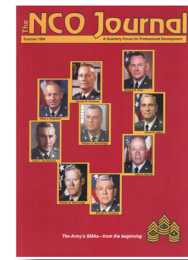


# Taking Care of Soldiers

By Lt. Col. Greg Kaufmann

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**D**o you remember those old documentary films from Vietnam that showed napalm being dropped on enemy positions? Do you remember how that napalm slashed and burned its way through the target area? Now, imagine sitting in a HMMWV about 50 yards from the point of impact of an F-16 crashing in to a C-141, waiting for the chute issue detail.

You hear the explosion. You see the fireball grow and move toward you. You have only a second or two to decide to duck down on the floor of the HMMWV. You feel the heat of the fireball pass over you, hear the whine of ripped metal and 20mm ammo discharging and feel the weight of something on your back.

After the fireball passes over you, you jump out of the HMMWV to escape the fire. Next, an unknown Soldier tackles you and pounds you on the back. You learn that the entire backside of your uniform was burning, a result of a fiery fuel and the melted plastic from the cover of the HMMWV.

You're on convalescent leave within 45 days.

This is a prime example of Soldiers taking care of Soldiers!

It wasn't napalm, but the fiery, fragmented remnants of the F-16 that slashed through the Green Ramp pre-jump training area and the Soldiers standing there, that left the same kind of devastation – a trail of dead, injured and burned Soldiers. The lives of roughly 100 aviation Soldiers from the 18th Aviation Brigade (Corps) (Airborne) who were there have not been the same since that day, March 23, 1994. The 82nd Airborne Division lost 23 outstanding Soldiers that day to this freak sequence of events.

Through luck, as well as the alertness of Cpt. Jessi Farrington and others, I and the other Soldiers from the brigade survived the initial fires and explosions. Jessie noticed the F-16 pilot ejecting from his aircraft and warned us, giving us the two to three seconds needed to scatter and survive.

Our survival ultimately translated into the survival of other injured Soldiers, because 18th Aviation Brigade Soldiers immediately threw themselves into the accident scene to provide first aid, comfort and assistance to injured Soldiers as they ignored exploding rounds of 20mm ammo.

The extent of injuries ranged from slight to severe – burns, cuts, broken bones, puncture wounds, gashes. Without hesitation, Soldiers immediately began applying many of the basic first aid tasks learned under the Common Task Training (CTT) program. *Every* Soldier interviewed afterwards emphasized the importance of this training, of how it just seemed to “kick in” when they needed it – a good example of the benefits of realistic, tough training to standards.

I learned many things that day about leadership. More importantly, and the reason I'm writing this now, I learned the value of discipline, training and initiative.

And, I learned just how great our Soldiers are and the true meaning of selflessness.

The lasting impression of the day was the defining of selflessness through actions. In a situation that called up images of *Dante's Inferno*, individual acts of heroism were common. A Soldier flinging himself on another Soldier to shield

her from the fireball, forfeiting his life in the act. Soldiers ignored their own burn and shrapnel wounds, exploding ammo, scattered fires and blinding smoke to rescue and aid others. It was to this scene of injury and death, flames and exploding ordnance, that our great Soldiers – from all the units present on Green Ramp that day – reacted. Their personal initiative serves to define what is best about our profession, what is best about our comrades, what is best about ourselves.

I estimate about 30% of the Soldiers present were trained as combat life savers. On *that* day, every bit of time these Soldiers spent away from the unit to attend training in the past – paid off.

The wreckage of a C-141 aircraft at Pope Air Force Base after being hit by an out-of-control F-16 on March 23, 1994. (DOD photo by Marcus Castro)



Training, discipline, physical and mental toughness – these basic Soldier skills were key elements in the successful treatment of the injured Soldiers. From senior NCOs to officers to chaplains (some of them combat life savers themselves) – they were Soldiers taking care of Soldiers.

Many Soldiers live today due to the efforts of their fellow Soldiers. But when all is said and done, the training and discipline we demand of ourselves and our Soldiers determines our readiness and ability to care for ourselves. As many of

our peacemaking and peacekeeping missions are so richly illustrating, it's the basic Soldier skills that ultimately are important. It's the execution of tough training to a tough standard that prepared – and prepares – Soldiers for the challenges they faced on a fiery 23rd day of March 1994. ■

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*Lt. Col. Kaufmann is commander, 1st Battalion, 58th Aviation Regiment (Corps) (Airborne), Fort Bragg, North Carolina.*

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