

THE CRASH THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING



STORY BY KEVIN KNIGHT

**CRASH LANDING
INSPIRES
RICHARD SNIDER
TO OPEN
AEROSecure
AVIONICS**

World War II Army General George Marshall, who became secretary of state and secretary of defense under President Harry Truman, knew success requires sacrifice. In 1941, he told Officer Candidate School graduates, “The truly great leader overcomes all difficulties, and campaigns and battles are nothing but a long series of difficulties to be overcome. The lack of equipment, the lack of food, the lack of this or that are only excuses; the real leader displays his quality in his triumphs over adversity, however great it may be.”

Army avionics tech and Apache attack helicopter pilot Richard Snider wasn’t thinking about that before crash landing his Lancair Super ES on an Arizona mountain top Sept. 1, 2015. However, everything General Marshall said embodied Snider’s philosophy and character, both of which were about to be tested in very real ways.



Photo by Kevin Knight

ABOVE: “Lots of planning is required before you even touch the aircraft, or it could be a nightmare,” says Richard Snider, Aerosecure Avionics founder, who was trained by the Army to service avionics and fly. **BELOW:** Snider with his Army AH-64 Apache helicopter that he piloted in active service during desert engagements from 1999 to 2004. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Snider’s crashed Lancair ES before it burst into flames.

Snider grew up near Detroit with his older sister and younger brother. His father was a West Point graduate who met his mother while stationed in South Korea. His grandfather flew fighters in World War II and trained others in various planes across Europe and the U.S.

“My family has an extensive history of military service,” Snider said proudly. “There are six or seven consecutive generations of West Pointers. Lots of extended family members were at the academy at the same time, including my dad and his cousin.”

After graduating from the academy, Major Snider started as a tank officer but soon switched to flying heavily armed Hueys and the AH-1 Cobra. That left an impression on Snider who graduated from high school in 1994 and joined the Army after a year of community college. He enlisted as an avionics tech on helicopters and spent 3 ½ years supporting them at Fort Knox in Kentucky, Fort Eustis in Virginia, and other bases.

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Aerosecure's diverse avionics team includes a large number of Army, Air Force and Navy veterans.

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In 1998, he left the Army but continued his military service by joining the Arizona Army National Guard's 285th Aviation Regiment near Tucson. To supplement his income, he also connected avionics systems at Boeing's helicopter plant in Mesa for six months before doing similar work at MD Light Helicopters.

While supporting and servicing the National Guard's Apache and Black Hawk helicopters, he learned that one enlisted soldier would have the opportunity to attend Warrant Officer Candidate School and then rotary-wing flight school.

The competition was fierce, but so was Snider's determination to earn that coveted spot. He spent several months undergoing interviews with executive staff leaders. With their endorsement he spent 18 months doing WOCS and rotary-wing flight training at the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence at Alabama's Fort Rucker.

Google "Warrant Officer Flight Training video" and you'll see several YouTube videos that explain the selection process and rigorous program.

After earning his AH-64 Apache rating and returning to Phoenix, Snider flew six years for a special unit supporting

desert operations. He avoids specifics on when and where missions went, but clearly some weren't training exercises. The Apache is called an "attack" helicopter for a reason.

The National Guard was only part of his overflowing schedule. He was also studying business full time at Arizona State University in Tempe and working at a boarding school.

"Twice each week I'd work 48 hours straight," he recalls with a laugh. "From midnight to 8 a.m., I was a monitor at a boys boarding school when the kids were mostly sleeping. That gave me time to study. I'd then attend college classes at ASU from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Next, I'd drive two hours to the base near Tucson where we'd plan night missions, fly and debrief. Then, back to Phoenix for another midnight shift. When you're in your 20s, you can do a lot."

It says something that he graduated ASU in 2002 with a 3.4 grade point average before finishing his military career in 2004 at age 29.

Because of his athletic background and secondary job as a physical training officer in the military, he built a successful personal training business in Phoenix. For

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