



Crew Rest for Reserve Aircrew

By Lt. Pete Zubof

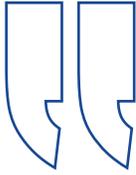
Reserve aviators, historically chastised as “week-end warriors,” increasingly have become active and essential assets in our modern Navy. In the past, they had their own units and deployed on their own schedules. More and more, however, these reservists are being asked to fully integrate with active-duty squadrons: flying, training and deploying alongside their active-duty peers.

These reserve aviators, who have served in active-duty squadrons earlier in their careers, are able to maintain currency in their aircraft equal to their active-duty brethren, while only serving in a part-time status. The host of experiences these aircrew bring to the fight also comes with a unique set of challenges in managing their safe operation of naval aircraft.

Many of these aircrew work in high-profile jobs in the corporate sector that can demand as much as

60-plus hours a week. Finding time to balance career, family and the Navy can be a personal challenge for many reserve aviators.

Of particular concern to reserve commands is managing crew rest for their selected reserve aviators. OPNAVINST 3710.7T states that commanding officers should make eight hours of sleep available to their aircrew each day, and the flight schedule should be made in “consideration for watch standing, collateral duties, training, and off-duty activities.” Aircrew are not supposed to exceed an 18-hour crew day (most squadrons try to observe the 12-hour crew day of the Air Force as an extra safety measure). These restrictions are all well and good for an active-duty squadron, where the command can closely monitor the working hours and habits of its aircrew. With a reserve aviator, though, how does one judge crew day at all?



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In most active-duty squadrons, working hours for aircrew usually are from 0730 to 1630, plus or minus an hour. If they are scheduled on the night page, most aircrew will sleep in and arrive at work so their total time at the squadron will not exceed 12 hours. Reserve aviators, by comparison, have two bosses to answer to, and their civilian jobs often don't accept "crew rest" as a reason for not showing up for the 0730 board meeting.

Most reservists also do not have the luxury of taking an entire day off from work to fly at their squadrons; therefore, the majority of their flight time is earned in the evenings after they finish with their civilian jobs. The problem then becomes clear: How does one monitor or control crew day for these overlapping priorities?

There are no clear answers to this question. It is not realistic to monitor the civilian work schedule of a reserve aviator. Neither can we forbid a reservist from flying at night because we know the early and demanding hours of his civilian job, lest we have no reserve component at all. The active-duty and full-time-support aviators in a reserve squadron need to monitor the well-being of their squadronmates and make sure only those aircrew who are prepared to fly set foot in the cockpit.

How do we make sure we continue to operate safely? One key is attention to detail in the brief and preflight process. The difference between a good brief and a bad one often comes down not to the tactical aspects, but to the care taken in approaching the safety and ORM aspects of the flight. For a strike-training

flight, a bad tactical plan might lead to the imaginary enemy "winning" the scenario, but failure to address the ORM issues of a tired aviator might lead to catastrophic consequences.

If excessive civilian-job commitments compromise their ability to fly a particular event, reservists need to down themselves until they can resume their military duties. They need to work with their commands to make sure they are afforded training opportunities conducive to the schedules of the squadron and individual.

Active-duty aircrew in a reserve squadron also should challenge their reserve aviators before they go flying and help them provide an honest assessment of their flight status. Such a challenge can be as simple as a friendly conversation. We know the men and women we work with. Are they agitated about something from their civilian jobs? Do they look more tired than usual? These are the intangibles that often can be examined to offset the lack of traditional crew-day monitoring.

Instructions such as OPNAVINST 3710.10T are written as general guidelines on how to safely conduct the business of flying. On the topic of crew rest, only two short paragraphs in the 3710.10T even discuss it. Clearly the onus is on the individual reservists and their commands to establish policies that will allow them to safely conduct their flying duties in a part-time status. "Weekend warriors" increasingly are called on to fulfill active-duty obligations. They need to continue finding innovative ways to blend their civilian lives with the needs of the Navy and do it all safely. 

Lt. Zubof flies with VAQ-209.