

nose-down, as I scrambled to pull my emergency O2 green ring. I was so impaired from the lack of oxygen, it took me about 30 seconds to find the green ring. I remember pulling the ring, but I could not tell whether it was on or not; I could not focus enough to read the indicator.

Passing through FL340 in the HUD, I felt like it took more than two minutes to descend from FL370. I remember an overwhelming feeling of panic because, now, my hands were shaking, and my vision was going in and out—like the TV snow effect. I was on the verge of passing out, and it felt as if I could not get down fast enough. Fortunately, there was a solid layer from 20,000 to 6,000 feet over all of R-2508. Somewhere below that cloud layer is mountainous terrain. As we started our moving-map penetration into the goo, my emergency O2 ran dry, and I had to turn back on the flow knob. After recreating the events, we estimated the seat-pan O2 lasted for two or three minutes, a far cry from the advertised 10 minutes. My seat-pan O2 was empty, and my hands still shook, but my vision was coming back.

During this entire time, ATC and my lead tried to contact us on the radio. I never heard a call for a full three minutes. We broke out of the goo at 2,000 feet AGL in Panamint Valley. I finally heard ATC call when we were level at 2000 feet. We quickly landed at China Lake.

Postflight maintenance found that the front cockpit “B nut” was loose and was not providing adequate O2 flow at altitude.

There are many lessons learned from this event. First, regardless of how long your OBOGS DEGD caution is displayed, you have to assume you are not receiving good O2. Second, the every-four-year, physiology chamber ride saves lives. I have no doubt without this training, I would not have realized my severe state of hypoxia.

The third and probably the most eye-opening lesson is how quickly hypoxia can happen without realizing it. My student got the FAM-1 from hell, while I got a new appreciation for the dangers of hypoxia. 🦅

Lt. Nalewajko flies with VFA-122.

BRAVO Zulu



AW2 Matthew Jirrels

During a crew swap to Proud Warrior 431, AW2 Matthew Jirrels discovered the pressure-differential indicator (PDI) for the main-gearbox filter was activated. A check of the indicator is not required by NATOPS during a hotseat event. Left undetected, a pressure differential can lead to a loss of main-gearbox-oil pressure. Petty Officer Jirrels spotted a condition that could have led to damage to the aircraft or loss of aircraft and crew.