

Crew-Resource Management

Situational Awareness

Assertiveness

Decision-Making

Communication

Leadership

Adaptability/Flexibility

Mission Analysis



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Get-Home-Itis Almost Got the XO

By Cdr. Timothy C. Pedersen

I hate to tell this story, in part, because after flying more than 18 years in two communities, I would have thought I had attended enough safety stand-downs, read enough *Approach* articles, and heard enough ready-room chatter on how not to succumb to get-home-itis. *Webster's* does not define it; however, it is a common term in naval aviation. The urge to hurry home has been the root cause of several mishaps that have claimed lives, damaged aircraft and hurt many an aviator's pride. I can add myself to the latter.

The story took place December 2002 at Ramstein AFB, Germany. We were providing communications support for the USCincEur-NATO battle staff with our E-6B Tacamo aircraft. Our flights had gone well, liberty was great, and we had taken advantage of the Christmas shopping. The last flight was complete, and the crew was finishing postflight duties. The airstairs were



being brought to the forward main door of our Boeing 707.

I was on the flight deck, finishing my chores, when a loud hissing grabbed my attention. At first, I thought someone was purging one of our portable oxygen bottles, but, after hearing shouts, I saw differently. The escape slide for our forward door had inflated inside the aircraft when a crew member tried to open the door from the inside.

The escape slide is over 18-feet long and is used for emergency egress. It does not fit well in a fuselage when inflated. Crews have used knives to cut them and stop their inflation, to avoid getting pinned against an interior bulkhead. Fortunately, our crew member was not hurt, just a little embarrassed. The triggering lanyard had dislodged and gotten caught between the side of the jet and the airstairs, causing the inadvertent inflation.

There I sat, the night before our scheduled return home. I could only imagine the squadron wardroom talking, "XO wants a few more days in Germany, so he pops a slide." Granted, liberty in Germany is great, but, after you have bought all the presents and visited all the castles, everyone wants to get back home.

I called our maintenance department, telling the controller of our plight. I had, in front of me, two points of reference for guidance. The first is our wing-configuration-control list. This reference indicates the total number of a specific component on board the aircraft and how many are required

for flight. In our case, the E-6B contains three emergency-escape slides and all are required for flight. In addition, the NAVAIR E-6 Mission Essential Subsystem Matrix (MESM) states, "All emergency equipment must be operable." As noted, our jets have three emergency slides, one internally in the forward main door, one in the aft door, and a third next to the aft bailout door. The slide by the bailout door is different from the other two: It is not mounted into the door.

To justify my rationale to return with only two operable slides, I felt we could move the aft bailout-door slide up front and could use both our primary exits for ground evacuation: the forward and aft doors, with operable slides. Our maintenance controller was thinking the same way, and the approval request for a waiver was started up the chain.

Within the hour, our maintenance officer called and told me there would be no request for a waiver. His reasoning was sound, and it woke me up like a slap to the face. Since we had a full jet (23 personnel), he asked me what would happen if we had to abort on the runway and egress. What if one of the slides failed? Imagine the chaos in getting 23 people out of a burning jet, using the one remaining slide. Seconds count in emergencies, and I could have contributed to injuring some of my crew members because of my shortsightedness.

The good news: A resourceful engineer talked to a NATO base in northern Europe that flew a similar airframe, and, after an eight-hour round trip on the

Autobahn, he had procured a slide. Total delay, one day. Red-faced XO? You bet. Knowing you had a truly up jet, priceless.

Get-home-itis can happen to anyone. If documents tell you something, it is for a reason. I learned naval aviation, with all of its checks and balances and proper use of ORM, will stop irrational thinking like mine. When a decision doesn't seem right, ask the chain of command for inputs. Chances are, someone at homebase, who is not pushing to get home, has the big picture. 🦅

Cdr. Pedersen is the executive officer of VQ-3.

