

why is everything so blurry? I looked around and saw my wreckage off to the left. As I turned in my parachute, I saw the impact of bombs, dropped by my wingmen, in the vicinity of Blue Mountain.

Why is my vest all red? As I looked down, a steady stream of blood came from around my left eye. I touched the area, and it was all puffy and felt numb. Add to that, my right shoulder was hurting. Well, this was going to be an interesting landing.

After an eternity in the parachute (I ejected from 11,000 feet), the ride came to an end in the desert. On touchdown, I released my Koch fittings and turned off my ELT. While waiting for SAR to come pick me up, I had time to reflect on what just happened. I started feeling the pain from my injuries. Thirty minutes later, a Yuma SAR helo, came to pick me up and transported me to Yuma Regional.

I had a dislocated shoulder, a skull fracture, and a traumatic injury to the left eye, which was the big problem. It was cut open through the cornea, and I had lost my lens, iris and eye fluid. They extracted several visor pieces from the eye. I have since undergone four surgeries for the eye, and the end result is still up in the air (that's where I intend to be again – in the air).

Several good things came out of this mishap. One, we are not flying with the old harnesses anymore, which were prone to riser slap. Second, my belief in aircrew coordination training has been reaffirmed, especially for single-seat aircraft.

I never got a chance to thank the SAR crew that day, but I am eternally grateful for their quick response. I later found out that a KC-130 was diverted to the scene to provide fuel. The FA-18s that had given me a laser spot came back on scene, and my wingmen were able to remain throughout the recovery effort. 

Capt. Brunnschweiler flew with VMA-231 and is now at HQMC.

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by AD1 Rene Watson

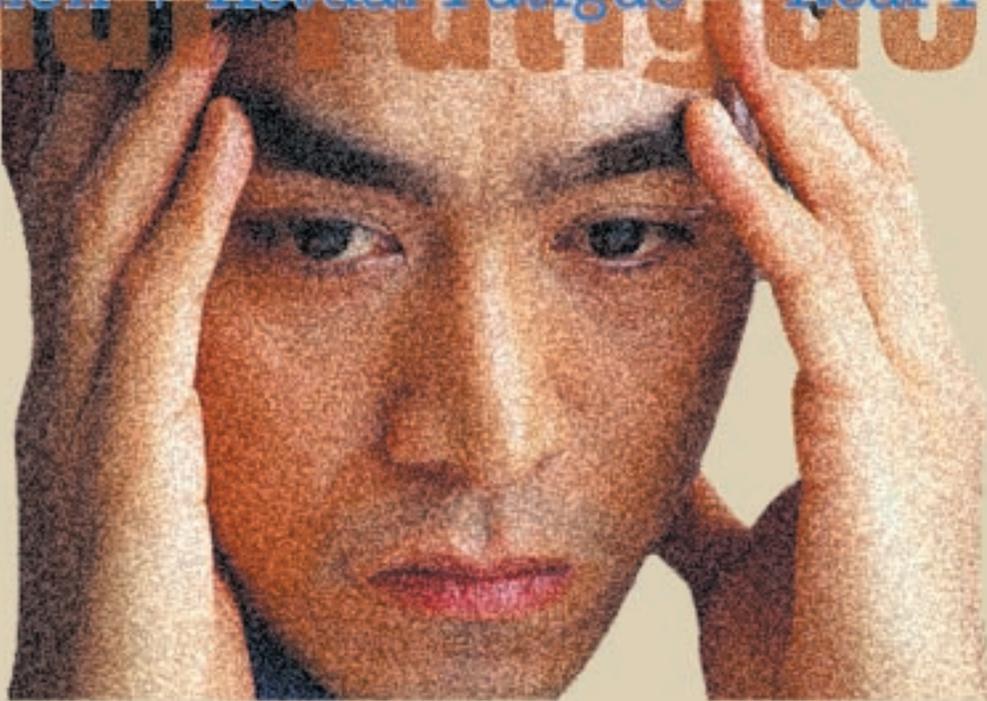
It was a typical training flight in a P-3C. We had set up simulated malfunctions in accordance with NATOPS and the Flight Instructor's Guide (FIG). Although I'm an experienced instructor flight engineer with plenty of hours on the circuit-breaker panel, this time I was overcome by mental fatigue but I didn't realize it.

During the four days prior to this training event, I had been studying extensively for an airframes-and-powerplants certification exam. I was getting only about five hours of sleep each night, which compounded my fatigue. Three days of testing, followed by the agonizing anticipation of the test results, only added to the mental overload.

The instructor pilot set up an engine fire as the simulated malfunction. While dealing with this problem, the instructor flight engineer has to pull all the circuit breakers for the fire-extinguishing system to keep from actually discharging the extinguishing agent into the engine. This setup was routine for all training flights, and I'd done it many times. The simulated malfunction was briefed before takeoff; however, I failed to pull the fire-extinguisher circuit breakers before the student

Qual Fatigue

action + Actual Fatigue = Real Problem



activated the extinguishing agent. Although the engine wasn't damaged, we had to RTB because we had lost the primary source of fire protection for that particular engine.

My fatigue had made me lose situational awareness. Acute fatigue, which is one of the two basic types, is caused by too much mental activity and can be relieved by a good night's sleep. The second type, chronic fatigue, is caused by long exposure to stress; some of the symptoms include insomnia and forgetfulness. People usually don't recognize the symptoms. In this case, even if I had recognized the symptoms, I wonder if I would have done anything about it. Would I have toughed it out to

complete the event? Experienced aviators and instructors tend to feel overconfident when it comes to situational awareness or the lack thereof.

I learned a couple of valuable lessons from this flight. First, it's hard to stay focused if you don't have enough rest. Second, it's easy to become overconfident when you have a lot of experience. You assume you can push past personal limits. Last, my wake-up call came cheaply. I hope other instructors learn from my errors in judgment before they learn a more expensive lesson. 

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