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Grand Canyon Midair Collision

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DON HARTSOUGH

"GRAND CANYON MIDAIR
COLLISION"

1988

GRAND CANYON MIDAIR COLLISION

Disaster Worker Project

Interviewee #701
Ranger, National Park Service

The interview was conducted at the home of one of the rangers August 11, 1986. This respondent is Chief (and only) Ranger at one of the remote outposts in the Grand Canyon. More importantly, he is the air specialist for the NPS at the canyon. His home is at the Grand Canyon Village, but he is a pilot and can fly to the remote location (using a grass runway) in order to work. Since the midair collision, he has been working at home on a computer to draw up regulations that will be proposed by the Grand Canyon to the National Park Service that would regulate air traffic throughout the canyon.

Event Participation

He was at home when the midair collision occurred. He monitors the aviation frequency (on his radio) and he heard that contact was lost with one of the aircraft. He did not want to respond to this incident at all, but Butch called and said, "Get your butt down here, we need you."

When the collision was confirmed by the call from Butch, his first thought was, "I know the pilot."

He explained that people around the Grand Canyon tend to know one another anyway, but that there is a subgroup of pilots who number about 40. Therefore, he was certain that he would know who had crashed.

His thought was, "I've been around, I don't need it any more."

He went to the heliport (command center). His first task was to set up a restricted airspace, basically to seal off the airspace--airplanes who had no business there, for example, curiosity seekers, could legally be kept out of the zone around the disaster. This involved contact with aircraft control centers in the southwest region and he had that done by noon. He ended up on this incident as the Coordinator for Air Operations, but it did not start off in that way.

"We were sitting around at the heliport, a group of us planning this operation. They wanted an investigator down there and all heads turned to me. But I said 'No'. There were three good buddies down there, and there was no way I wanted to go down there if I could avoid it. I had a brother (who) died in a plane crash 13 years ago--he was a good pilot, and there were a lot of parallels between this one and the one he died on. I saw his crash. It was a small plane and it burned too--there were just too many parallels. One of the hardest things I ever had to do was to get back into the cockpit after he died. I told them and a lot might be riding on it. I said they needed an experienced investigator, Ranger #232. I knew he was really good, and I got out of it by using (his) skills. I didn't want to give them the real reason (for not going into the canyon)."

Because his ploy was successful, this respondent did not go down into the canyon until after all bodies had been removed. He identifies himself as having three roles during the midair collision, one of them unofficial. He was in charge of Air Operations, and coordinated helicopter traffic in and out of the canyon in that area. Second, he was the NPS representative to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation team, which eventually reconstructed the aircraft parts up at the airport on the rim. Finally, he worked with some of the families of the dead pilots.

"When the bodies came out (to the heliport on Thursday), I wanted to stay out of the area. I kept wondering, is John (one of the pilots) in that body bag? I kept wondering who was in what bag. But I wanted to keep away, so I did."

The NTSB investigation was not begun until after all bodies had been removed. The basic goal of the investigation was to bring up all of the wreckage from the floor of the canyon, to work with the NTSB team which was attempting to determine exactly how the crash occurred. Work with the NTSB team was very rewarding, and he learned a lot. He tended to avoid contact with the body bags as they were being transported from one place to another at the heliport. He did manage to lift two or three, but generally stayed back. The NTSB investigation was much less uncomfortable for him, but the death of his friend, John, the pilot of the Twin Otter was on his mind a great deal.

"I saw the rudder pedal (during the NTSB investigation), and I knew John's foot had been on it, and I knew how he tried to fight the dive. The pedal was all splayed out. It was a sensitive moment."

He went to the memorial service the following Sunday. It was originally planned for the pilots, but eventually expanded for all pilots and passengers.

"The memorial service was a huge community purge, it was necessary for all of us, and a lot of emotion was flying around. They all needed the memorial service to do the emotional purge, and then they could go about beginning the process of healing."

He coped with his feelings throughout this first week by keeping busy working with families of the deceased, looking after many details, working with the video-tape that #153 had made of the crash site, and being generally helpful. He thinks he has a good ability to understand the feelings of others. He thought about the two pilots of the Twin Otter. They were a team, they were always together, they did a lot of activities together. He remembered seeing them for the last time when one of the pilots called up and said that his TV set was out, could they come over for a special program. So they both came over to this respondent's home and they all had a very good visit. He kept thinking about them and his feelings were running very high.

"After Sunday, it had kind of leveled out by then, and I had a lot more free time. Before that I just stayed busy."

He recalled the strong need to talk with someone the first evening after the crash (Wednesday). He remembers that a Crisis Impact Team came up from Flagstaff at the request of the Sheriff to do work with the families of the deceased (Crisis Impact is a program that works with law enforcement, interviewing people in need who come into the system). The Impact volunteers

sat around for a while at the command post (heliport) but there really wasn't anything for them to do in terms of work with families. Finally one of them said to the Sheriff, "Well I guess there's nobody for us to talk to, so should we go back?" The Sheriff told them to go back to Flagstaff.

"I wish they could have stayed, because boy, I really wanted to talk with someone. I couldn't feel free to go and ask them, but if one of them had come over with a cup of coffee, I could have talked for a long time."

Thinking of that evening, made this respondent think of #068, who stayed down in the canyon that night. (The following is a paraphrase of his comments about this part of the incident.)

"S_____ down in the canyon all night--it was a mistake! I don't know how we missed it. We all should have known better. Hell, I worked with S_____ up here a long time. I would have been glad to go down there with him, just so he could have some company. It wasn't right putting a guy down there alone. It just happened. I even helped him pack his gear and he was joking and making light of it. We just let it slip by us without even thinking. It was wrong."

Effects of Participation

"I had two really bad dreams, one two days after the crash and one the following Monday or Tuesday. In the first one I was loading body bags at the truck. All of a sudden, John rises up out of one of the body bags, and he's all fine and whole. I could see all the details just like he really was, it was very vivid. Everything was there, the way he wore his jacket, the details of his face, everything. It wasn't very emotional (in the dream) but it really shook me up seeing him like that.

"In the second one I was on the jumpseat. You know, the jumpseat is a seat for an extra pilot when there are three in the cockpit, and I was on the jumpseat and I knew the other two pilots, and I was trying to bring the plane out of the dive. I was working real hard and I sensed we were on fire. I think there was something in the bedroom making a rustling noise, and I put that right in my dream as the fire. We were going down and I was trying to help them bring it out. The dream woke me up. I know how it was for them, trying to fight the dive and not being able to."

This respondent wanted to have a debriefing for all of those involved. He talked with #232, and the two of them went to Superintendent Marks to request a debriefing. They got initial support for the idea, and #232 called San Diego to talk with the psychiatrist who had run programs after the air crash several years ago. The idea was kicked around among those involved, but there didn't seem to be enough support among them to hold a debriefing, and so it was not held. During the critique he brought up the idea again. But again, it was let go. He told the Superintendent he needed to see someone because of his own reactions, and he is now seeing a therapist in Flagstaff, sponsored by the NPS.

Before the memorial service on Sunday he was headed for another service for one of the pilots. He got to a crossroads, and just couldn't force himself to go toward the service. When he went to the service on Sunday, he spent time consoling others and talking with families. But all this time he felt that he needed someone to talk with himself. That's when he asked for direct therapeutic help.

"My counselor is Eileen Adams, and she's really good. In the first session we got right through the midair crash and right back to my brother. I guess that's where a lot of the feelings coming from."

Attitudes About Recovery Work

He has an archeological background and a pilot's background, and got into the NPS in 1975. He got into search and rescue around 1978, and investigated some incidents involving death early in his career. He said that he had received no training for body recovery work, that you just picked it up on your own, and, "by the time you're in it, nobody has prepared you for anything." There is a need for training, and he is trying to get a counselor from Flagstaff or other experts up to the Grand Canyon for their annual refresher courses.

This respondent actually enjoys working with survivor families, and has a capacity to empathize with them. He is very sensitive to his own feelings, and observes in himself an unusual reaction to this particular incident, one that was strong enough to require professional counseling.

Interviewer Observations

It seemed to me that this respondent had been deeply troubled by the incident as witnessed in the dreams and in his inability to confront one memorial service afterwards. At least two areas of strong feelings came out during the interview. The first occurred whenever he talked about his brother, a person from whom he learned a great deal and who led him into flying. His brother was a role-model and this respondent was very shocked when he suddenly died in a crash. Although he at first did not realize the parallels between the Grand Canyon midair collision and his brother's death, this was quickly brought out in counseling, and was very much on his mind at the time of the interview. The second area of strong emotions had to do with his belief that the park rangers and other people involved in this incident needed some kind of emotional debriefing. He was frustrated in not being able to have this occur following the incident, and we talked at some length about his plans for some kind of emotional pre-training for search and rescue work as part of the Park Service's regular in-service training.

I would agree with him that he has sensitivities toward people in distress, and his enjoyment in working with them is probably because he is successful in doing so.

BSI

Name: _____

Patient No.: _____ Technician _____

Location: _____

Visit No.: _____ Mode: S-R _____ Nar _____

Age: _____ Sex: M _____ F _____ Date: _____

Remarks: _____

INSTRUCTIONS

Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have. Read each one carefully, and select one of the numbered descriptors that best describes HOW MUCH DISCOMFORT THAT PROBLEM HAS CAUSED YOU DURING THE PAST _____ INCLUDING TODAY. Place that number in the open block to the right of the problem. Do not skip any items, and print your number clearly. If you change your mind, erase your first number completely. Read the example below before beginning, and if you have any questions please ask the technician.

EXAMPLE		HOW MUCH WERE YOU DISTRESSED BY: Descriptors	
HOW MUCH WERE YOU DISTRESSED BY:		0 Not at all	
		1 A little bit	
		2 Moderately	
		3 Quite a bit	
		4 Extremely	
EX. Body Aches	Answer Ex. <input type="checkbox"/>		

HOW MUCH WERE YOU DISTRESSED BY:		HOW MUCH WERE YOU DISTRESSED BY: Descriptors	
1. Nervousness of shakiness inside	<input type="checkbox"/>	28. Feeling afraid to travel on buses, subways, or trains . . . ? . .	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Faintness or dizziness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	29. Trouble getting your breath.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The idea that someone else can control your thoughts . . .	<input type="checkbox"/>	30. Hot or cold spells	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Feeling others are to blame for most of your troubles. . .	<input type="checkbox"/>	31. Having to avoid certain things, places, or activities because they frighten you	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Trouble remembering things	<input type="checkbox"/>	32. Your mind going blank.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Feeling easily annoyed or irritated	<input type="checkbox"/>	33. Numbness or tingling in parts of your body	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Pains in heart or chest	<input type="checkbox"/>	34. The idea that you should be punished for your sins	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Feeling afraid in open spaces	<input type="checkbox"/>	35. Feeling hopeless about the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Thoughts of ending your life	<input type="checkbox"/>	36. Trouble concentrating	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Feeling that most people cannot be trusted	<input type="checkbox"/>	37. Feeling weak in parts of your body.	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Poor appetite	<input type="checkbox"/>	38. Feeling tense or keyed up	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Suddenly scared for no reason	<input type="checkbox"/>	39. Thoughts of death or dying	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Temper outbursts that you could not control	<input type="checkbox"/>	40. Having urges to beat, injure, or harm someone	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Feeling lonely even when you are with people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	41. Having urges to break or smash things	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Feeling blocked in getting things done.	<input type="checkbox"/>	42. Feeling very self-conscious with others	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Feeling lonely.	<input type="checkbox"/>	43. Feeling uneasy in crowds	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Feeling blue	<input type="checkbox"/>	44. Never feeling close to another person	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Feeling no interest in things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	45. Spells of terror or panic	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Feeling fearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	46. Getting into frequent arguments	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Your feelings being easily hurt	<input type="checkbox"/>	47. Feeling nervous when you are left alone.	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Feeling that people are unfriendly or dislike you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	48. Others not giving you proper credit for your achievements	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Feeling inferior to others	<input type="checkbox"/>	49. Feeling so restless you couldn't sit still	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Nausea or upset stomach.	<input type="checkbox"/>	50. Feelings of worthlessness	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Feeling that you are watched or talked about by others . .	<input type="checkbox"/>	51. Feeling that people will take advantage of you if you let them.	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Trouble falling asleep.	<input type="checkbox"/>	52. Feelings of guilt	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Having to check and doublecheck what you do	<input type="checkbox"/>	53. The idea that something is wrong with your mind	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Difficulty making decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Name _____

Date _____

Ways of Coping (Revised)

My situation:

Please read each item below and indicate, by circling the appropriate category, to what extent you used it in the situation you have just described.

	Not used	Used some- what	Used quite a bit	Used a great deal
1. Just concentrated on what I had to do next--the next step.	0	1	2	3
2. I tried to analyze the problem in order to understand it better.	0	1	2	3
3. Turned to work or substitute activity to take my mind off things.	0	1	2	3
4. I felt that time would make a difference--the only thing to do was to wait.	0	1	2	3
5. Bargained or compromised to get something positive from the situation.	0	1	2	3
6. I did something which I didn't think would work, but at least I was doing something.	0	1	2	3
7. Tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind.	0	1	2	3
8. Talked to someone to find out more about the situation.	0	1	2	3
9. Criticized or lectured myself.	0	1	2	3
10. Tried not to burn my bridges, but leave things open somewhat.	0	1	2	3

	Not used	Used some- what	Used quite a bit	Used a great deal
11. Hoped a miracle would happen.	0	1	2	3
12. Went along with fate; sometimes I just have bad luck.	0	1	2	3
13. Went on as if nothing had happened.	0	1	2	3
14. I tried to keep my feelings to myself.	0	1	2	3
15. Looked for the silver lining, so to speak; tried to look on the bright side of things.	0	1	2	3
16. Slept more than usual.	0	1	2	3
17. I expressed anger to the person(s) who caused the problem.	0	1	2	3
18. Accepted sympathy and understanding from someone.	0	1	2	3
19. I told myself things that helped me to feel better.	0	1	2	3
20. I was inspired to do something creative.	0	1	2	3
21. Tried to forget the whole thing.	0	1	2	3
22. I got professional help.	0	1	2	3
23. Changed or grew as a person in a good way.	0	1	2	3
24. I waited to see what would happen before doing anything.	0	1	2	3
25. I apologized or did something to make up.	0	1	2	3
26. I made a plan of action and followed it.	0	1	2	3
27. I accepted the next best thing to what I wanted.	0	1	2	3

	Not used	Used some- what	Used quite a bit	Used a great deal
28. I let my feelings out somehow.	0	1	2	3
29. Realized I brought the problem on myself.	0	1	2	3
30. I came out of the experience better than when I went in.	0	1	2	3
31. Talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.	0	1	2	3
32. Got away from it for a while; tried to rest or take a vacation.	0	1	2	3
33. Tried to make myself feel better by eating, drinking, smoking, using drugs or medication, etc.	0	1	2	3
34. Took a big chance or did something very risky.	0	1	2	3
35. I tried not to act too hastily or follow my first hunch.	0	1	2	3
36. Found new faith.	0	1	2	3
37. Maintained my pride and kept a stiff upper lip.	0	1	2	3
38. Rediscovered what is important in life.	0	1	2	3
39. Changed something so things would turn out all right.	0	1	2	3
40. Avoided being with people in general.	0	1	2	3
41. Didn't let it get to me; refused to think too much about it.	0	1	2	3
42. I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice.	0	1	2	3
43. Kept others from knowing how bad things were.	0	1	2	3

	Not used	Used some- what	Used quite a bit	Used a great deal
44. Made light of the situation; refused to get too serious about it.	0	1	2	3
45. Talked to someone about how I was feeling.	0	1	2	3
46. Stood my ground and fought for what I wanted.	0	1	2	3
47. Took it out on other people.	0	1	2	3
48. Drew on my past experiences; I was in a similar situation before.	0	1	2	3
49. I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work.	0	1	2	3
50. Refused to believe that it had happened.	0	1	2	3
51. I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time.	0	1	2	3
52. Came up with a couple of different solutions to the problem.	0	1	2	3
53. Accepted it, since nothing could be done.	0	1	2	3
54. I tried to keep my feeling from interfering with other things too much.	0	1	2	3
55. Wished that I could change what had happened or how I felt.	0	1	2	3
56. I changed something about myself.	0	1	2	3
57. I daydreamed or imagined a better time or place than the one I was in.	0	1	2	3
58. Wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with.	0	1	2	3
59. Had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out.	0	1	2	3

	Not used	Used some- what	Used quite a bit	Used a great deal
60. I prayed.	0	1	2	3
61. I prepared myself for the worst.	0	1	2	3
62. I went over in my mind what I would say or do.	0	1	2	3
63. I thought about how a person I admire would handle this situation and used that as a model.	0	1	2	3
64. I tried to see things from the other person's point of view.	0	1	2	3
65. I reminded myself how much worse things could be.	0	1	2	3
66. I jogged or exercised.	0	1	2	3
67. I tried something entirely different from any of the above. (Please describe).	0	1	2	3

Purdue PTSD Scale

Name _____

Date _____

These questions ask about your reactions to an event in your life.

The event in your life to use as a basis for your answers is _____
_____.

The first eleven questions ask about your reactions during the past seven days. The last four questions ask about your reactions since the event happened. Circle one number for each question.

	not at all		moderately		extremely
	↓		↓		↓
DURING THE PAST SEVEN DAYS, INCLUDING TODAY...					
1. how much have you been bothered by memories or thoughts of the event when you didn't want to think about it?	1	2	3	4	5
2. how often have you dreamed about the event?	1	2	3	4	5
3. how often have you suddenly felt as if you were experiencing the event again?	1	2	3	4	5
4. how much have you felt unusually distant or detached from people?	1	2	3	4	5
5. to what extent have you felt that you just couldn't respond to things emotionally the way you used to?	1	2	3	4	5
6. how much have you found yourself extra alert to possible danger?	1	2	3	4	5
7. to what extent are you more jumpy than usual?	1	2	3	4	5
8. to what extent have you had more trouble sleeping than usual?	1	2	3	4	5
9. how often have you had more trouble than usual remembering things or concentrating?	1	2	3	4	5
10. to what extent have you avoided activities that reminded you of the event?	1	2	3	4	5
11. how much do the reactions described in items 1-10 get worse when you've been in situations that remind you of the event?	1	2	3	4	5

SINCE THE EVENT HAPPENED...

12. to what extent have you lost interest in one or more of your usual activities (e.g., work, hobbies, exercise, sports, entertainment, church)?	1	2	3	4	5
13. to what extent have you felt guilty about surviving or about what you had to do to survive during the event?	1	2	3	4	5
14. how much has this event distressed or upset you?	1	2	3	4	5
15. how much do you think this event would upset or distress most people?	1	2	3	4	5

GRAND CANYON MIDAIR COLLISION

Interview Rating Scale

- | <u>Strongly</u>
<u>Agree</u> | <u>Agree</u> | <u>Neither Agree</u>
<u>Nor Disagree</u> | <u>Disagree</u> | <u>Strongly</u>
<u>Disagree</u> |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---|-----------------|------------------------------------|
|---------------------------------|--------------|---|-----------------|------------------------------------|
1. This worker was exposed to stressors that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
 2. After the incident, this worker showed signs of reexperiencing the trauma in some way (example: recurrent dreams, intrusive recollections of the event).

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
 3. At some time after the trauma, this worker experienced diminished responsiveness to the external world (example: feeling detached from others, loss of interest in significant activities).

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
 4. This worker experienced symptoms of excessive autonomic arousal that were not present before the trauma (example: hyperalertness, difficulty sleeping, trouble concentrating).

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
 5. This worker showed the symptoms necessary for a diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
 6. This worker demonstrated a positive style of coping that would allow him to manage significant amounts of stress.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
 7. This worker holds definite, well thought-out beliefs about death.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---