Who's Your Buddy When You're Out Cold?

By Ltjg. Patrick Stephens, VP-46

On a rare sunny day at Whidbey Island, Wash., a young flight engineer's heart beat faster as he perched on his YZ450 dirt bike, contemplating the set of double jumps towering before him at a local track.

The 15-year dirt-bike veteran was wearing all the required protective gear when he attacked the doubles as he had done safely hundreds of times before. He also had used ORM and correctly mitigated the self-identified risks associated with this extreme sport. Hindsight, however, would prove he had overlooked one important aspect: the buddy system.

In spite of his experience, he lost control of his bike and knocked himself unconscious. He was lucky a fellow rider nearby saw the wreck and called paramedics, who took the injured Sailor to a hospital for treatment. Doctors there diagnosed a concussion and broken pelvis.

This situation could have been far worse if our Sailor had been riding alone. You can't count on a good Samaritan always being around to call for medical help. The buddy system would have ensured immediate recognition and treatment. Risk management is designed to bring some of the wisdom of hindsight to our attention, in the form of foresight, to mitigate risks and to be prepared for the unexpected. In other words, you learn from the mistakes of others.

Off-duty and operational risk management isn't a panacea to alleviate all risks in all situations. However, it can help to ask "what if" before it becomes a "what now." It's easy to Monday-morning quarterback a scenario and say someone should have done this or shouldn't have done that. The Navy spends a lot of time, money and effort to provide Sailors the tools to be safe. Those efforts undoubtedly have paid off in lives saved through the inception of NAMP (Naval Aviation Maintenance Program), NATOPS (Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization), and ORM.

Every action involves some level of risk, and our military needs people who will accept some of this risk to defend a nation. Whether you're facing risk on the job or in everyday life, one of the best ways to minimize that risk is to have a buddy present to give you a sanity check and a helping hand.

Resources:

- Operational Risk Management (the basics: what it is, how to use it, etc.), http://safetycenter.navy.mil/orm/generalorm/introduction
- Operational Risk Management (news and hot items, application and integration and other training, links, tools and resources), http://safetycenter.navy.mil/orm
- The MSF Dirt Bike School (how to enroll, safety tips, etc.), http://www.dirtbikeschool.com/
- Riding Tips (setting up your bike, pre-ride checklist, etc.), http://www.motoschool.com/dirt-bikes_table.htm