

# All for a Football

By MM2 Pat Lumumba,  
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The crew heard, “Man overboard! Man overboard!” The boatswain’s mate of the watch, however, never said a word about a drill. Thus marked a tragedy that occurred just 96 hours before an amphibious ship was to return to port from a successful seven-month deployment in the fight against terrorism around the world.

The young victim in this case, a PO3, perished while chasing a football on the flight deck. A shipmate had tossed the ball, and the PO3 felt obliged to catch it. Unfortunately, he hadn’t assessed the risk of being thrown off the flight deck as the ship took a sudden roll in heavy seas.

For just an instant, this “absolutely fine Sailor,” as his skipper described him, put aside the primary law of self-preservation and paid the ultimate

price. Would-be rescuers found the football, along with the float coat and smoke float shipmates had thrown him, but there was no sign of the missing PO3.

How did this tragedy happen? To start with, the victim had let himself be lured by the relaxed atmosphere that often evolves while a ship is headed home from a long deployment. He perhaps was focusing too much on the long-awaited family reunion and not enough on the fact he still was aboard a naval warship. A shipmate, friend, superior, or mentor should have reminded him how important situational awareness is to your safety in a ship’s extremely hazardous environment—whether in port or at sea. A naval ship is an industrial fortress, not a playground.

This tragedy never would have occurred if the victim just had applied the principles of operational risk management to what he was doing. Sailors need ORM engraved in their minds—along with the rules, procedures and lessons learned from continuous training—for their own protection, as well as the safety of all hands. Learn to make safety a first priority, not the last. ■

Navy photo by PHAN Carl E. Gibson



The victim in this story was playing with a football on the flight deck, just like these Sailors are doing.

## A DOUBLE DOSE

By Ken Testorff,  
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What’s worse than a Sailor falling overboard from the flight deck of an aircraft carrier? It’s two Sailors falling overboard—from the flight deck of the same aircraft carrier, just 16 days apart.

The first incident involved an E-5 who was tasked to work on an aircraft on the flight deck at night. The aircraft was spotted so that no part of it was over water. After the E-5 completed his task, he went below but, later that night, returned to the same aircraft. Unknown to him, though, shipmates