

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

USCG Counterdrug Ops

Operation "Jester" excerpted from article by USCG historian John Moseley, submitted by USCG brother, Ron Willis: In 1980, cocaine was not yet on the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) radar screen.

During the mid-1980s and 1990s, 60 percent of the world's coca crop was grown in Peru. Most of that coca was processed into a cocaine base and flown to Colombia to make cocaine for shipment to the USA and Europe.

The U.S. Government began policies to reduce the amount of cocaine flowing into America. The Reagan administration and Peru's government began collaborating on anti-drug programs within Peru. November 1985, under the Peruvian government, drug interdiction proved successful. Peru dispatched its army to remote areas to locate and destroy cocaine laboratories. In 18 months, these troops destroyed 36 laboratories and 150 airstrips, and seized 70 trafficking planes and 30 tons of coca paste. This initial success did not last.

In 1986, Shining Path guerrillas took control of the Huallaga Valley's coca fields. The Peruvian government embroiled in civil war abandoned drug interdiction. Building, equipping and manning a strategic airfield in the Huallaga Valley became the DEA's responsibility.

The counter-drug operation became part of a larger Department of State (DOS) operation. Construction of the airfield began in 1998 with fixed-wing aircraft flying personnel, equipment, and supplies from Lima, Peru, to the base several times each week.

DOS requested the immediate assistance of the Coast Guard to provide an air bridge between Lima and the airfield in Santa Lucia for two months using its HC-130 "Hercules" aircraft. Coast Guard Commandant Paul Yost agreed to the mission and Air Station Clearwater provided a C-130 and aircrew.

The assignment was far beyond the Service's normal mission. At operations level, this mission required a series of daily flights from Lima and other locations to the remote airbase in the Andes under threat from Shining Path forces. At the initial Coast Guard operations brief, Commander Ed Park responded "You've got to be fooling me!" From this astonished statement, the name operation's name "Jester" was born.

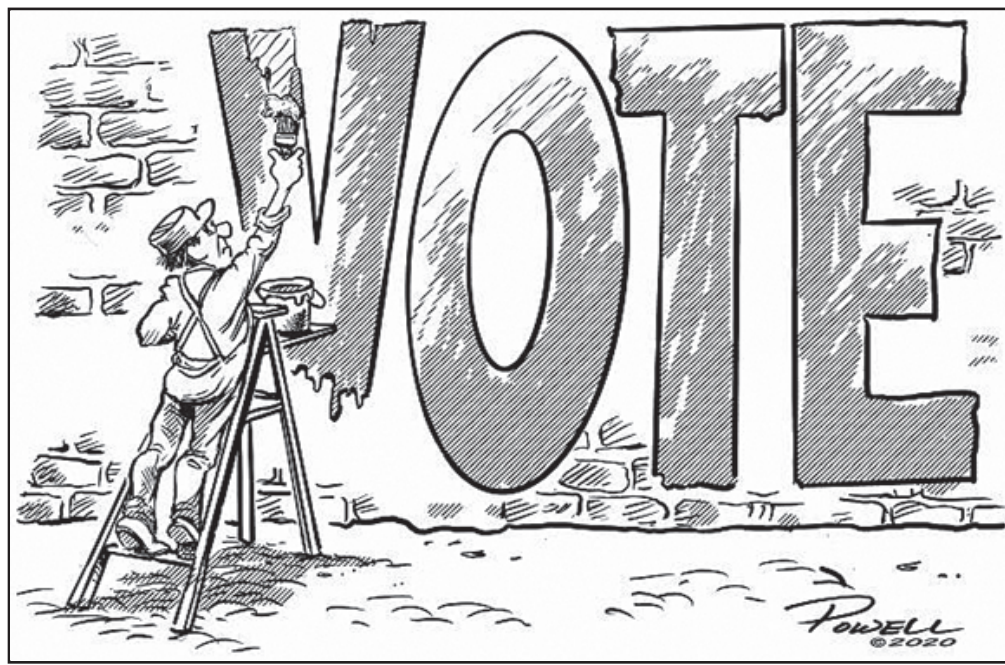
"Improvise and adapt" has ALWAYS been required by us Coasties. USCG crew members needed protection from small arms fire plus special training required by air crews for avoidance of surface to air missiles. Flak jackets became DE-rigured and improvised avoidance by a crew member who fired marine grade distress signals out the rear ramp to "redirect" SAMs when he saw a flash of a SAM firing. Kevlar bullet proof blankets placed on the decks of USCG aircraft, plus blacked out USCG markings. Civilian clothing for USCG members was required as well as personal sidearms when off base.

The Coast Guard's involvement in Operation Jester concluded on October 20, 1989. The Coast Guard team's swift action and dedication to the mission demonstrates why the Coast Guard is frequently called upon for rapid response. Rooted in its search and rescue mentality, Coast Guard personnel adapt to the impossible and find a solution.

As it was way back in my day, "Get 'er done" and "Can you handle it!?" were spoken almost every day, no matter what!

Semper Paratus

The Veterans' Corner
Scott Drummond
USCG Veteran



No Complaints

The next time we meet here another election will have bookmarked the perpetual drama which now dominates the opinion planet of the pixel universe. Millions of Americans will have voted in the most recent, most important election of our lifetimes, and we'll be well on our way to the next one, even if the votes from this one have not all been counted.

No matter who wins, somewhere between a fourth to one half of us (or more) will be unhappy with the results, and several million folks will begin to complain all at once. Some won't stop complaining for another four years.

It's difficult to be more precise than "a fourth to one half." That's because half of us don't vote, and there are many complainers in this group. It's even more difficult to gauge the true level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction because media bias is so prevalent that pixels and sound bytes are a poor gauge of opinion. Or reality.

Don't forget, corporate media assured us that Clinton would win big in 2016. All the polls agreed, or at least all the polls the big talking heads told us about. Polls are supposed to be unbiased, scientifically determined measures of public sentiment. A case can also be made that sometimes polls are a tool of propaganda, a means to an end that resembles a kind of acquired helplessness syndrome. Why should I vote when the polls say the election is already decided?

For whatever reason, the half dozen companies which control 90 percent of media would prefer to see democrats in power. The reasons why are unclear. Some might say that this is the natural preference of smart and successful people. Others would opine that this is the mark of those who drink too much of their own bathwater. I don't know.

I do know that, from a logical viewpoint, just because media is biased or corrupt doesn't mean that they're wrong. It does mean that they are going to be wrong an uncomfortable percentage of the time, and extreme bias to the exclusion of information which threatens their favorite candidates does make it very difficult for us to decide for ourselves who is right and who is wrong. Which gives us even more to complain about.

Meanwhile, there are some numbers which might be of interest to both the party of the socialists and the party of the deplorables. The share of the national wealth that belongs to people who work for a living is at a 70 year low. We have other problems too, but this one seems closest to a culture which keeps its wallet close to its metaphorical heart. It is also a clear reminder that something about this left-right paradigm just isn't working for us.

I came across an old video of a routine by the great comedian and social commentator, George Carlin. It puts the current chapter of our drama into perspective. Carlin observes that people who vote like to tell people who don't vote that they have no right to complain. Carlin disagrees. He says, look at the rogues and thieves (his choice of words we can't print here) who have elected, and the problems they have caused. People who voted, therefore, are responsible for those problems, so we have no right to complain.

I don't know about you, but I find Carlin's opinion refreshing. I think we could all use a break from the grating, rasping, whining dissonance that unceasingly and violently attacks our consciousness. There is so much more to life than politics.

GUEST COLUMNS

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper. If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:

Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor
P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546
Our email address: tcherald@windstream.net

Letters should be limited to 200 words or less, signed, dated and include a phone number for verification purposes. This paper reserves the right to edit letters to conform with Editorial page policy or refuse to print letters deemed pointless, editorially defamatory or in poor taste. Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc.

Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.*

Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.

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Spiders

In the spirit of Halloween this year, I want to talk about spiders. When I was growing up either my dad or me always had spider duty for my sister. If there is one in her general vicinity, she wants it dead. She's actually still like that to this day; I just can't hear her scream from a state away. The truth is that spiders may creep us out sometimes, but they do a lot of good too. So, let's talk about spiders.

Spiders are arachnids, meaning that they have eight legs. Ticks, mites, and scorpions are also arachnids. A spider's body is made up of two parts, the abdomen and the cephalothorax. They come in a wide range of sizes, but the female is usually larger than the male. The smallest is Patu digua from Colombia, and is only one-fifth the size of a pinhead. The largest is the goliath birdeater. It's in the tarantula family. They weigh up to 6.2 oz. and are almost half a foot long. They're from northern South America. Most spiders will only live for one or two years, but tarantulas can live over 20 years in captivity. A trapdoor spider in Australia lived to be 43 years old.

Even though we think of spiders as creepy crawlies, they are usually good to have around. Spiders are a general predator, meaning that they will catch and eat a wide number of different insects. This makes them beneficial in the garden. I also don't mind having them out on the porch, because that means fewer mosquitoes. Most of the time spiders are going to be harmless to humans. Most of their bites are not dangerous for an animal our size. A couple have a powerful bite. The black widow is one that most people know. Black widows are common throughout Georgia. Like most spiders, they are timid and won't bite unless they're handled. They are shiny black with a red hourglass shape on their abdomen. They like to make their web in piles of trash and lumber or cracks and crevices around the home. Black widow bites are painful. The brown recluse is another species that has a painful bite. They are not seen as often in Georgia. They like to live in undisturbed areas. They are light brown with a violin shaped body. A brown recluse bite can cause an ulcer that heals slowly and leaves a scar.

There is a new spider in northeast Georgia from the last couple of years. The joro spider. These are from the golden orb web genus. They make large webs that have the classic spider web design. The females are black, yellow, and red making them very striking in appearance. They'll grow to be 4 inches across, including their legs. The joro spiders are an invasive species, but they have not shown themselves to be a pest. They may actually help control stinkbug populations, which are a pest.

If you have questions about spiders contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu. I cannot identify critters from the bite or rash that they leave, but can assist in identification of an insect or spider if a specimen is brought in.

UGA extension
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



Holiday Fire Danger

Fall is the time of year when our mountains turn colorful, cooler weather sets in, warm fires are lit, and now the fire danger ramps up because dry leaves are falling and we just to have to pile them up, jump in them and then light a match and watch them disappear in the flames leaving ashes and embers. The smoke smells good and brings back childhood memories and the flames are relaxing until a puff of wind scatters the embers across our leaf strewn yard and that is when the fun is over and terror sets in as you try to outrun the flames as they race toward your house and your stuff that you had intended to make Fire-wise all summer, but put off. Now a real fire is here in your yard and instead of taking the offense and clearing debris away like you should have, you have to go on the defensive to protect your house and everything in it and hope the volunteer fire department shows up soon. Remember our firefighters are all volunteers who are doing other things until the tone drops and your call goes out and they get there as soon as they can. Until the calvary gets there with their tools and trucks, it is up to you to hold back the flames as best you can. This is why we call the cleared area around your house as defensible space where you or the firefighters have a chance to stop the flames before they reach your house. Think about the weather and what could be in the path of a fire before you light the match because once it starts it is hard to stop it.

Fall also has more holidays than any other time of the year and our fire risks increase because of what we do during the holidays. Halloween is this week and the decorations have been put out and costumes are made for the children to dress up and go door to door, which leads to many dangerous situations. Taking simple fire safety precautions like keeping decorations far away from open flames and using battery-operated candles or glow-sticks in jack-o-lanterns can help ensure your holiday remains festive and fun. When choosing a costume, stay away from long trailing fabric. If your child is wearing a mask, make sure the eye holes are large enough so he or she can see out. Provide children with flashlights to carry for lighting or glow sticks as part of their costume. Dried flowers, cornstalks and crepe paper catch fire easily. Keep all decorations away from open flames and other heat sources like light bulbs and heaters. Use a battery-operated candle or glow-stick in jack-o-lanterns. If you use a real candle, use extreme caution.

Make sure children are watched at all times when candles are lit. When lighting candles inside jack-o-lanterns, use long, fireplace-style matches or a utility lighter. Be sure to place lit pumpkins well away from anything that can burn and far enough out of the way of trick-or-treaters, doorsteps, walkways, and yards. Remember to keep eyes clear of decorations, so nothing blocks escape routes. Make sure all smoke alarms in the home are working. Tell children to stay away from open flames including jack-o-lanterns with candles in them. Be sure they know how to stop, drop, and roll if their clothing catches fire. (Have them practice, stopping immediately, dropping to the ground, covering their face with hands, and rolling over and over to put the flames out.) Candles may be pretty to look at, but they are a cause of home fires — and home fire deaths. Remember, a candle is an open flame, which means that it can easily ignite anything that can burn. Blow out all candles when you leave the room or go to bed. Never use a candle if oxygen is used in the home.

Have flashlights and battery-powered lighting ready to use during a power outage. Never use candles. Any time of the year we should think fire safety but especially in the fall when the fire risk is much higher than other times of the year.

For more information on Holiday fire safety go to www.nfpa.org and search of Firewise fact sheets or check us out on Facebook, ChestateeChattahoochee RC&D.

RC&D
Frank Riley
Executive Director



Letters to The Editor

Bell Mountain

Dear Commissioner Bradshaw,

Several weeks have elapsed since our meeting on September 24, 2020. This letter serves to level set regarding our once quiet and safe small residential community along Shake Rag Road.

Since the opening of Bell Mountain Park in February 2016, the mountain has become a conservation and public safety disaster. Incidents shutting down our road (we've had several in the past year), prevent emergency personnel to reach our homes to fight a fire or provide timely emergency medical response and transport. With thousands of motor vehicles a month on the road, the risk of a serious life threatening incident is exponential.

Five years of incompetent planning, environmental neglect, and disregard for public safety places the County at significant risk of a devastating lawsuit should a serious incident occur. Apparently, a tourist attraction and a stunning photograph take priority over lives and property.

Hal Herrin must be turning in his grave. Surely, the Herrin family never envisioned, nor would they now condone, the safety threat and resultant harmful consequences as thousands of motor vehicles navigate the dangerous single lane residential road serving as the only entrance to Bell Mountain Park.

The liability was too much for Young Harris College and Mountain Conservation Trust. These entities declined to accept ownership of the property or the interest therein devised to them under Mr. Herrin's last will and testament. This is why the property was subsequently conveyed to Towns County and given the designation of a Historical site.

Shake Rag Road was not engineered for the current traffic volume. The detrimental burden on the environment and the complete loss of quiet enjoyment for property owners is devastating. The substantial erosion, impact to the watershed, destruction of property, and extreme hazardous travel conditions along the 2 mile route to the mountain top has arisen only in the past four years since the park was opened.

The residents of Bell Mountain and the Towns County community deserve better. The habitual inaction, aborted promises, convenient amnesia, disregard for the safety and security of Towns County citizens and visitors, willful disdain for the natural environment, and audacity against the citizens the County is obligated to serve is shameful.

We hoped our conversations and meetings would translate to reasonable and mutually acceptable solutions. Unfortunately, the remedies considered by the Commissioner and County staff are fundamentally inadequate. Our suggested solutions were only given meaningless lip service. We are confident if Commissioner Bradshaw or members of his family resided on Shake Rag Road, the outcome would be remarkably different.

A separate letter will be forthcoming addressing what we learned from the September 24, 2020 meeting and since.

Respectfully,
Lee Steinberg, Property Owner, Bell Mountain

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