



NEWS RELEASE

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AIRCRAFT RESCUE OFFICERS PERFORM CPR

By Christie Vanover

During a recent TDY mission, two Fort Riley officers were confronted with a situation they never expected. A fellow passenger on their return flight suffered a massive heart attack.

Maj. Chuck Jarnot and Capt. Eric McEldowney, 2nd Battalion (Training Support) (Aviation), 291st Regiment, traveled to Bismark, N.D., in early January, to visit a National Guard unit their battalion oversees.

When returning to Kansas, fog caused the two to miss their connecting flight in Denver, Colo., and they were seated on another flight.

Just as an attendant was preparing to close the door, another flight attendant announced over the intercom that they were looking for a doctor on board. When there was no response, the attendant asked if anyone knew CPR.

“We didn’t see anyone get up, so we figured we were the best chance,” said McEldowney, commander, Company A.

The two weren’t sure who needed their assistance because they were in business class and the turmoil was in first class.

“There was some commotion going on, but we couldn’t really see anything until we walked up there,” said Jarnot, battalion operations officer.

When they reached the front of the plane, they saw an older gentleman, Cornelius Vandereyk, in his seat with an oxygen mask on his face.

“He had already started turning blue by the time we got there,” said McEldowney. “We couldn’t get a response out of him, so we decided to get him out of the seat and onto the floor and start rescue breathing resuscitation.”

The two continued resuscitation for approximately five minutes, until an airport paramedic arrived. Together they carried Vandereyk out into the terminal.

Jarnot and McEldowney resumed CPR while the paramedic set up his equipment. Within minutes the ambulance arrived to transport the gentleman to Columbia Medical Center South Aurora, Colo.

“When he left, we were told he had a weak but steady pulse and he was breathing,” said Jarnot.

“Their quick and selfless response in providing CPR kept the passenger stable until paramedic/EMT personnel arrived and were able to return the individual to unsupported breathing and then transport him to a local hospital for treatment,” wrote Tim O’Neill, service director for United Airlines.

Neither of the aviation officers has had to use their CPR training in a real life situation before, but McEldowney, compared the experience to an aircraft emergency landing.

“You’ve been drilled on it so many times, your actions are very automatic. We were on auto pilot,” he said. “The emotion doesn’t come until you’re all done.”

Jarnot agreed. “There’s no hesitation. Nor is there any fear. You’re in an automatic mode.”

Once Vandereyk was transported, the two re-boarded the airplane for a quiet, reflective flight home.

That same day, United Airlines sent a letter to the battalion commander thanking the officers for their assistance.

“We at United Airlines here in Denver, as well as the flight crew and passengers on Flight 1524, want to extend our heartfelt appreciation and respect in recognition of their lifesaving efforts. They are to be commended for their heroics and caring concern,” wrote O’Neill.

“We didn’t do anything that an EMT or paramedic doesn’t do three to five times a week,” said McEldowney.

“I’m very confident that any soldier I’ve served with would have done the same thing without any hesitation,” said Jarnot.

Jarnot and McEldowney received word that Vandereyk made it to the hospital and was placed in intensive care, but passed away a few days later.

“It was a blessing for his family to have an opportunity to have a period of time where they could gather and mentally prepare,” Jarnot said.

Two weeks after the incident, Jarnot and McEldowney were traveling again, even more confident in their military training.

“You never know when you’re going to use your training, so pay attention. You just don’t know-period,” said Jarnot.