



Admiral's Corner

From Commander, Naval Safety Center



The Blue Threat— Our Deadliest Enemy

Our nation is at war. Those of us in uniform know that better than anyone. It is a complex war being fought on many fronts. It is a different kind of war, unlike any other we have waged. Yet, one reality in this war remains constant, a theme played out in every other conflict in modern American history: The vast majority of our aviation losses are not because of engagements with enemy forces. Our losses overwhelmingly are due to mishaps.

How do we deal with this terribly consistent trend? When we prepare for combat, we train to win against a defined threat. We expect to face an opposing force: an enemy force, a red force. We study the threats the anticipated force might present. We devise tactics to defeat the Red Threat. We train to and modify our tactics depending on the part of the world, the time of year, and the time of day we expect to fight. Our tactical ingenuity is focused on fighting potential enemy forces, potential Red Threats. The result? The most potent fighting force in history.

Our aviation team is very good at what we do, and the fighting forces that comprise naval aviation have no equal. The only forces that appear to diminish our ability to successfully carry out our assigned mission are the United States Navy and Marine Corps. We continue to take ourselves out with deadly precision, through errors, lapses and poor decisions. The Class-A mishaps are the result of our actions against ourselves. In FY06, as of Sept. 7, naval aviation has had 25 Class-A mishaps, with the loss of 21 aircrew, and 17 aircraft, at a cost of almost \$508 million. Contrast this to direct-enemy action (DEA) combat losses from the Red Threat, as we fight the Global War on Terrorism, which consist of one AH-1W and two aircrew lost.

Our losses to the **Blue Threat** we face each day have not significantly diminished in more than a decade. Our aviation mishap rate is relatively flat. How can we

change this? What can we do to achieve the next drop in the mishap rate?

We must view the hazards we face every day, in training or in our everyday lives, in the same way we view our enemies: as real threats. What if we were to always treat low visibility or wet runways as a threat (with the ability to take out an FA-18) equal to that of a surface-to-air missile? What if we viewed fatigue-impaired decisions as a threat as dangerous as an anti-aircraft-artillery piece? What if we approached the threat of following too closely in automobile traffic or the reckless drivers who cut you off on the highway in the same way we deliver weapons inside a Red-Threat envelope? We need to treat the threats we can control, the **Blue Threats**, with the same energy we approach fighting the Red Threats. Because today, **Blue Threats**—our errors and poor decisions—are our deadliest enemies.

In this issue of *Approach*, we officially recognize **Blue Threat**. Each article tells a story of what went wrong and how the aircrew survived. If you analyze each story, the themes are very familiar: communication (internal and external to aircraft) confusion, preflight planning and briefing weaknesses, complacency, and a lack of assertiveness, to name a few. I invite you to be a “Monday morning quarterback” and analyze the stories and identify the hazards, or **Blue Threat**, that contributed to the situation. What you’ve learned about ORM and CRM will be evident as you read. We want you to think as much about defeating our deadliest of enemies as we do at the Safety Center.

The men and women of naval aviation are war fighters in the truest sense of the word. We can win the war against the **Blue Threat**. It will take dedication, determination and courage, but we have plenty of that.