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Joel Fallon and Josh Rosa, of Palm Coast, planned a simple flight to DeLand for lunch last Nov. 9, but it turned into a lifealtering adventure after their plane crashed because of a mechanical failure in thick woods in western Flagler County. The two survivors got to meet and thank the four paramedics with Flagler County Fire Rescue on June 6 who rescued them from the airplane. “Who does that?” asked Fallon at the Flagler County Rotary Luncheon where the meeting took place.

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Wayne Grant
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“Who does that?” asked Fallon at the Flagler County Rotary Luncheon where the meeting took place. “Who climbs up on an airplane for someone they don’t even know, knowing it could explode any minute?”

The airplane’s 75 gallons of fuel had spilled, much of it on Fallon, who was hanging upside down from the plane. He legs were caught in the twisted dash and he couldn’t move an arm. Rosa was thrown out of the plane and was sitting unconscious in his seat, several feet away from the plane, with his belt intact.

When paramedics arrived, Fallon said, “Don’t leave me.”

As he hung there, he kept having positive thoughts: “It’s gonna be good; I’m going to be all right.”

Now he said he realizes it was the words of Aaron Price, one of the paramedics, who kept putting him on the back and reassuring him as the paramedics worked.

Tears appear whenever Fallon talks about it.

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Joel Fallon (in wheelchair) and Josh Rosa (second from right) meet with the paramedics who pulled them from their crashed airplane: Jesse Hunter, Dennis Moore, Aaron Price and Jon Moscowitz.

“THANKFUL”

At the luncheon, Fallon told the paramedics that he wanted to thank them, not just for his rescue, but for what they do every day.

“I’ll be able to walk my daughter down the aisle. I get to see my granddaughter,” he said. “These things are so precious. I’m just thankful.”

He also had some questions for the paramedics, such as how they got him out of the plane, because his legs were trapped. Price explained that while the other paramedics lowered him, he guided his legs out of the twisted metal.

Fallon also said he was in a lot of pain at first, and the paramedics explained that they had given him an IV. They also mentioned they put his elbow back in place.

Fallon remembers when they did that and told them the arm felt much better after they did it.

“CUTTING THROUGH A JUNGLE”

The firefighters had to cut their way through the underbrush with machetes to get to the men, said Fire Chief Don Petito, and then had to carry them out on backboards. They were about 15 paramedics at the scene.

“The operation was very complex,” Petito said. “We’re proud of all the guys.”

Fallon had 17 breaks in his legs. Surgeons used muscles and blood vessels from his legs to restore one of his feet. He is going through therapy and can stand briefly. He can go 100 paces with a walker.

“After that, he’s done for the day,” said his wife, Lynn.

When Rosa was thrown from the plane, flesh was cut off from one of his legs to the bone. Surgeons repaired it by using flesh from his back. He can now walk, but will always have a limp, he said.

Fallon went back to running his business, Granny Nannie’s Senior Home Care, four months after the crash.

“He has to be around people,” his wife said.

Rosa has an airplane business, Flagler Air Exchange.

Fallon credits Rosa, the more experienced pilot, with taking the right steps before the crash. For example, he cut off the engine so it wouldn’t be hot and start the grass fire at the crash site.

Fallon was awake enough in the plane to call 911.