



By Elder
Bruce A. Carlson
Of the Seventy



THE BLESSINGS OF Magnifying Our Callings

*I learned for myself that as we
“magnify our office unto the Lord,”
He will bless us and watch over us.*

The day after graduating from college, I was commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Air Force. From there I began a series of training and operational flying assignments, as a fighter pilot, that saw my new bride and me move every few months over the next four years. Those moves included a yearlong tour in Southeast Asia at the close of the Vietnam War.

Our fifth move was an assignment to Bergstrom Air Force Base in Austin, Texas. Our constant moving meant that even though we always actively served in the Church, we, as new members, were unfamiliar with Church administration and leadership service.

My assignment at Bergstrom AFB was to fly an OV-10 Bronco, a small two-engine turboprop used for observation and support. The OV-10 was fully acrobatic, cruised at speeds up to 350 mph (563 kph), and looked a lot like an oversized dragonfly with a large, clear bubble canopy protruding out the front, allowing the pilot an unobstructed view.

Just before my arrival in Texas, I flew this aircraft into combat and felt confident about my ability to pilot it through almost any circumstance.

During my new assignment to Bergstrom, I was away from home about half the time because my group supported all of the army and air force units west of the Mississippi River.

Before my wife and I had even settled into our home, we were invited to meet the stake president early one Saturday morning. As a young father and an inexperienced convert to the Church, I was surprised by the invitation. We had a cordial visit, during which I laid out my travel and temporary duty schedule. Despite my heavy travel schedule, the stake president called me to serve as the elders quorum president in our ward. As he concluded the interview, he sensed my concern over what I thought would be a very difficult assignment given that we were new to a large ward and that I was gone almost half of every month.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIAN CALL; PHOTOGRAPH OF ELDER CARLSON BY CRAIG DIMOND

He looked me in the eye and promised me that if I would do my best—my absolute best—to magnify my calling when I was home, the Lord would bless me with success. Then he added, “And the Lord will protect and watch over you while you are away from your family.”

I was buoyed up by his promise of success in this challenging new calling, but I didn’t think much more about the promise that I would be protected and watched over. I was, after all, young, confident in my abilities, and a combat veteran.

The stake president, two marvelous counselors, and a patient bishop helped me to understand the significance of my calling. As a result, I found great joy in serving the brethren in our growing quorum. Because of the work of many, our home teaching percentages improved, we enjoyed convert baptisms, and we spent many hours together serving ward members.



MAGNIFYING OUR CALLINGS

“What does it mean to magnify a calling? It means to build it up in dignity and importance, to make it honorable and commendable in the eyes of all men, to enlarge and strengthen it, to let the light of heaven shine through it to the view of other men. And how does one magnify a calling? Simply by performing the service that pertains to it. An elder magnifies the ordained calling of an elder by learning what his duties as an elder are and then by doing them. As with an elder, so with a deacon, a teacher, a priest, a bishop, and each who holds office in the priesthood.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “The Call of Duty,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 38–39.

Several months later I was returning one Saturday evening from two weeks of flight training at a western base, and I stopped with a second airplane in El Paso, Texas, for fuel. It was late, and the other pilot, in a second OV-10, suggested that we get a room in El Paso, have a good meal, sleep late the next morning, and get home mid-afternoon on Sunday in time for the football games on

television. I was tired and hungry and agreed it would be great to get a good night’s sleep, but I recalled my stake president’s guidance and knew that he would expect me to be at an early Sunday morning priesthood executive committee meeting and the other Sunday meetings that would follow.

I convinced the other pilot that we should be on our way. Then I called Vicki, who, along with our two-year-old son, would pick me up at the base three hours later.

Because I had flown as lead from California to El Paso, it was the other pilot’s turn to lead our two-ship formation. About halfway to Bergstrom it grew dark and the weather turned foul. I flew in close formation behind the leader for the last half of the flight. About 15 miles from the air base, in darkness and in rough weather we began our approach to the field. We lined up the runway at about 1,000 feet (300 m) above the ground, just below the thick clouds and in and out of rain showers.

About the time we were approaching the field to land, my concerned wife looked outside at the impending stormy weather and felt prompted to kneel with our son and ask a loving Heavenly Father to protect me and bring me safely home.

Over the approach-end of the runway, following standard landing procedure, the leader executed a sharp 180-degree turn to slow down enough to extend the landing gear and flaps in preparation for the descending final turn to landing.

Following the leader, I counted to five and pulled the throttles back to idle and simultaneously rolled the aircraft into a 60-degree banked turn. Just as I pulled on the flight-control stick to tighten up the turn, the main oil line failed on the right engine. Oil pressure was needed to hold the engine propeller at the precise pitch called for by the throttle position. When the oil line failed, the propeller’s three blades rotated 90 degrees within the propeller hub. As the propellers rotated, they created extremely high



drag loads on the engine, similar to someone trying to pull three large oars through water.

This excessive load caused the engine to fail, sparking an engine fire. The loss of thrust on the right engine forced the airplane to yaw upward into the nighttime storm clouds. A relatively simple landing had turned into a dangerous problem compounded by the storm clouds.

A key part of military flight training is learning to handle in-flight emergencies. With the illumination of the fire-warning light, I instinctively followed emergency procedures—shutting down the right engine and discharging the fire extinguisher. As I turned my attention from the flight instruments while focusing on the emergency, I experienced a severe case of spatial disorientation. I was no longer sure which way was up or down in the thick clouds.

During those few seconds in the darkness, a few hundred feet above my waiting family, I

struggled to make sense of what I saw on the instrument panel and worked to overcome the compelling instinct to follow my senses rather than the instruments. At that instant—with a clarity I cannot explain but with a power I can never deny—I knew with a confidence that defied the situation that I must turn left. I followed the prompting and almost instantly found my way out of the clouds and on final approach to the lighted runway.

Rolling down the runway, I recalled my stake president's promise: the Lord would watch over me if I did my best to magnify my duties as elders quorum president. I did do my best during that busy time of my life, and the stake president's promise was fulfilled.

I learned for myself that as we “magnify our office unto the Lord . . . by laboring with our might,” the Lord will not only bless us with “spotless [garments] at the last day” (Jacob 1:19) but will also protect us and watch over us. ■

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