

# Save the Day!

## *And a Million Bucks...*

By AM1(AW) David German

**O**n the evening of Sept. 16, 2003, night-check was working a nice and easy normal shift when things took a turn for the worst without any warning. I would learn this evening that developing effective crew coordination and understanding how to use time-critical maintenance risk management can save the day at the least expected moment.

About 9:30 p.m., I was sitting in the quality-assurance office finishing my dinner, when I was startled by the sound of fire alarms going off. I knew a drill wasn't scheduled and decided to take a quick look into the hangar. We share a large hangar with HSL-41 and HSL-45. HSL-41 occupies the left side of the building, and HSL-45 resides in the right side, with us in between. I didn't see anything happening in the hangar that would cause the alarms to go off and figured it must be a false alarm, which we'd had a few times in the past.

A second after that thought crossed my mind, I noticed large amounts of water and foam flowing from the AFFF cannon dispensers in HSL-41's hangar, but, for some reason, it wasn't flowing from ours or HSL-45's, yet.

At that time, we had four aircraft in our hangar. I immediately knew we had to get as many of them out as we could, in case our AFFF dispensers activated as well. Without realizing it at the moment, the wheels of time-critical maintenance risk management had started turning in my head. It was time to identify the hazards, assess the hazards, make a risk decision, and quickly implement control measures to save these aircraft.

I ran out of the hangar and flagged down our move crew that just had finished moving an aircraft from the flight line to the wash rack. When they looked toward the hangar and saw what was going on, everyone hurried toward me. I quickly explained that we needed to get our aircraft out of the hangar as fast and safely as possible.

We hooked BattleCat 27 to the tow tractor and moved it out to the flight line. Then "it" happened. All of a sudden, the AFFF cannon dispensers started shooting foam at a high rate into our side of the hangar. We were able to move one more aircraft before it got soaked, but the AFFF rapidly was filling the hangar, and we couldn't save the other two aircraft. BattleCat 24 and 31 almost were completely broken down for phase inspections. Both aircraft had

the majority of their panels uninstalled and had their doors removed. The AFFF guns were pointed directly at the two aircraft and completely filled one of them.

With AFFF flooding the cabin, cockpit and covering all the avionics. I decided that we needed to move the last two aircraft out of the hangar, take them to the wash rack, and begin the emergency reclamation (EREC) process. I then gathered everyone for a meeting to explain exactly what we needed to do next.

We moved everything out of the hangar, inventoried the EREC kits, assigned a plane captain to each aircraft, appointed team leaders and recorders, and began the long night's work. The aircraft were washed, and the priority removal list was followed exactly. Parts were removed, bagged and tagged, and turned into AIMD. Everyone worked as a team. Every person involved in this phenomenal effort demonstrated an outstanding coordinated response to an emergency situation. We saved the U.S. Navy millions of dollars in repair and replacement costs.

This incident was a perfect example of the positive impact that effective maintenance crew coordination, developed through training and drills, and the application of time-critical maintenance risk management can have in an emergency situation. I couldn't have been prouder of my fellow BattleCats and their unbelievable efforts. 

AM1(AW) David German was assigned to HSL 43, NAS North Island, Calif., at the time of this incident.



AFFF may be great at extinguishing a fire, but it is not friendly to exposed aircraft and equipment.

*Are you prepared for the unexpected? Now is the time to discuss nightmare scenarios and develop a plan of action. Remember, once you have a plan, ensure that everyone knows the details.—Ed.*