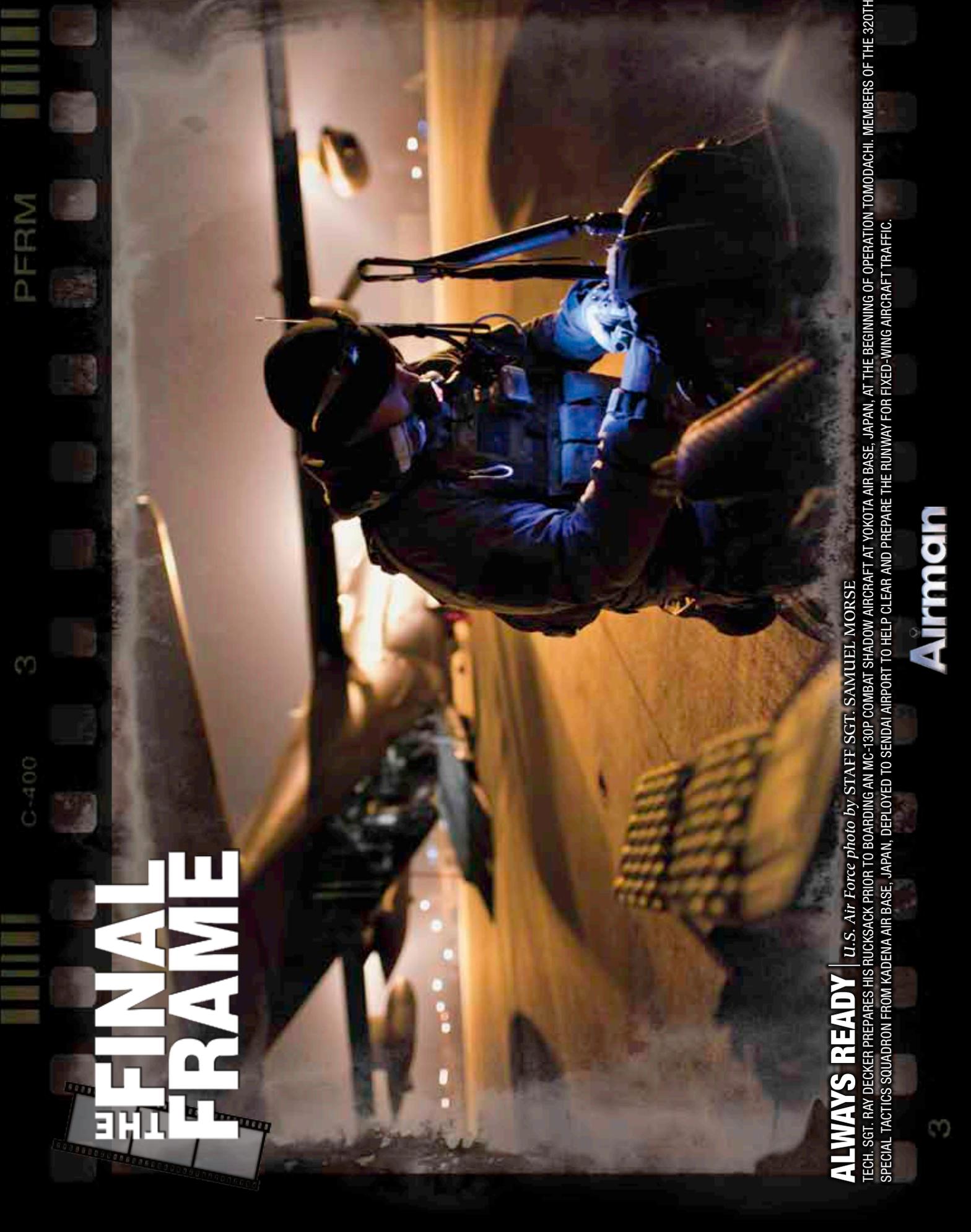
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# THE FINAL FRAME

**ALWAYS READY** | U.S. Air Force photo by STAFF SGT. SAMUEL MORSE

TECH. SGT. RAY DECKER PREPARES HIS RUCKSACK PRIOR TO BOARDING AN MC-130P COMBAT SHADOW AIRCRAFT AT YOKOTA AIR BASE, JAPAN, AT THE BEGINNING OF OPERATION TOMODACHI. MEMBERS OF THE 320TH SPECIAL TACTICS SQUADRON FROM KADENA AIR BASE, JAPAN, DEPLOYED TO SENDAI AIRPORT TO HELP CLEAR AND PREPARE THE RUNWAY FOR FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT TRAFFIC.

**Airman**



PFRM

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C-400