



Behind the 8 Ball

Blue Beret National Cadet Special Activity Oshkosh, Wisconsin



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Packing Your Parachute

Two years ago I attended an incredible Marine Corps birthday party! The speaker for the ceremony was a Lieutenant Colonel that really changed the lives of those in attendance. He told a story that has become a guiding value in my life.

A Marine Captain - fighter pilot in Vietnam - had flown 74 combat sorties and was five days from going home. On his 75th sortie, he watched his bombs soar for the last time over Hanoi. Behind him, the bright light of a SAM raced towards him. BAM! It hit and he tried to control the aircraft. If he bailed out over the sea, he'd have a chance. The plane was too damaged. He realized at that point that his skills as a pilot were useless, and he pulled the ejection chords that accelerated him out of the cockpit. He was taken as a POW, and tortured for six years.

In prison, he learned to cope with his emotions. He felt self-pity, then hatred towards his captors. Every day was an emotional roller coaster. In between the periods of harsh violence and punishment, there were sometimes days of boredom. To keep from going insane he thought about what happened on the sortie. Worst of all, he remembered the ejection. He was thrown from his cockpit in seconds. Luckily his parachute had deployed; an angel of silk and chord. Sitting in that prison cell he realized it was the man who packed his parachute who had saved his life. He felt ashamed that he had never once thanked the other service men in his unit. He'd been caught up in the fact that *he* was the hero, and that everyone had been there to support *him*. He thought of how badly he wished to thank those men for saving his life on every single sortie.

Years later he attended a ceremony for Vietnam vets. As he cut through a crowd, a someone called out. He turned around to see a man who stood with a modest smile on his face. The man said, "I used to work in the parachute section of your unit. I was the one who packed your parachute. When I heard you were shot down, I was worried about whether or not my parachute had worked. I feared the worst. I've wondered every day since then if you lived". The Captain was astonished by his honesty and compassion. Flashbacks of his days a POW, and his feelings of shame resurfaced. The Captain broke from his trance, and hugged him tightly. These were tears of gratitude. They were two men who had never met once in their lives; yet were interconnected through events much beyond their control. The Captain stepped back again, and assured the man that his ejection was perfect. At this, the two broke down again and found forgiveness in each others' embrace. Finally the two warriors were at ease. "Thank you for packing my parachute. What was different about that parachute, than any of the others you packed?" The enlisted man replied with, "Nothing, Sir, I was doing my job. I just hoped that I did it right that night." With a grin and a shared understanding, they shook hands and parted their ways never to meet again.

These two men acknowledged a fact of life that is often too easy to overlook. It is important to **know who packs your parachute**. We all carry parachutes that someone else packed; both emotional and physical parachutes. These parachutes don't necessarily make us the heroes we aspire to be but ensure that if something goes wrong in our lives that we will live to see another day. Most of us don't thank the people who pack our parachutes, yet we expect them to do their jobs anyway. An example is our parents, who build up our egos by telling us we're the best. They send us off to school with books, utensils, and an *I love you*. For most, this seems like nothing. For someone having a hard time in life, however, this is the silk angel that protects us. It flies us home when our aircraft gets shot down. Many times we find that a "thank-you" is overlooked.

The same can be said about our fellow berets; our brothers and sisters; our family. They feed us, keep us safe and watch over us at night. They build us up in victory and soften the blows when we fail. My beret brothers and sisters have stood with me when I could not stand alone; they carried me when I could not stand. They have been my silken angels who brought me home when I was shot down. I want all of you to have that as well. We forget that the true test of a human is not *if you fall*, but *standing back up*. In order for some of us to land, somebody had to be there to pack our parachute. While parachute packing may be just another job - take a moment out of your life to travel down to your *nearest parachute section* and thank those people. Make sure that every parachute you pack in someone else's' life is the best parachute you could have given them. Neither of you may be around to find out whether or not that parachute deployed; but if you do your best you won't have to be.

Alec Gendron, C/1st Lt, Cadet Commander NBB 2009



First Find! Foxtrot Flight

In Oshkosh, WI, the world's second largest fly-in went off with a bang! On the first the day, Cessnas, Mooneys, and Bonanzas dropped into pattern, camped, and enjoy the fly-in; but while the crowd the air show, Civil Air Patrol Cadets enjoyed marshalling aircraft, providing flight line security, and best of all searching for Emergency Location Transmitters (ELTs) and overdue aircraft!

Saturday, July 25, 2009, the first day of full operations for the Blue Berets, was a hectic day indeed. Cadet flights were positioned across the northern runway and the Oshkosh Airport, one flight was on alert for overdue aircraft or ELT signals. Immediately Foxtrot Phoenixes went into action sending two cadets and an experienced Senior Member to the south portion of the airfield.



With other flight and Senior Members stationed at different points on the airfield, the search began for an overdue Cessna 180-look-a-like. One of the drivers, the an ES Team Member, drove the cart through the rows of vintage aircraft with a sense of urgency, but unsuccessful results.



Realizing that this was the first find of the week, the flight members on the cart started rejoiced. As the cart came to a stop at the plane, the pilot and his wife stood with a questioning look, and then in an instant, they both said simultaneously, "FLIGHTPLAN!!" It seems that they had forgotten to close their flight plan, causing the *always vigilant* Civil Air Patrol to spring into action, get out from "behind the eight ball", and get ahead of the power curve.

The Foxtrot flight members being credited with the first find are c/Lt Col Mitch Edwards, c/Capt George Dendrinis, c/1Lt's Graham Bozarth & Caleb Hendyx, c/2Lt's Brandon Van Dyke, Joshua Thomas, and Sierra Schirtzinger, c/CMSgt's Michael Sheaks, Joseph Spitzer, Wesley Woods and Aleksander Hosage, and c/SMSgt Bryan Burr, all being led by their expert Ground Team Lead and TAC Officer Major Jane Smalley. In addition, 1Lt. Diamond Gee was along for assistance and was also credited for a find.

**Rick Besaw, SSgt
Emergency Services Officer**



The team then searched the homebuilt area on the advice of the Ground Branch Director and within minutes the team had located the overdue aircraft, safely on the ground at Oshkosh.



Another Find for Hotel Flight

Transportation

Blue Berets!

With nearly 200 Blue Beret's being earned this year it is a massive job to make sure the right size beret goes to the right member.

The staff in the Admin Shack have been stacking and sorting the berets into piles organized by size and flight, matching each and every beret against a list of nearly 200 names.



**Sarah Wildman, C/Capt
Cadet Admin sorting Berets**

Even Colonel Aye's desk gets cleared off to make space available to the crew making sure that each flight has the right blue beret for the right Cadet.

Pam Morris, 2nd Lt

As we move into flight line activities we will be moving on and off the flight line in vans without seats, or seatbelts. In order to make this as safe as we can we need to remember a few simple ground rules:



1. Wear BDU covers to flight line (NO Berets)
2. Remove all web gear before entering the van
3. Move as far forward as you can before you sit down
4. Do not enter or exit the vehicle while it's moving
5. When it's your turn to exit or enter the vehicle, do so quickly
6. No horseplay around the vehicles
7. Hands-off all flight line equipment before entering the van

We will be in a very busy area and we need to get you on and off the flight line as quickly and safely as possible.

Rick Franz, Maj, CAP

Featured Flight: Juliet



- Flight Commander:**
C/1st Lt Joseph DeWitt
- Flight Leader**
C/CMSgt Makayla White
- TAC Officer:**
Capt Charles Robertson

Featured Flight: Charlie



- Flight Commander:**
C/2d Lt Brandon Doubrava
- Flight Leader:**
C/CMSgt Caleb Harris
- TAC Officer:**
2nd Lt Michael Foppe



Beret Traditions [Reprint]

Duty, honor, service, sacrifice and tradition are words you often hear in military movies. They are also words that apply to the National Blue Beret Program. Berets have long lived up to the standards of duty and honor. We have also made many sacrifices throughout the years. Everyone here is a volunteer. They sacrifice, time, money, and sleep to be part of this corps.



When a beret candidate receives their Saint Alban's pin, they become a member of the berets. They are held to a higher

standard and should humble themselves to those they serve. Becoming part of the best means you take on the burden of responsibility that comes with that honor. You strive even harder to be of service to your fellow cadets and Civil Air Patrol. It is truly an attitude of professionalism. Your actions should always exemplify the best Civil Air Patrol has to offer at all times.

There are quite a few traditions. Some are old, some are new, and some are yet to be created. Major Bear [now Lt. Col.] has come to Blue Beret many years. He was a Lieutenant the last time I was here. Some Beret's spend a quiet moment by the rock seeking the strength and courage to become something more than they were. One of my favorites is the crest we wear. You may have noticed that some are a silver and not gold.



The silver crest is not an accident. After a long day on the flight-line or emergency services, there's a lot of salt and acids in sweat. When it gets on the crest, it will

eventually eat away the gold plating and the crest will turn silver. Seasoned berets that live their life in humble service will often have a silver crest.

Watching all of you as the days go on, I have seen each of you grow into a stronger, driven, and more confident people. Those that dedicate themselves to this level of selfless devotion become part of a close knit family we call the Blue Beret.

Ryan Stocklin, 2nd Lt, NBB 2007

Cleanliness is Far above Godliness

What does Col Aye say about the female barracks? They "were the cleanest they have been in seven years." That's high praise indeed.

Most of us don't normally live in a tight space with fifteen other girls, so keeping the female barracks non-foul has been an understandable challenge. Our success is due to the Beret sisters' superhuman efforts.

Whenever I walk into the barracks, someone is leaning, tidying towels, adjusting bunks, doing laundry, dusting, sweeping, or tending to the ever-accumulating garbage. Returning Berets help just as much as the first timers. Before any of us leave the barracks in the morning, all bunks are made by their owners or willing volunteers. If we girls didn't help each other, our barracks might be as bad as our rooms at home. When somebody has to leave for an early shift, we make sure that her area is squared away. Nobody minds pitching a hand for the HQ shift, even when we are on reserve and do not have to.



Apart from the selflessness of all the females in the barracks, another enormous reason for our resounding victory is the leadership of our returning berets, especially honorary barracks mommy Chief White. Chief White helps us run our barracks like clockwork. She is the flight leader of Juliet Flight but still makes the time to organize our shower time to perfection.

What else does Col Aye say about the condition of the female barracks? "I almost walked out barefoot last night for the first time, because the floors were so clean."

Wow!

That's clean!

Thanks to the outstanding efforts of all the females, both new and returning berets, the female barracks is a delightful living environment for all involved during our stay at Blue Beret. Keep it up ladies. I dare the boys to outdo us... Seriously!

R. Boodee, Capt



Civil Air Patrol Facilities (AKA The Compound)