

Trapped in a Weight Room

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I was in a weight room, training my body and trying to improve my readiness as a naval warrior, when my quest for strength and agility nearly cost me my life.

It was a standard 100-degree day in Meridian, Miss. I had finished training in a T-2 Buckeye. It was my second formation-flying hop of the day under that magnifying glass the Buckeye has for a canopy. I recall having had only 15 minutes between flights that day, which wasn't much time to hydrate. After my second hop, I was a little disheartened with my lackluster performance, so I headed directly to the gym to work off my frustration.

Once there, I changed into my PT gear, took a sip of water, and jumped into my normal routine. Unfortunately, I didn't consider the fact I was dehydrated, tired, hungry, and upset about my last flight. I had trained under similar conditions before but didn't realize that, when combined with an intense weight-training workout, those conditions would be more dangerous than I thought.

I started with a chest workout, using relatively light weights. I soon became engulfed by my frustration and forgot that I was in a dehydrated and weakened state. I stacked on about 20 more pounds than usual and began the torture session without a spotter. I had planned to do 10 repetitions,

Whether lifting weights indoors or out, always work with a spotter.

but by the time I got to seven, my body had other plans.

I've been training a long time and never before had my body quit in such a cowardly fashion. My chest gave out halfway up, and the barbell slammed onto my chest. I made several desperate attempts to lift the barbell, but it was impossible. I realized my situation and began screaming for help. The problem was that the only other person in the gym was wearing headphones and couldn't hear me squealing like a stuck pig.

The barbell then rolled onto my neck, which immediately stopped my yelling. With no way to remove the barbell, I was choking to death. I lay there for about 45 seconds wondering if I was going to die. The person in headphones, however, finally saw me out the corner of his eye and came to my rescue.

I consider myself lucky to be alive, but this situation never would have happened if I had taken the time to hydrate and rest after my flight. I also shouldn't have been working out without a spotter. Both are mistakes I won't make again. ❏

Photo by John Byerly

