

# Drifting Away

By TSgt Giovanni Abarintos, Nellis AFB, Nev.



## From e-mail:

*"The first page of **Combat Edge** includes the statement, 'The editors reserve the right to edit all manuscripts for readability and good taste'...take a look at the back page (cover) of the October issue...is this photograph considered in 'good taste'? I'm all for a good laugh and include humor in most presentations, but as the flagship publication of **Air Combat Command**, this photograph crosses the line of good taste."*

—A-NON-E-MOUSE

## Our Response:

I'm sorry that you feel the photograph crossed the line of good taste, but I don't agree, so we'll have to agree to disagree.

As for SSgt Stacy L. Pearsall's photo, it was photo number 6 of 10 that she submitted to the 2003 Military Photographer of the Year awards program (MILPHOG) "which recognizes, rewards, and promotes excellence among military photographers, videographers, journalists and graphic ..." SSgt Pearsall won first place with her photo portfolio and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs prominently posted it on their website at <http://events.dinfos.osd.mil/viap/milphog/2004>

The intent of the photo is to catch your attention. When you take it in context, they actually work together on three or more levels.

I view this as an opportunity to explain the thought process behind the action and provide additional information to a reader in a constructive manner — I'm just asking that you return the favor in future correspondence. Frankly, I enjoyed your letter; it's nice to know that people are picking up the magazine. Although I like it more when people respond with a tale of their own because it is a stringer magazine that is dependent upon reader involvement.

On a separate note, did you read any of the other stories? Did you like the full page pull out poster reflecting Spatial Disorientation, which was one of the big issues when I went through the Physiological training block, and which continues to take lives and aircraft today. Considering that you live and recreate in California, one of the places that is a big risk for wildfires, did you find any of that information useful? Was there anything in the magazine, or any of the other editions of the magazine that you have found interesting? "If you're not happy with the Magazine for one reason please tell us. We'd love to publish your article."

I'm also a realist — I know that most people read the magazine in the bathroom during their work hours. Frankly I'm glad they do, I wish more did. In fact, when I was interviewing for this job I commented that I felt **The Combat Edge** was and has always been the best read safety magazine in the bathroom. It's the truth. There's no reason to run from it.

-Editor

*P.S., For brevity: the message is that the person is deployed, most likely in Southwest Asia (SWA), we are an ACC publication, but even though you're deployed, you can still receive a subscription to our safety magazine by following the hyperlink. Following are some of the other messages the reader should/could take from our October 04's back cover:*

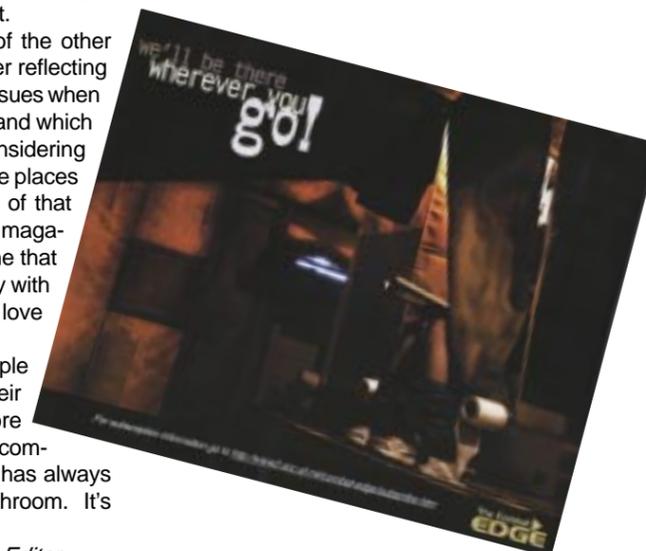
*The **Combat Edge** web link to obtain a subscription for your office.*

*We will send the magazine to your location, whether you are CONUS, deployed, USAFE, PACAF, CENTCOM, etc.,*

*Make time for safety. If you're worried about being seen reading a safety magazine at your desk, feeling it sends the message to others that you have "too much free time" and need more work to do, then take us with you, wherever you go, be it the bathroom, dorm or home — just read it!*

*Make good use of your time — read us in the bathroom because reading the sports section won't save your life.*

*Finally, we see the magazines in the stalls, why not admit it and give it a positive spin?*



The worst thing that can happen during a vacation is for someone to get hurt or injured. Unfortunately, safety often does not take priority when one is on vacation. This incident happened a few years ago on my vacation to the beautiful island of Maui, Hawaii.

It was a beautiful day, the water was warm, the sun was shining, a truly ideal day for some fun at the beach. The resort we were staying at had its own private beach area with all the amenities: personal cabanas, umbrellas, snorkeling gear, and inflatable rafts. For some reason there were very few sun worship-

ocean. This one particular couple was having a jousting contest with floating noodles while on inflatable rafts. It was obvious they both had limited swimming abilities when one of them fell in and they barely made it back onto the raft. After their joust, the husband swam back to shore leaving his partner sunning on the raft. After some time, my wife noticed that his wife was floating out a little farther and that her partner was nowhere nearby. Though it happened slowly, the woman on the raft eventually realized that she was floating away from shore. We saw a look of panic on her face as she fell into the water. Did I

mention that there were no lifeguards on duty? I may not be the greatest swimmer in the world, but I swam out to her as fast as I could while my wife went to look for help. As I was swim-

ming to get her, it struck me that I had a friend who died trying to save her sister in a swimming pool many years back. I thought about what my swimming teacher said about trying to save someone in trouble in the water. The victim is in a panic mode and will hold on to anything that will float. They will crawl on top of a rescuer and pull them under not realizing what they are doing.

So when I finally got to her, I had decided to keep the floating raft between the girl and my-

self to avoid her from grabbing onto me. If she stayed calm, she would have had no problem getting back on the raft and paddling back to the beach. But no. It took a while, but as I steadied the raft and talked to her, she eventually calmed down enough and got back on the raft. As she held the sides, I towed her back in with the line attached to raft. It was slower and much more difficult coming back in, but we finally made it back to the beach. Her husband was waiting and thankful. It was not Baywatch material but hey, whatever it takes. It's good to know that all those lessons at the YMCA finally came in handy.

The morals of this story are to "know what your limitations are" and that safety should be a priority even on a vacation. The presence of a flotation device often gives inexperienced swimmers a false sense of security. In this case, the couple took for granted that their raft was a save-all for ocean swimming, but didn't realize that the raft would become useless when they began to panic. The couple could have improved their situation by using ORM to analyze the risks: no lifeguards on duty, strong underwater currents, and admit the fact that they were poor swimmers. They could have then minimized those risks by deciding to wear personal flotation devices, staying near shore and together, and then actually following through with that plan.

Don't allow a simple case of neglect or assumption ruin a time meant for fun and laughter by letting your safety awareness take a vacation while you're on vacation.



pers that afternoon, but a few other vacationers, along with my wife and I, were enjoying the perfect afternoon in the water. Along the short stretch of water, there were signs indicating there were no lifeguards on duty. Having experienced the strong under currents that Hawaiian waters have, my wife and I stayed close to the beach and its shallow ends. Even on the inflatable rafts, we stayed close to shore.

Other folks seemed to want to venture out further into the