

by LCdr. David F. Weir

Here I am in Wardroom I, pointing at my watch, replaying to my buds how I was saddled in on a foe from a sister squadron, gunning him while he feverishly tried to escape my deadly gun solution. With my ill-equipped opponent nowhere in sight, I conveniently leave out the part about him wagging his wings to indicate he was NORDO. Then the growing noise of a cat shot makes everyone stop talking for a moment. I suddenly realize that my tale of bravery and heroism has made me late for CATCC.

As I dash through the O-3 passageway, I time myself to see if I can beat my record. Nope—30 seconds flat, three seconds off my best. If that airman hadn't been waxing the floor, I could have made it.

I casually open the door, hoping that CAG isn't present, and if he is, that it is so dark he can't see my face or my squadron patch. Zero for two on that one. I calmly take a seat in the corner when I hear the call, "Tomcat rep." Ahhh, no answer, and no rep in sight. The heat is quickly off me. As I settle in my seat, I realize I do not have the CATCC squadron book. Oh well, no matter. The CATCC

board already has the lineup, and we have a full NATOPS under one of the chairs. I'm set.

"Hornet rep." Darn, my turn on the hot seat. I hustle to the radio. It's one of our new guys, asking if the lack of squelch is a downing discrepancy. Old salt that I am, I set him straight. Every one of our aircraft makes it off the deck. Now comes the hard part: the recovery.

The pilot in our squadron's first aircraft makes his ball call and lands with a pass almost as good as mine usually are. Another new guy. He forgets to turn off his lights in the landing area, a point that the CATCC Officer feels he must point out to me. Master of the obvious. I guess he feels the pilot still needs a talking to from me after suffering the humiliation of the Air Boss screaming at him three times for his lights, with the entire ship listening on the PLAT. I act like I'm writing down all the pertinent facts in my CATCC book, which I forgot to bring, and then return to bad-mouthing the next pass.

Next guy down the chute bolters. LSOs come back with their standard statement, "Five-Zero-One, paddles, make sure you fly the ball." A newly discovered technique!



flies

Maybe I'll try it. (Actually, the guy just has not learned yet to spot the deck correctly.)

At eight miles on final, one of our guys tells the controllers that he does not have three down and locked. Blue-water ops, with a not-too-far divert, but he's low on gas. I look for our large NATOPS, which is in the last chair I look under, grab the radio and start yapping away. Fortunately for me, there is another squadron Hornet rep there, the "dead" guy I gunned on my earlier flight. No wonder he was not at dinner. He looks up the bingo numbers, clean and dirty, and helps me to the landing-gear section of the NATOPS, while I try to act cool and calm on the radio.

How much gas does he have? What is the bingo? Will it be a dirty bingo? Has he checked the light bulbs yet? What if he is below bingo? Dirty tank him? What if we still can't get the gear down? I start reading the procedures to him, not realizing that he is now about three miles on final, dealing with the controllers, and, by the way, flying the aircraft. He waves off low, climbs out, and then hears my lovely voice again yapping about procedures.

Conveniently, my skipper has made his way down to CATCC and joined into the chorus with CAG, the CATCC

Officer and other assorted hecklers, asking me 30 different questions in each ear, while I'm still trying to get at least halfway through the procedures before my bud flames out. Because of my vast experience and expert communication techniques, I still manage that low calm voice on the radio. (Hey, why write an article if you can't exaggerate a little?)

We go through the procedures, and we still can't get three down and locked. He is hitting dirty bingo. We think we can vector another aircraft over to take a look, but it is too far away. We can buy time by trying to dirty tank, barricade him, or divert. We opt for the latter and hope the gear problem is just a bad proximity switch.

Story over? Nope. We continually bug the pilot for extraneous information, while he deals with controllers on one radio and us on another. CAG wants a play-by-play, including direct comms with the divert-field tower. Where is CNN when you need it?

Then a five-minute gap as he makes his final approach into the divert field. Hmm. Sure hope the weather is good, because he doesn't have the gas to be shooting long, involved approaches. Shoulda checked that. We get the news that his gear held up on landing, and a big sigh of relief swells through CATCC. Then all of the second-guessing and lessons relearned for the hundredth time come out.

Get to CATCC or PriFly early, and know who is landing, what configuration they have, and double-check the CATCC board.

Check your divert field: bearing, distance, bingo and weather. When was the weather last updated?

Go through situations that require time-critical actions. Review the procedures: gear won't come down, hydraulic failures, single-engine, etc.

Review, in your ready rooms, situations you've had in the past and the mistakes that people made.

Emphasize to everyone that the CATCC reps need help, not a ton of people asking questions in both ears.

Realize that the pilot is probably overtasked and give him time to fly the aircraft when you are reading procedures to him.

Finally, and most importantly, when you write an *Approach* article, explain that you have compiled it out of lots of different events, and that you have embellished the facts, so the new skipper doesn't question you about the situation you just described in your article. 🛩️

LCdr. Weir flies with VFA-86.



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