

BRAVO Zulu

Marines Rescue Man From Burning Truck

By Sgt. Pamela Shelly, USMC,
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Marines helped save a man's life by pulling him from a burning tractor-trailer cab. The four, including PFC William Patnode, PFC Charles Meskunas, Pvt. James Stewart, and PFC Gregory Lafountain, just had graduated from recruit training in Parris Island, S.C. They were driving Interstate 87 to attend a Permissive Recruiters Assistance Program class in New York.

Minutes after passing Exit 31, the group spotted flames through the fog on the North Country Road. As the accident grew closer, and the Marines could view the full wreckage, they saw that a fuel tanker

had rammed into the rear of a tractor-trailer in the southbound lane. They pulled their vehicle to the side of the road and instinctively leaped into action to help.

"As we approached the vehicles, we noticed two females standing there. We asked them if anybody was inside the vehicles, and they said they didn't know. With the heat, the flames, and the tires blowing, we looked at the fuel truck, wondering if it was empty [*they later learned it nearly was—Ed.*]," said Lafountain. Because there was no cellphone service, he and Patnode drove about a half-mile to call 911 but still couldn't get through. At that point, Lafountain



Navy photo by Assemblyman Chris Ortloff

called his dad, a captain with the State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigations, who was able to get the necessary aid.

Meanwhile, Meskunas and Stewart, with the help of an unidentified truck driver [*who cut away the victim's seat belt—Ed.*], pulled the man from the burning tractor-trailer. They used a sleeping bag to carry the man to a spot about a quarter-mile away and applied basic first aid, while waiting for emergency assistance.

When help arrived, the Marines continued doing their part at the scene by directing traffic and assisting the emergency personnel. "They were working on the victim when we arrived," said the fire chief. "They grabbed gear from the ambulance and kept working; they were incredible."

The four Marines reported in for their class two hours late. When they told SgtMaj. Andrew L. Yagle about their ordeal, he recognized their adherence to

the Marine Corps' ethos. "They definitely displayed their honor, courage and commitment," he said. "The purpose of my class here is to remind Marines of the positive image and roles they need to portray here on the home front. They did just that: They set a good example, and we're proud of them."

"Lafountain came here with all the tools, especially maturity," said SSgt. Robert L. Lytle, senior drill instructor of Platoon 3110, India Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, MCRD Parris Island. "We just chipped away the rough edges and transformed him. He was an outstanding recruit who obviously has turned into an outstanding Marine."

All four Marines credited their lifesaving action to the training they received from senior drill instructors at Parris Island. They said that training gave them the ability to handle such a critical situation. ■

Adapted from a Marine Corps press release.

Aircrewmen Put Training Into Action

With CVW-2 in Fallon, Nev., for a training period, five aircrewmen from HSL-47 and one from the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center (NSAWC) had decided to take a ski trip to Lake Tahoe. The five HSL-47 aircrewmen included AW3 Christopher Hlynka, AW2 Zack Dotson, AW3 Matthew Gardner, AW2 Eric Starr, and AW1 Brennan Zwak. Their friend from NSAWC was AW2 Michael Adomeit.

As this group was driving a winding road over the mountain into Lake Tahoe, they came upon a cloud of blue smoke and slowed to investigate. The source of the smoke turned out to be a car in the ditch. The six aircrewmen immediately pulled over to help.

Two people were injured, one of whom was a woman who had been ejected about 30 feet from the vehicle. Petty Officer Dotson ran to survey the scene and started giving first aid to the victims. Meanwhile, Petty Officer Hlynka called 911 and relayed the situation, along with his personal assessment, to the



(L-R) HSL-47 aircrewmen AW3 Hlynka, AW2 Dotson, AW3 Gardner, AW2 Starr, and AW1 Zwak

emergency operator. Within minutes, paramedics were on the scene and coordinated a helicopter life-flight evacuation to a local trauma center.

All six petty officers received a BZ for putting their training and expertise into action. ■