

# It's more than just Crew Rest

By Capt David Levenson, Naval Exchange Pilot

Every crew brief covers Operational Risk Management (ORM), but the ORM part all too frequently lacks depth.

**O**n one particular flight, the entire crew had gotten plenty of sleep, but ORM still played a significant role in averting a mishap over the skies of Macedonia. I was ECMO 1 in an EA-6B during a night-strike mission over southern Kosovo. After the strike, we headed toward our tanker. The communications with AWACs were unusually weak and full of static. There was a layer of broken clouds just below the tanker altitude. Without air-to-air radar or night-vision devices, finding the tanker was becoming next to impossible. With our fuel getting close to bingo, we finally found the tanker and commenced the join-up on the left, which is the standard side for the Navy, but not standard for the Air Force.

We hadn't briefed which side of the tanker we would join on — mission planning overshadowed that

type of detail. Once joined, we realized that two British Tornados were already on the tanker, one taking fuel and the other on the right side. After they finished, I saw Dash 2 disconnect and apparently clear off below us. As we slid back, anticipating getting in the basket, a bright flash filled our cockpit accompanied by severe buffet. The Tornados had tapped burner right in front of us, instead of exiting down and aft. They turned off their lights and went left into us. My pilot dumped the nose and successfully avoided them. We climbed back to the tanker, got our gas, covered another strike, and returned to Aviano.

Once on deck, I told the operations officer what had happened. Tanking briefs started getting a lot more attention. In fact, in the 45 days we were over the skies of Bosnia, this near-midair was one of

the most hazardous flight events I experienced.

This may seem like just another close call, but ORM could have easily lessened the severity of the problem or broken the chain of events leading to it. In most cases, you can easily cope with the risks of day-to-day flying. The next time you brief ORM, think of "Dumb, Different, or Directed." Each of these categories won't cover all risks that you may encounter, but they can highlight potential problems.

Some ORM concerns under "Dumb" are flying in terrible weather, descending below the briefed hard deck, or continuing a flight beyond calculated bingo. These things can usually be solved quickly in the cockpit. There are also not-so-obvious, dumb risks, and these might be the most



Photo by PH3 Todd Frantom



Photo by PHAN Ryan O'Connor

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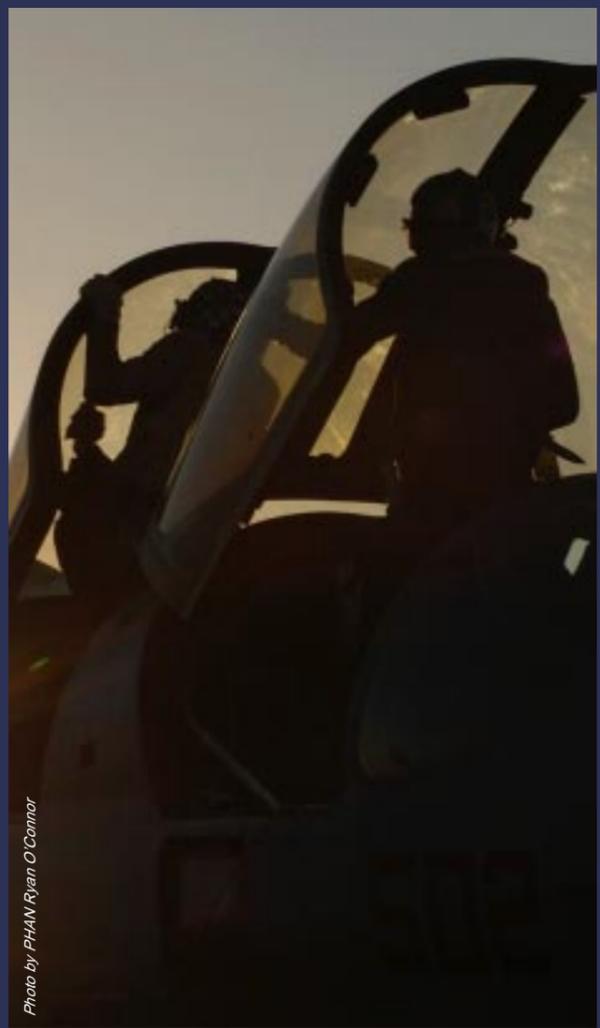


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important: poor mission planning, flying with people who have unresolved personal problems, or flying with outdated FLIP or charts. Unfortunately, these will not become apparent until too late.

"Different" covers those actions that vary from the normal activity. For example, flying into a new airfield or unfamiliar airspace. Air refueling at night is also a good example. Before our near collision with the Tornado, we should have identified the unusual procedures and briefed them. While not particularly dangerous, the items in "Different" can contribute greatly to causing a more dangerous situation.

Lastly, "Directed" activity covers those actions ordered by higher authority that may influence the aircrew's judgment. These actions are check-rides, functional check flights, cross-countries, or combat. The crew might be directly or indirectly pressured to complete the flight or check. Over Macedonia, our crew wanted to complete the air refueling, avoid a bingo divert into an unfamiliar airfield, and support the last of the night strikes. The internal drive to complete a mission, whether combat or peacetime, can cloud an aircrew's judgment.

Identifying the possible hazards is a great first step, but it is just as important to identify control measures for these hazards and ways to lessen the effects. If the severity or probability is too great, complete avoidance is often the best solution. Usually, identifying the hazard and sticking to the planned mission is enough. Occasionally, you have to make slight changes in the plan. It may be as simple as taking off earlier from a high-density-altitude airport when the temperatures are typically cooler. Remember, the goal of ORM is to understand and manage the known risks involved. ▶

**Editor's Note:** This story is reprinted courtesy of APPROACH, December 2002. Capt Levenson was flying with Navy squadron VAQ-134.

# ACT: DAILY RISK MANAGEMENT

ACT is a supplemental tool that may be used for risk assessments in time-critical situations. ACT is most beneficial in less complex off-duty activities, such as driving and recreational events. This process may also be appropriate in the execution phase of an operation in which mission demands do not allow enough time to perform a detailed analysis using the six-step ORM process, or for an "on-the-run" review prior to performing a technical order task. ACT merges the six steps of ORM into three broader steps that may be used where risk management is accomplished mentally or verbally and action taken in minutes or even seconds.

## THE ACT 3-STEP PROCESS IS:

1. Assess the Situation
2. Consider Options to Limit Risk
3. Take Proper Action

### Step 1

**Assess the Situation.** Look at your surroundings. Determine what could go wrong, the likelihood of occurrence, and severity of the impact if something does go wrong. Areas for consideration include:

**People.** How many people are involved and what are the chances for injury, illness, or death? Assess personal risk factors such as fatigue, distractions, emotions, health, and lack of training. What are the chances that any personal risk factors will affect the safe and successful accomplishment of the task or activity?

**Task or Activity.** Look at what you are trying to accomplish. Is there adequate time?

What are the consequences of not completing the task or activity?

**Equipment.** Take into account the equipment you are using. Do you have the right tools for the job? Is machinery in good condition? Are the necessary safety devices in place? What are the chances the equipment will be damaged or destroyed? Do you have the correct personal protective equipment for the task?

**Environment.** Environmental conditions may present risk factors whether inside or outdoors. Consider factors such as light, noise, weather, road conditions, etc. What is the likelihood that unfavorable conditions will negatively impact the task or activity?

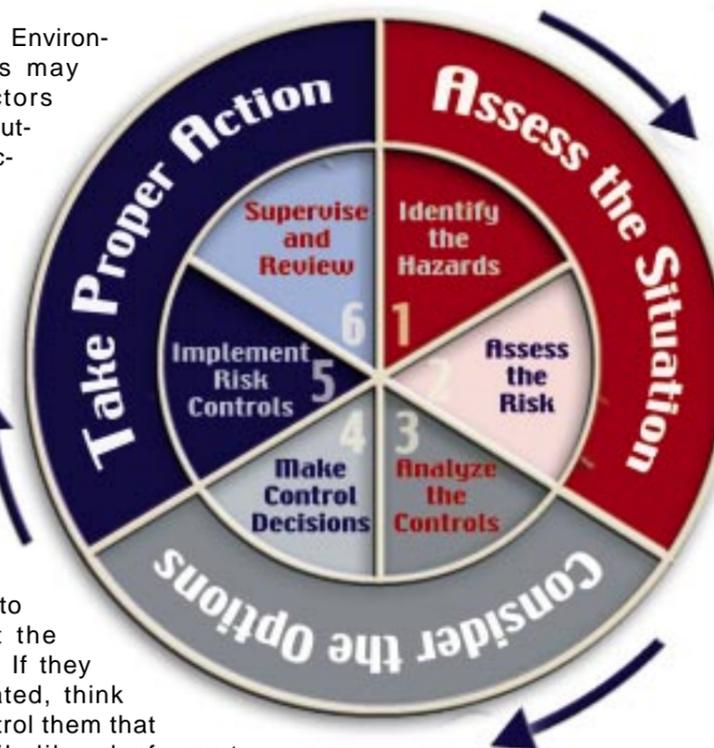
### Step 2

**Consider Options to Limit Risk.** Seek ways to eliminate or limit the risks, if possible. If they cannot be eliminated, think about ways to control them that will lessen the likelihood of something going wrong. Does the task have to be completed now, or can it be postponed to await more favorable conditions? Do you have the authority to make a decision, or does the level of risk necessitate that you elevate the circumstances to someone else for a final decision? The objective in this step is to make an informed decision at the

appropriate level. Remember, if you have the authority to accept the risk, you may need to document the reasons for your decision.

### Step 3

**Take Proper Action.** Implement the best options to mitigate risk. If others are involved, make sure they fully understand the potential risk and proper actions they



must take. When you are done with the activity, take a few minutes to review your thought process. If your ACT process worked, remember the options you used to lessen the risk factors and use them again. If your ACT process didn't work as well as planned, think about how you might improve the situation the next time. ▶

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