Crew Resource Management

Situational Awareness

Assertiveness

Decision Making

Leadership

Communication

Adaptability/Flexibility

Mission Analysis

CRM Contacts:

LCdr. Scott Stroble, OPNAV N789F3
CRM Program Mgr.
stroble.scott@hq.navy.mil, DSN 664-7721

CRM Model Mgr., Pensacola, Fla.
http://wwnt.cnet.navy.mil/crm,
DSN 922-2088

LCdr. Mike Reddix, Naval Safety Center
michael.reddix@navy.mil
(757) 444-3520, Ext. 7231 (DSN 564)

Learning the Di
Right and

By Lt. Clay Person

I woke up at 0530 on our third day out of Trondheim, Norway, to a strange but certainly welcome feeling. The frigate actually was riding upright, and my stateroom wasn't turned upside down and inside out.

We were two months into cruise and had finished our C-phase inspection in port the previous week. From the moment we pulled over the last line, we had experienced nothing but 20-foot seas, gale-force winds, blinding snow, and temperatures well below freezing. How odd for the Norwegian Sea in the middle of winter! Today was different; the weather had broken—it was functional check-flight time.

My crew mustered in CIC for the brief. Our ASTAC dutifully passed along the observed climate data and our ship's current position. Our Standing Naval Forces Atlantic (SNFL) task force had been assigned a large patrol box about 20 miles off the Norwegian coast in support of Strong Resolve 02. The last item briefed was the nearest airfield. Today, the airfield was 50 miles away, and it even had a TACAN station. I quickly checked the nautical chart and noted a generally southeast heading to the little airplane symbol—easy enough.

Every brief covered the divert field—that mystical airport on some barren rock in the middle of the ocean, usually well out of range for our SH-60B. While operating far from land, I had grown accustomed to not asking many questions about the divert field. I was a helicopter pilot after all. It would be there if I needed it—and if I could get to it. That's all I needed to know.

We moved to the hangar to complete our NATOPS brief and preflight. We discussed what checks would be required for the FCF, covered how we would handle any in-flight emergencies, and re-emphasized the need for overlapping VFR scans. This was going to be a routine flight, right?

Our rotors were engaged as the sun rose over the snow-covered mountains to the east. We kept ourselves within 20 miles of the ship, a sign of our respect for the freezing water under us. If something went wrong, we didn't want to be ice cubes by the time the ship got to us. The first part of our FCF went flawlessly.

ifference Between Wrong

Photo by Matthew J. Thomas

I was happy with the way the aircraft flew, and I enjoyed checking off step after step. I felt we were close to coming home with an up aircraft. Just a couple of vibration runs, and we'd be home in time to catch a nap before lunch. Then came the bad news. Our four-rev vibes were out of limits; we would need to do vibration-absorber tuning. My hopes of a quick FCF yielded to the multi-flight marathon day that often is more the LAMPS reality.

We returned to the ship, and our maintainers set us up for the vibe-absorber tuning. We strapped back into our seats an hour later, ready for another go.

"Not so fast," was the word from CIC. Our ship would be involved in a gunnery exercise, and we were grounded until the last of the 76 mm shells was downrange. I muttered some choice words as I got out, but, hey, this was LAMPS. The plans always change.

After lunch, we again got the OK to launch. After a quick look around the helo, I was ready to pull the chocks and chains. I didn't update my brief with combat. Why should I? It still was freezing outside, and the same mountains still were visible 20 miles to the east. Nothing had changed, right?

We lifted off into the afternoon sun. Before we moved to absorber tuning, my maintainers suggested we check our 140-knot vibrations one more time. Some loose hardware had been found, and our vibration levels might have been brought within limits. I accelerated to 140 knots and headed east.

After 10 minutes, we found ourselves about 20 miles from the ship, over some barren barrier-island rocks. Good news came from the back: Our vibes were fine, and we congratulated each other. While my copilot coordinated our recovery, I lazily orbited over the rocks. I noticed a colony of seals sunbathing under us and pointed them out to the crew—hardly the aggressive VFR scan we had briefed earlier.

As we watched the disgruntled seals lumbering into the water, I caught something moving from left to right out the corner of my eye. I looked up to see two Norwegian F-16s passing overhead in landing configuration. I'm not sure how close they were, but my feeling was if you can see the other pilot turning his head to watch your aircraft pass under his, you probably were way too close. I yanked the cyclic to the left to pass further behind them.

Like every savvy LAMPS HAC, I assumed this situation in no way was my fault, and I quickly lambasted the ASTAC for not warning me that two jets were about to turn my Seahawk into an expensive hood ornament. He fumbled around on the radio, telling me he had no radar imagery on

Photo by Nils Mosberg

any strangers. That's when the ice-cold water poured down my neck.

Where exactly was that divert field? I instantly reached down and dialed in the navaid channel. I gulped as the needle swung immediately to the east, and the DME spun to 5.7. We were OK, though. We hadn't swapped paint with anyone yet, and, even if it was a military airfield, the control zone probably started at five miles, right?

It was time to do some explaining. We just would call the control tower and let them know we were at 400 feet and outside of five miles.

I casually contacted the tower and told the controller who we were and what our intentions were. We were Americans, after all, and I could talk my way out of anything—I thought.

What followed was a one-way "conversation" with a Norwegian ATC official who made it very clear I was not welcome in his airspace. He "discussed" how we had come within 400 meters of colliding with two jets on final to land, and he had been trying to contact me for the past 15 minutes. He curtly gave me a heading to fly and "asked" me to expedite my departure from his control zone, which, by the way, extended out to a range of 17 miles either side of the runway centerline.

The only reply I could muster was, "Yes sir…roger…out."

I learned many lessons that day. My first mistake was applying a blue-water mentality to a littoral environment. The divert field was not some dusty strip on a Caribbean resort island. It was a major Norwegian Air Force installation.

There is no guarantee that the regulations we adhere to in the United States are remotely similar to those of other countries. OPNAV 3710.S specifically requires the aircraft commander to make sure flights are conducted according to applicable regulations, and all NOTAMS and procedures have been reviewed. None of the other pilots on our detachment were aware of the 17-mile control zone either, but that did not matter. I was the HAC, and it was my duty to avail myself of whatever information I needed to operate safely. I failed in this responsibility and risked my crew, my aircraft, and the other pilots in the air with me. An aircraft commander agrees to do these things when he signs the A Sheet and the flight plan.

The biggest disappointment for me that day, though, was my lapse in situational awareness. This was not a routine flight; it was an FCF, and I was in command of an aircraft coming out of a major maintenance inspection. That divert field could have meant the difference between life and death for my crew. I should have known the bearing and range. I should have had the approach plates open and marked. I should have known the frequencies, the runway conditions, and any other information that would have allowed me to land there without talking to anyone and with my aircraft full of smoke. Instead, I launched without knowing where the airport was.

A long day and a moving ship had altered the playing field, and I was the last one to figure it out. Flight planning is not complete just with a morning situational snapshot. We operate in a dynamic environment, and the unforgiving nature of aviation demands we maintain a clear picture of where and how we conduct each flight.

Lt. Person is the HSL-48 Det 1 maintenance officer.