

Commander's Connection



Photo by Airman 1st Class Amber McCarthy

Col. Sam Angelella (center) presents awards to 20th Fighter Wing Annual Award winners Feb. 6 in the Conference Center.

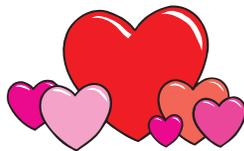
"Commander's Connection" is a link between Col. Sam Angelella, 20th Fighter Wing commander, and the Shaw community. Questions or concerns that can't be resolved through normal channels can be called in and recorded at 895-4611 or e-mailed to commandersconnection@shaw.af.mil.

*Callers should leave a name and telephone number in case questions need clarification. Comments of general interest may be published in *The Shaw Spirit*.*

Q My husband is out-processing to go to Korea. This is a stressful time for families, especially with short-notice orders. He took leave to tie up loose ends and spend time with his family, but most of it was used to outprocess. He often had to return to places because something was forgotten or he had a problem with Virtual MPF. I hope this message gets to the people who are part of the process because I don't think they realize how much it takes away from family. Instead of leave, I suggest people get a week to do these tasks.

A Military members can be allowed up to five duty days by their commander to accomplish out-processing. The intent of virtual out-processing is to make it as 'one stop' as possible by reducing the amount of time and required number of stops. However, vOP suspenses are dependent on the member's departure date; any changes will accelerate/delay suspenses. We did identify and are addressing a few agencies slow in clearing your husband's checklist to prevent recurrences. Thank you for helping us improve our process.

Airmen on the street



How did you know you were in love?



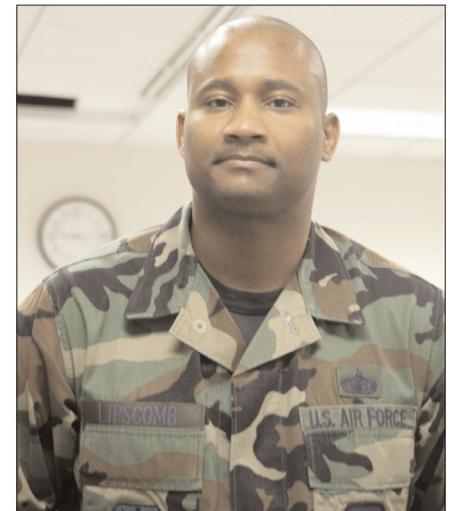
Tech. Sgt. Stephanie Suell, 20th Fighter Wing -- "He actually paid attention to what I wanted and didn't shop at the last minute for gifts."



Staff Sgt. John Smith, Shaw Honor Guard -- "I knew it was love when she made me homemade cookies."



Staff Sgt. Angie Royster, 20th Logistics Readiness Squadron -- "I knew when he sprinkled rose petals all over my floor."



Tech. Sgt. Bryan Lipscomb, 20th Comptroller Squadron -- "I knew when we were sitting on the beach one day holding hands."

The Shaw Spirit

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Seatbelts saved us -- we walked away

By Mrs. Peggy Gravermoen
609th Air Communications Squadron

I have always been a safety-conscious person. I think it started when I joined the Brownies (you don't want to know how long ago that was). Anyway, I am a firm believer in the "Buckle Up For Safety" program.

On May 31, 2002, my husband and I planned to take a trip to Columbia to do some shopping. We decided we would leave after breakfast, as we needed to go to the base and pick up something before we headed to Columbia. After leaving, we picked up our mail and turned on a side road taking us down to the new Highway 521. When we reached the stop sign where the side road and the highway met, we stopped and ensured no traffic was coming; we then proceeded across the highway.

Unseen by both of us, a vehicle was headed towards Camden at approximately 65 miles per hour. The car hit our truck on the front wheel, driver's side. The impact made our bodies jerk to the left, and we were slung back and forth.

I remember praying the seatbelts would hold because it was such a tremendous force when we were hit. I saw the side of our truck caving in from the impact. Glass started flying in the vehicle, and we started rolling. My first thought was, "God, if someone has to die during this accident, let it be me." Then I told my husband I loved him. These may have been the last words I would ever say. My next thought was "I'll never see my little grandson, Dakota, grow up" and last but not least "This would make one heck of a video for safety."

I know this sounds strange, but I have been involved in the safety program for more than 18 years, and my mind is trained to think safety.

The vehicle rolled, according to witnesses, four and a half times before landing on its top. Other than hearing the engine of the vehicle still running, there was total silence for about a minute. I asked my husband if he was alright.

Someone started banging on the door telling us to open it, but we weren't able. My husband's airbag had deployed and he was trying to release his seatbelt to turn the vehicle off. He smelled gas, but he could not reach the clasp of the belt.

I remember looking up wondering how everything was staying above our heads without falling; I then realized we were upside down. I was able to undo his seatbelt, and then mine.

I turned off the engine while he got out of the vehicle through the window; he then reached in to pull me out of the vehicle. There was glass everywhere. The roof of the vehicle on my side was bent inward right above my head. If I had been another inch taller I would have been seriously injured or possibly killed. Again, seatbelts kept me from serious injury. The shell was ripped off the bed of the truck and our possessions were all over the place.

The first person at the scene of the accident turned out to be an emergency medical technician who just happened to be going by at the time and saw the accident happen. He started checking us for injuries once we got out of the vehicle and continued to monitor us until the ambulance arrived.

The passengers in the other vehicle were just as shaken up. The front end of their car was messed up and some of the windows were broken out. I checked on them to ensure they were both OK. They were also wearing their seatbelts.

We were taken to the hospital, checked out from head to toe and released. Other than cuts and bruises and a fracture of one of the small bones in my husband's hand, we were both fine. My husband missed a week of work and I missed two weeks due to deep bruises and abrasions from the seatbelt. The seatbelt left a perfect impression on my chest plus an extra

stripe where the force of the accident caused the belt to move—but it held me in the vehicle. My husband had a big bruise on his hip from his seatbelt; his airbag saved him from more bruising and injuries.

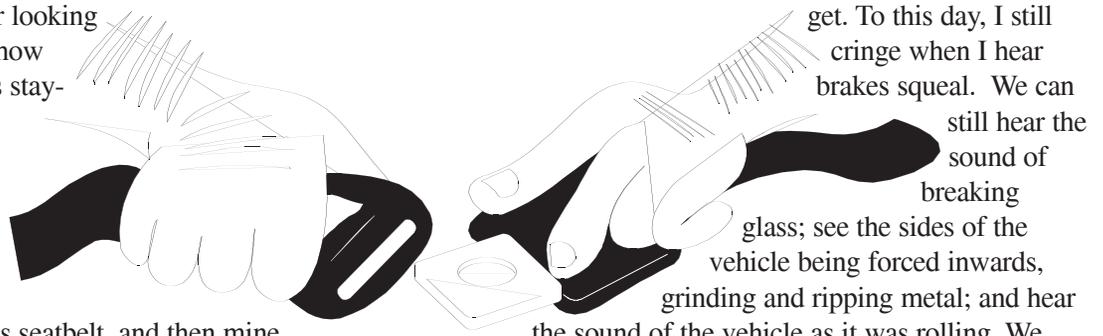
What happened is something we will never forget. To this day, I still cringe when I hear brakes squeal. We can still hear the sound of breaking glass; see the sides of the vehicle being forced inwards, grinding and ripping metal; and hear the sound of the vehicle as it was rolling. We can still see the fear on our sons' faces when one of them came to the site of the accident and when our other son came from out of town when he was notified. First thing that popped in their minds was "our parents could have died." God and His angels were definitely with us; He spared our lives; He gave us the common sense to always wear our seatbelts.

The next time you get into your vehicle, fasten you seatbelt and don't move the vehicle until everyone has buckled in. Can you imagine the guilt you or your family would feel if the people in your vehicle were hurt or possibly killed because you weren't buckled up?

The mental and physical pain they feel, you will feel tenfold if you are one of the few that lives; the anguish alone will be with you the rest of your life. Trust me, you will have an extremely hard time living with the guilt.

Every day you are constantly reminded about Operational Risk Management. You have heard it discussed and emphasized over and over again. You were told to ask yourself this question "What if?"

The next time you get in a car, ask yourself that question. What if I don't ensure my loved one has his or her seatbelt on? What if I don't fasten my own seatbelt? No one knows when an accident will happen, so be prepared: assess, consider and take action.



Embracing Diversity for Success in the 21st Century

Speaker: Clayborne D. Haughton, Jr.

Date: Feb. 20

Time: 10:00 a.m. - noon

Location: Community Center

For more information or to reserve seating, call 895-4416.

Sponsored By: Shaw Black Heritage Committee and
the Civilian Personnel Office

