

Fit to Fight

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Photo by: SSgt Beth Slater

During the first night of RED FLAG 04-2, a two-ship of NATO F-16s and an EA-6B Prowler entered Nellis recovery airspace without clearance from approach control. Nellis control, saturated with other recovering aircraft, directed the F-16s to turn north into the path of the southbound Prowler who was not yet radar identified. The lead F-16 passed less than 200 feet above the EA-6B. Two years earlier, the lead of a two-ship of F-16s passed within 400 feet of a civilian Cessna 320 after the flight lead misapplied local procedures and violated Las Vegas Class B airspace.

These events are a sample of the many near midair collisions involving RED FLAG participants the past 2 years, and they illustrate a troubling trend: the lack of safety emphasis on administrative portions of the mission as opposed to tactical portions of the sortie. In fact, most safety events occur during the recovery. The Hazardous Air Traffic Reports filed in the above examples noted lack of crew knowledge of local procedures and exercise Special Instructions (SPINS) as root causes for the close calls. In truth, the root causes lie deeper.

The RED FLAG exercise environment is the world's most realistic large force employment scenario, and the training gained from participation is unrivaled but, as I have illustrated, is not without risk. In order to mitigate the risk during every phase of the sorties, we must apply Operational Risk Management (ORM) well before the exercise begins. One way to do this is to determine if your squadron is fit to fight. A key person who can help the commander determine his unit's fitness and readiness for RED FLAG in the months prior to deployment is the Flight Safety Officer (FSO).

How can the FSO use ORM to determine if their squadron is fully fit to fight? There are a variety of tools available to aid in risk control (AFPAM 90-902), but the one I'd like to present is the 5M Model (Fig 1). It analyzes the Management of Media, Machine and Man to maximize Mission accomplishment without unnecessary risk.



Photo by: SSGT Beth Slater



FIGURE 1

Management is the key to success of any squadron safety program and employs the cooperative efforts of the commander, weapons officer, and FSO. Here we are specifically talking about how the commander critically analyzes the Media, Machine, and Man portion of the model in order to identify risks and formulate steps to mitigate them. The commander makes the ultimate decision on squadron readiness, but the FSO can help with the analysis of each "M."

Media reflects the expected operating environment. A detailed analysis of RED FLAG Media ensures that everyone in the squadron has a big picture of what to expect and how to prepare. The FSOs and weapons officers do this by developing a training plan. This plan

should incorporate a comprehensive review of exercise SPINS and Nellis' local area procedures. In addition, squadron standards, in-flight guides, and local area maps should all be published for everyone to review well before arrival at Nellis. One of the best ways to check to see if your training is on track is to offer comprehensive academic classes and test the squadron in the basics. The commander and operations officer also should allocate time for a flight spin-up for the squadron. This spin-up should include an update of required training currencies and employment of the attacks and tactics expected.

The look of RED FLAG changes every period and squadrons need to adapt to this changing environment.

Therefore, the training plan should include a review of exercise participants and new elements or scenarios. This training will identify potential hazards associated with integrating diverse assets and working with NATO partners, as well as prepare those who have "been there before" to get a look at new elements. Every RED FLAG is different and scenarios are tailored to the requests of participants and the deployed forces commander. Combat Search and Rescue and Time Sensitive Targeting are just two examples of diverse missions being integrated into the RED FLAG scenario. In addition to analyzing the Media, the FSO is also an excellent conduit between maintenance and the operators in identifying risks associated with the Machine.

lishes the squadron's overall fitness. It is important that everyone understands current exercise objectives and, both operators and maintainers, are prepared to handle them. For example, a sound training plan accomplishes required upgrades and ensures people are well prepared for the task at hand. RED FLAG is not the time to accomplish upgrades! The exercise affords an awesome training environment and upgrades tend to overflow an already full plate. The FSO provides a good perspective when these issues come up and helps prevent doing too much with too little experience. If the FSO, weapons officer and commander do their job prior to the deployment the final "M," Mission will be a success with the least amount of risk.

Everyone plays a critical role in Mission success, but it's management's responsibility to set up the best environment to achieve success. This is a reason that the FSO works directly for the commander. The use of the 5M Model is an example of how FSOs can maximize the success of their squadron at RED FLAG. The precedent set by someone arriving at Nellis who is not fit to fight jeopardizes the valuable training that RED FLAG affords. Therefore, commanders must ensure that their squadrons are ready, and each participant must be grounded in the basics before the Sunday in-briefs. If not, they are taking unnecessary risks before the simulated war even starts.

The Machine portion of the 5M Model focuses on aircraft preparation. The FSO should talk with maintenance about expected configurations, ordnance and exercise vulnerability periods. The squadron should tailor deployment configuration to reduce reconfiguration time once aircraft land at Nellis. If maintenance cannot support the current tactical plan, then adjust sortie generation and manning. Once RED FLAG starts, the FSO can continue to help in this arena by giving the commander a better sense of the demands placed on the maintenance personnel. This leads to the analysis of the final portion of the model, Man.

Man includes the experience and proficiency level of all squadron personnel. Evaluating these elements estab-



Photo By: SSGT Jeffrey Allen

RED FLAG ORM CHECKLIST

This is not an all-inclusive checklist but gives FSOs a starting point to evaluate squadron readiness. If the FSO concentrates in these 4Ms then the 5th M, Mission, has greater chance of success.

- **MANAGEMENT**
 - Establish exercise objectives
 - Evaluate squadron readiness
 - Appoint an experienced project officer
- **MEDIA**
 - Establish a solid training plan
- **Dedicate scheduled aircraft solely for RED FLAG spin-up**
- **Culminate in a base Live Fire Exercise prior to deployment**
 - Print copies of Nellis In-flight Guide and local area maps for everyone (NLT 1 month prior)
- **Highlight common visual references on maps**
 - Conduct squadron academics on Nellis procedures and SPINS
- **Type and number of aircraft participating**
- **Missions to expect**
- **Nations involved**
- **Vulnerability periods and mission commander responsibilities**
 - Test squadron aircrew knowledge of Nellis procedures and SPINS
 - Foot stomp mishaps associated with RED FLAG (HATRs on recovery)
- **MACHINE**
 - Inform maintenance of planned deployment configuration
 - Determine the best exercise configuration
 - Determine sortie generation schedule and number of aircraft to deploy
 - Planned ordnance (live drops involved; relocating aircraft)
- **MAN**
 - Establish upgrade priorities
- **Mission commanders need comprehensive academics**
 - Training currencies (Night, LOWAT, AAR)