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Stories on Time-Critical ORM in Maintenance

Navy photo by MC3 Dominque Lasco

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The three levels of operational risk management (ORM) are in-depth, deliberate and time-critical. The first two imply a well thought-out process, where time is available for a well-defined plan. In this issue, I've shared stories that deal with time-critical ORM, which maintainers use most often.

Time-critical ORM is the type that maintainers do on the fly, sometimes without even thinking about it, but we must think about this part. It needs to be an integral part of maintenance each and every day. Time-critical ORM is used when there isn't time to plan. It's the review necessary anytime a job is attempted on short notice, or during the execution of a mission or job. It's a critical step in safe maintenance and is a fundamental action in answering the question, "What's different today?"

For example, the simple job of wiping down canopies. Start with the simple A, B, C, and D approach: You need to A=Analyze the situation. Look at the hazards surrounding the job you're about to do. Quickly look at the things that can get you hurt or killed, whether its changing weather conditions, chemicals, slip and fall hazards, or any risk that might be present.

Next, B=Balance Your Resources: Ask yourself if you have the right number of people involved. What are the time constraints? Are the people knowledgeable about the task being attempted? Do you or the team have the right equipment to get the job done?

Once this mental notation is done, the next part is C=communication. It's necessary to make sure everyone knows what is going on. Talk with other workers, the flight-deck chief, or maintenance control when the plan or conditions change. It might be necessary at times to let someone know that you cannot get the job done with the available resources. You also must communicate the need for any additional requirements, like people, equipment, PPE, tools, or other gear that might be necessary to get the job done safely.

The final part is D=Do and Debrief. Once the decision is made to go forward, you need to take the steps to get the job done, being careful to prevent anything from happening that can cause you or your team harm. Once the job is done, the task should be reviewed and debriefed for lessons learned.

Several stories in this issue show a lack of ORM. Maintainers admit their mistakes, as usual, but read these stories with a critical eye. Try to identify the steps that could have been done ahead of time or during execution to avoid the problems presented. Look for the cases where maintainers should have asked, "What's different today?"

We can't improve unless we look at lessons learned and improve on past mistakes. Repeat mishaps continue to occur. We backed or towed aircraft into objects. A tail rotor struck a tie-down strap during a maintenance turn. We dropped pods and drop-tanks. Access doors separated from aircraft, canopies were damaged, and other mishaps show that time-critical ORM is essential. Don't let the same mistakes happen to you, your shop, or your squadron. You can make a difference.