

# Remember Charlie:

## Motivational Speaker Visits *Nimitz*

By JO2 Kris Allen,  
USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68) Public Affairs

In 1980, Charlie Morecraft was a petroleum-refinery employee at Exxon Corp. in Linden, N.J. He had more than 15 years' experience on the job and was familiar with all the safety regulations but admitted he frequently found shortcuts so he could complete his tasks more quickly.

Charlie's experience lulled him into a false sense of security until, one day, fate caught up with him. He ignored a few safety regulations and was trapped in an explosion that burned almost half his body and nearly killed him. After years of hospitalization, surgeries, physical therapy, and a lot of introspection, Charlie decided to tell the world about the importance of following safety rules.

"When I looked around the fo'c's'le, you could tell by the expressions on people's faces they were mesmerized by his presentation," said Lt. Ted Benchoff, the industrial-hygiene officer aboard USS *Nimitz*, during Charlie's September 2005 visit.

Benchoff explained he had been looking for ways to spice up safety briefs after the last stand-down and remembered Charlie from a presentation he had seen while working for a civilian company. He found a website and sent an e-mail, asking how to get a videotape of the presentation. Charlie responded by offering to waive all his speaking fees and to pay for his own plane tickets just to have a chance to speak directly to the crew.

Charlie said it was his way of showing support for the troops. "I lost a lot of friends in the Vietnam War. I was drafted and wanted to go in the Navy but failed the physical, so I couldn't go," he said. "From that time on, I felt guilty about not being able to serve my country, so when this opportunity came up, I thought it was time for me to pay back."

Charlie shared everything about his experience, from what led up to the accident, through all the operations and therapy afterward, to the horrible effects the accident had on his own family. Even though he relives the experience in every presentation, he feels



Navy photo by PHAN Gretchen Cloonan

Charlie Morecraft holds up a burn mask like the one burn victims have to wear for one year to promote nerve-ending healing and to prevent scarring.

it's worth it. "I love speaking to you guys. I love that something I say might make a difference," he added.

Benchoff said the most important message that Charlie had to make is that everybody has to be responsible for following the rules and procedures and for using the safety equipment they're required to wear. The main message he wanted to bring to the crew is that safety is personal: "It's about going home at the end of the day and kissing your spouse and hugging your kids." ■

*Charlie Morecraft today is chief executive officer of Phoenix Safety Management, Inc. To schedule one of his presentations, contact Tracey Olnick at 1 (800) 783-0796.*

*Nimitz serves as flagship for Carrier Strike Group 11 and was supporting maritime security operations in the Arabian Gulf at the time the author wrote this story.*

Navy photo courtesy USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68) photo lab