

# “Can Do” Meets Reality



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will commence shortly. The SAR helicopter already is turning. Engine starts are underway for

the first wave, and everything looks normal. The sight of the whole flight-deck team working together is awe-inspiring.

As a flight-deck supervisor with numerous years of experience, I just have overlooked a serious safety hazard. I will yell at you if you have your sleeves rolled up or your float coat isn't fastened properly, but I have neglected to ask questions when I knew that something was not right. I accepted the risk and allowed flight-deck personnel to operate without all of their personal protective equipment (PPE). We have got to make this launch because all the aircraft are going to support our Marines in Iraq.

Do you know what I am talking about? The LSE has his NVGs on and his flight-deck safety goggles off. When was the last time you participated in NVG operations? Have you ever noticed that the ballistic flight-deck goggles do not fit with the NVGs in place? Did you notice the vision problems you get from trying to wear the approved flight-deck goggles with your NVGs?

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By ABCM(AW/SW) Wynn Young

**T**his story is about getting the job done, despite the risks. It's a warning that a mishap is around the corner; it's just a matter of when it will happen, not if it will happen. This story is about senior leadership assuming that things normally unacceptable have become acceptable in the effort to complete the mission. We all look for the “can do” spirit, but it must be tempered with common sense and solid ORM practices.

This story or something very similar is happening today as I write this. It happened yesterday, and it will happen tomorrow. When will we recognize that we can do better?

It's a cool morning, around 0145, on an amphibious assault ship (AAS) conducting flight operations off the coast of Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The ship is darkened to conduct night-vision-goggle (NVG) flight operations, and the first launch



mounting platform for the goggles and is mighty uncomfortable for the person wearing it. The fleet is using multiple configurations. Some are better than others, but there is no standard.

How can we correct the unsafe condition we now face? First, we must recognize that we will continue to operate in a dangerous environment that becomes more dangerous when the mission requires strict light discipline. More importantly, supervisors need to readdress what risks we are willing to take with our personnel. It is important to wear some form of eye protection while operating in the NVG environment. We need to obtain and distribute a standard piece of equipment to avert disaster.

These problems can contribute to a number of unsafe conditions, ranging from flight-deck personnel using safety glasses or parachute goggles, to the even more dangerous practice of not wearing safety goggles at all under the NVGs. This practice can create an eye hazard, as well as a FOD hazard (from the unsecured safety glasses).

Compounding this problem is a flight-deck cranial helmet (HGU-24/P) that wasn't designed to accommodate a pair of AN/AVS-6 night-vision goggles or the battery pack. The cranial does not provide a stable

In the short term, help is on the way. The Navy Protective Clothing Board has looked at a goggle used by special forces personnel to bridge the gap, but it still needs testing. Discussions with the Surface Warfare Night-Vision Electro-Optics Program Office (SWNVEO) have increased awareness of the need for a better cranial configuration with regards to NVG mounting.

The long-term solution should include development of a new flight-deck cranial helmet. Aircrew helmets are designed as a system. Using the aircrew system as a model, the flight-deck crew's helmets should be ergonomically correct, NVG compatible, and provide proper sight, hearing, and impact protection. Comfort should be a major goal, considering the amount of time a cranial is worn.

So where does that leave us now? We have to make our decisions and carry out our assigned mission. Do what is right for your Sailors. Make "can do" meet reality. 

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*Hazard Reports are the best tools for identifying safety discrepancies in the fleet. Don't let a mishap report be the way attention is drawn to a known area of concern.—Ed.*

