

Suicide in the Ranks

I read with interest "A Scourge of Suicide in the Ranks" (p. 41, November), and found it both enlightening and concerning. Let me explain.

The extraordinary high quality of our Air Force recruits is heartening—the best in our history. As someone concerned with the health and vitality of the force, I am delighted to know that we are attracting capable and competent young men and women to serve our country.

My concern focuses on your framing of the suicide problem. This is hugely consequential. I was in Bethesda (14 July 2010) when the DOD Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide by Members of the Armed Forces report was presented to the Defense Health Board. The way I heard and read this draft report, suicide in the ranks was framed as a public health problem, not a clinical problem. Problem definition has significant consequences for problem solution.

If it is a clinical problem, then treatment interventions for victims and survivors becomes a key. We can even engage fitness training for individuals, building resilience within individuals and the force, but these interventions, while good, fall short if suicide is not a clinical problem. I agree with the DOD task force in defining the suicide problem as a public health problem.

To define suicide as a public health problem of a chronic nature in our current military context means that we must look at life history of the problem and start with the preferred point of intervention to get at the root cause. Primary prevention is the preferred point of intervention. Primary prevention means to do something about the cause of the problem, the health risk factor, or the demands and stressors to which men and women are exposed.

The profession of arms is an inherently dangerous and risky profession with an unlimited liability clause. However, as a four-star alumnus of our college once said, he never gambled young American lives. Yes, he put them at risk in combat, but always minimized American risks [while] escalating enemy

risk. Primary prevention in this context means to manage the risk and stress exposures. To do this requires a serious national look at force structure. We've been in the longest war in our national history and I'm not convinced that we've correctly sized the force for the fights. That is where we must look first at the scourge of suicide in the ranks.

You can ask good young men and women to walk in harm's way only so many times before bad things happen. Suicide is the worst case. There are no quick fixes for this tragic rising tide.

Col. James Campbell Quick,
USAFR (Ret.)
University of Texas, Arlington
Arlington, Tex.

Leadership Lacking

This article [*"Etchberger, Medal of Honor," November, p. 42*] points up the lack of leadership, both military and civilian, in a political war that resulted in this tragedy and others. What type of true leader would place these men into a no-win situation without any means to adequately defend themselves, let alone plan for their expeditious extraction? It is obvious that these leaders did not expect the unexpected. Their failure to properly defend and arm these men verges on gross incompetence and dereliction of duty.

It appears that we do not learn from our past mistakes. The saga of Chief Master Sergeant Etchberger and his fellow airmen should be required reading

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Adam J. Hebert

Editorial

afmag@afa.org

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Production

afmag@afa.org

Managing Editor

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Eric Chang Lee

Media Research Editor

Chequita Wood

Advertising

bturner@afa.org

Director of Advertising

William Turner
1501 Lee Highway
Arlington, Va. 22209-1198
Tel: 703/247-5820
Telefax: 703/247-5855



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1501 Lee Highway • Arlington, VA 22209-1198

Telephone: (703) 247-5800

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Magazine

Advertising.....adv@afa.org

AFA National Report.....natrep@afa.org

Editorial Offices.....afmag@afa.org

Letters to Editor Column.....letters@afa.org

Air Force Memorial Foundation ..afmf@afa.org

For individual staff members
first initial, last name, @afa.org
(example: jdoe@afa.org)

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as a case study for every military leader (officer and enlisted) in this country.

Charles Miller
Davie, Fla.

It Was a Quip

Thank you for an excellent article on Brigadier General Howard's exploits in World War II [*"One-Man Air Force," November, p. 60*]. St. Pete-Clearwater Arpt. (Fla.), to its credit, maintains a public display of Howard's memorabilia, on loan from the Howard family. Howard's joking remark to an undiscerning reporter ("I seen my duty and I done it.") made headlines in World War II, but would be greeted with derision by today's media. Fortunately, it typifies the American fighting spirit, then and now.

Douglas A. Walker
Gainesville, Fla.

Cost-Cutting Recommendations

So Robert Gates and the Obama Administration want to save \$100 billion [*"The Two Wars of the Air Force," November, p. 28*]? I can enlighten them on how they [could] save that money and more.

We have the Marine Corps [operating] fighters; that's aircraft. Why do they need F-35s? They can get CAS (close air support) from the Navy and the Air Force, any time of the day and night. Why don't they stick to fighting, which they do very well?

Now we have the Army, which, I think is trying to revert to the 1930s and become the Army Air Corps. They're getting into the remotely piloted aircraft business, which they need like I need a hole in my head. They also should stick to what they do best—fighting.

Gates should also look to his own civilian troops. They called us contract administrators when I retired from DOD. My boss used to get on our arse because we weren't writing up the contractor enough to warrant more than 300 bureaucrats working there. I told him that the only writeup that I deemed important was "safety of flight." We could've done the same job with less than 50 people.

Fred Cavaiuolo
Las Vegas

Hail November

The November 2010 issue was especially good. The issue includes good information on the huge and critical problems the Air Force and the Nation face in the most alarming socio-economic-security crises we face. They are momentous and require short-term tactics as well as long-term strategy. We need all the unadulterated information we can get, to understand and take our stand. The numbers say we cannot afford the defense we need for the security of the US, and it looks like they are right.

It is good to lay out these issues, not only for us old-timers to lament, but more importantly for those to whom we pass these heavy and slippery batons. They really do have their work cut out for them. And they need to know the facts.

And it does give us old-timers some good grist to grind before we go to D.C. in early January to put in our two cents' worth of experience, if not wisdom, for the current Air Staff to consider.

Of equal value in the November issue are the tales that make up the heritage of the United States Air Force. You are so right to get on public record the legend of James Howard, the "One-Man Air Force" in World War II, and Richard Etchberger, the Air Force noncommissioned officer who earned the Medal of Honor in Vietnam.

G. J. Eade
Healdsburg, Calif.

It is certainly with some trepidation that I offer a correction to anything written by Walter Boyne, who is in my opinion the finest historian of airpower in the world today, but I fear that Colonel Boyne is in error when he claims in "Airpower Classics: B-26 Marauder" [*November, p. 96*] that the B-26 was the only USAAF bomber to drop torpedoes in World War II. In fact, one of the very last medium bomber attacks during World War II was flown from Okinawa by B-25Js of the 41st Bombardment Group (M). Between 28 July and 1 Aug. 1945, these B-25s flew three missions carrying the Glide Torpedo 1 (GT-1), which was a combination glide bomb and standard Mk XIII torpedo. On 29 July 1945, nine B-25Js of the 47th Bombardment Squadron headed out on a mission to attack two fleet aircraft carriers reported to be in Sasebo Harbor. Because the fighters rendezvoused late with the bombers, they only had enough fuel to hit the secondary target at Kagoshima, where three of the six GT-1 torpedoes dropped were seen to enter the harbor and detonate. Two days later, 13 B-25Js of the 41st Bombardment Group made it to Sasebo where one fleet carrier (CV) and one light carrier (CVL) were riding at anchor. Of the 13 GT-1 torpedoes dropped, one stalled and spun in, a second was shot down before entering the water. Of the 11 that entered the water, three were seen to detonate—one near the CV, the other near the CVL, and a third against a small freighter. The final GT-1 mission of the war was flown on 1 Aug. against Nagasaki, though heavy smoke from Task Force 38 air attacks made any bomb damage assessment impossible for the three GT-1s that successfully entered the harbor.

Lt. Col. Donald J. Hanle,
USAF (Ret.)
Alexandria, Va.

