

SADCLAM

By Lt. Thad Johnson

It was one of my first flights as helicopter aircraft commander (HAC). I had been training to do this since I started flight school. I was the mission commander with a nugget who had never been to the boat. We were flying in support of a COMPTUEX off the coast of Southern California. The night was overcast without a moon, and we were out there, “Doing the business,” as my skipper likes to say. We had donned the goggles and were to check out a contact that might be orange. The ASTAC called and said there was a chance USS *Benfold* would need us for a medevac.

My air boss, on a previous flight, had to decide whether to degoggle—to allow his eyes to adjust, because there was a question about what ship he was going to recover on. With

from the ship to the hospital. We discussed the requirements for a night medevac and pax transfer. We pumped the ASTAC for as much information as we could. I kept asking the H2P and the aircrewman, “What else?” When the ASTAC told us to kick to USS *Benfold* control because they were ready to recover us, I thought we had all the bases covered.

About then, my copilot said, “Do you want to break out the HOSTAC 1?”

I shrugged and replied, “I think we can handle a DD.” After all, our ship, USS *Kinkaid* was a DD. Here’s the thing: The USS *Benfold* is a DDG with a flight deck that has a 30-degree offset. I’ve always been a little weak in specific knowledge of different ships, but I knew my copilot was strong. He always was quoting stuff out of Jane’s. I’m not sure why I didn’t heed him.

I was about to learn the hard way.

We closed the ship by going straight up the BRC without being able to see the SGSI, the deck-status lights, or the lineup lights. I requested the tower check the intensity on these lights. In fact, all I could make out was a stern light and some dustpan lights as we got close.

What would have been your typical dark-night scary approach had become really dark and scary.

We were at less than a quarter mile, at 100 feet, and at a creep of 10 knots, when it all hit me. We started to pick up the lights and the lineup lines, and our error was clear. The LSE was accommodating us by facing our way. We managed to get into position and put it on the deck.

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this fresh in mind and knowing USS *Benfold* did not have compatible lighting, we decided to degoggle. Next, while we waited for tasking, I started running through everything we might need to conduct a medevac. We broke out the blue brains and looked at the route to Balboa Naval Hospital. We talked about whom we would talk to on the radios while transiting



The medevac was brought onto the helo, and we were off to Balboa, but the fun wasn't over.

We talked to all the key players and passed information ahead of us as requested. We split the duties; the aircrewman fed information to the controllers, and the copilot switched radios. Earlier than anticipated, the San Diego Airport Tower (Lindbergh International) cleared us direct. I had flown the hospital route a couple of times—you just follow the freeway north, pick up the exit, and look for the pad. This works unless you end up coming from the north, which we were, because of the way we had been cleared. This was my copilot's suspicion, which he voiced and I ignored, because he didn't sound

sure of himself. The Lindbergh controller quickly straightened us out, and we found the pad without further incident.

The lessons learned here are all CRM. *Situational awareness* could have been improved and would have led to better *decision-making* if I had listened (the second part of *communication*). My copilot could have been more *assertive* with his opinions. We also needed to *adapt* more readily to two unexpected situations. We managed to accomplish the *mission*, but it would have run more smoothly had my *leadership* brought it all together. I use the acronym "SADCLAM" to remember the CRM skills. Did I leave anything out? 🦅

Lt. Johnson flies with HSL-43.