

Don't get ripped

Be cautious when swimming in open bodies of water

By CW3 MEAGHAN FALONE
C Company, 1126th Aviation

A few friends invited me on a weekend trip to Panama City Beach, Fla. At the time, we were about six months into our flight school training at Fort Rucker, Ala., and had definitely earned a break from our studies. I packed an overnight bag and we headed south to the beach.

The next morning, we headed out onto the beach. I was feeling a little under the weather from the previous evening's activities, so my goal for the day was to lie in the sun and relax. I was doing just that when the guys asked me to join them in the water. I knew I wasn't a strong swimmer and the waves were pretty large, but I figured I'd just jump in for a second to cool off.

At first, we were laughing and letting the waves crash into us. I didn't intend to go in past where I could touch the bottom with my feet, but as I was jumping through a wave, I lost my balance. It all happened so fast that I was oblivious to the fact that the current was pulling me out. I looked over at my buddies and one of them asked if I was OK.

They were farther out than I and looked to be turning to come back to shore. I answered that I was fine. I decided I should also head back to shore. That's when I realized I was in trouble.

Waves began crashing over my head. I was swimming and swimming but wasn't going anywhere. One of my friends saw me struggling and yelled for help, but the sound



of the waves muffled his cries. I joined in, trying not to panic, remembering what I had watched on television about rip currents. However, the waves were relentless and wouldn't stop crashing over my head. I didn't know how much longer I was going to be able to stay afloat. The guys were yelling words of encouragement. I tried swimming parallel to the shore, but I still wasn't moving.

I then started to panic. I thought about a discussion we

had in the car on the drive down about how being an aviator is one of the most dangerous jobs in the Army. I thought, "How ironic, I'm going to die, but the cause is not going to be related to flying. All of this work in the Army was for nothing." I then thought of my Family.

As my head went underwater, I thought, "This is it." I was exhausted from fighting the current and out of ideas on how to save myself. Suddenly, someone grabbed my arm,

pulled me to the surface and told me to relax. It was one of my friends, who, fortunately for me, had been a lifeguard prior to flight school. He put his hands on my waist and pushed me up out of the water so I could breathe. We eventually made it to shore, where he helped me to my towel. I was in complete shock. I had to go to the car and sit for a few minutes to compose myself.

If you get caught in a rip current:

- Remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- Don't fight the current. Swim out of the current in a direction following the shoreline. When out of the current, swim toward shore.
- If you are unable to swim out of the rip current, float or calmly tread water. When out of the current, swim toward shore.
- If you are still unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself – face the shore, wave your arms and yell for help.
- If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 911. Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.

I should have done many things differently that day. I'm lucky that I'm able to share my story; some folks don't get the chance.

Chief Warrant Office 3 Meaghan Falone is with the Maine Army National Guard, Bangor, Maine.

PERSONNEL PROFILE

OFFICER

'Big Easy' Soldier serves with JAG

By DANA ELISE SMITH
CSJFTC Public Affairs

Capt. Raymond L. Edwards is the Chief of Legal Assistance in the JAG office at Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center. He provides legal assistance services to all mobilizing, demobilizing, and garrison Soldiers as well as retirees. He also runs the CSJFTC Tax Center.



Edwards

"It is important to the Army that Soldiers do not have any legal issues that affect their ability to perform their jobs while deployed," said Edwards.

Edwards grew up in a military Family. He served in the Navy as an electronics technician from 1983 to 1992. He joined the National Guard four years ago and has been mobilized ever since.

He deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn in 2011 with the 185th Theater Aviation Brigade. While deployed, he took on the roles of battalion historian, public affairs officer and command judge advocate. He produced "The Griffin Monthly," an electronic newsletter for the Families

of the deployed brigade. Edwards earned his law degree from Loyola University in New Orleans in 2005.

He has special permission to commute to CSJFTC from his home in the French Quarter of New Orleans. There he and wife, Becky, own an art gallery where they display and consign works of a large variety of art genres.

Some of the works in the gallery are his own. They were inspired by a trip to Paris during his rest and recovery leave while deployed in 2011.

"After seeing the brown and dusty orange landscape of Iraq for five months, the bright and colorful flowers in the gardens of Paris inspired me to paint again. That is why I mostly paint bright flowers," he said.

While in Paris, he and his wife enjoyed touring Museum d'Orsay which displays the works of Monet, Picasso and Renoir.

In his spare time, Edwards enjoys running half-marathons, spending time with his wife, grandchildren and dog, a miniature schnauzer named "Gunner."

Did you know?

Water-related fatalities were on the rise during fiscal 2011, with 11 Soldiers losing their lives to drowning or boating accidents.

The U.S. Army Combat Readiness-Safety Center developed the Water Safety interactive website to promote water safety awareness through user challenges, informational videos and links to related safety resources.

The site provides realistic challenges and scenarios Soldiers and their Family members are likely to encounter while at the beach, lake, pool or other bodies of water.

Visit <https://safety.army.mil/SafetyCity> to learn more.

All-season tires might serve you well most of the year, but there are better

options for brutally cold temperatures. Winter-specific tires feature a softer rubber compound and aggressive tread pattern. To maintain even traction, use winter tires on all four wheels.

Whatever tires you use, consistently monitor air pressure and tread during winter. When it's cold, the air inside your tires condenses, causing pressure to drop and reduce traction on snowy roads. Tread depth should be at least 6/32 inches for tires to grip the road, approximately enough to cover the top of the Lincoln Memorial when using the "penny test."

Remember, making an inspection list and checking it twice beats being stranded on the road in winter!

Helpful hints....

Before your next beach trip, keep the following tips in mind:

- Get yourself familiar. Google the beach you're visiting so you can find information such as if there is a lifeguard on duty, the condition of the water, etc.
- Pay attention to the warning flags. Know what the different colors mean, as well your swimming experience level.
- Trust your instincts. If it doesn't feel safe, it probably isn't safe.

Visit the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration website at

<http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov/tips.shtml> for more rip current safety tips

NCO Assoc. Conference

The Mississippi National Guard NCO Association Conference will be at the Whispering Wood Hotel and Conference Center, 11200 East Goodman Road, Olive Branch MS, April 19-21.

We encourage everyone to attend this year's conference in support of our association.

With membership dropping, we need to make every effort to sustain our membership and search for ways to make it grow.

We need full involvement in the association and ask that everyone please

talk to your fellow Soldiers and Airmen about the NCO Association and the many benefits of association membership.

This is going to be a great event, featuring bowling, fishing and golf tournaments, as well as ceremonies honoring our NCOs/Soldiers of the Year and outstanding Airmen. Maj. Gen. Collins is planning on attending, as well as many other special guests/speakers.

For more information, contact Keith Ales at 662-816-6452

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