

Fatigue, Frustration and... That Deer on the Runway

Our squadron had been back from cruise for only two months when we again began bouncing for the boat. Deck certifications and CQ requirements made it seem we were right back where we had been a year ago, at the peak of the work-up cycle. The first CQ period in November went smoothly, and I had the good fortune to be the designated squadron LSO for the detachment. We were blessed with good weather and a deck crew still fresh from cruise. The downside was the 1.5-hour taxi-fam-at-night necessary to qualify the yellowshirts for the next night CQ.

Prior to the second CQ period, the squadron's head LSO developed a realistic FCLP plan to work around Thanksgiving and still complete the training. Unfortunately, the third squadron LSO would be in San Diego for three weeks of FAC(A) School, so we were down to two. I quickly realized the flight-deck pay received on cruise was actually compensation for the long nights at our outlying field. Every night, I was either bouncing or waving. Finally, on the last

night of FCLPs, I was going to get home by 2000. At least, that was the plan.

We briefed at 1630 for an 1830 takeoff. The weather looked good, with maybe a bit of a crosswind at Fentress. My RIO and I had flown the FCLP pattern lots of times together, so the only new ORM issue that came to mind in the brief was getting into and out of Fentress.

We knew the jet had some AOA indexer problems, but the gripes were signed off. The indexers looked good when we tested the lights. As I was keying the mike to call base to check us out of the line, our newest nugget pilot relayed to maintenance that his jet was down because of a problem with the digital flight controls. Being a team player, I decided we should hot-switch crews. I was hoping I would get the OK from the head LSO to go ahead and call it a night. I guess my bounces hadn't been as strong as I thought; he told me to hot-switch into the next jet back.

An hour and a half after hopping out of the first jet, we hot-switched into another one. I checked my watch, and we were already an hour past our first land time when we taxied to the duty runway. As I wiped out the flight controls, they felt all wrong. I couldn't get full throw in the aft and left quadrant. The stick was fighting me, trying to re-center. We taxied back to the line just as our original jet was coming out of the fuel pits. The RIO in that jet asked us if we wanted to get back into that one.

My "I-can-hack-it voice" started its mental dialogue. "Come on, you're already dressed," I told myself. "You've already put five hours into this event. You're an LSO, give the new guys a good example. The head LSO is waiting

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Please send your questions, comments or recommendations to Cdr. John Anderson or to Capt Dennis M. Faherty, Director, Operational Risk Management, Cdr. Anderson's address is: Code 11, Naval Safety Center, 375 A St., Norfolk, VA 23511-4299. (757) 444-3520, ext. 7203 (DSN-564). E-mail: janderson@navsafetycenter.navy.mil

Write Capt. Faherty at OPNAV/Code N-09X, 2000 Navy Pentagon, Rm. 5E-816, Washington DC 20350-2000. (703) 614-8430, (DSN-224). E-mail: fbaherty@navy.mil



How Many Points Does Have?

by Lt. Mike Horn

I heard our nugget pilot tell tower to get somebody to chase a deer near the duty runway.

for you.” At the same time, I was talking to the maintainers who were troubleshooting my jet. I could feel my frustration rising. Then I heard our nugget pilot tell tower to get somebody to chase a deer near the duty runway.

I still was planning on hot-switching. I also was concentrating on the plane captain’s wipeout signals and wondering how many points the deer had. Then base called to tell me the original jet still had no AOA. I finally decided to call it a night.

What helped me decide to hang it up was envisioning a scenario where people were questioning my judgment, and I was having to defend myself. What if I tried to hack it, bounced, and then hit that deer on the runway coming back home? For starters, GE 110 engines cost more than \$3 million each. Why man-up three times at night for FCLPs, three hours after scheduled takeoff time?

Many times we brief ORM, but we don’t continually update our risk assessment. In this case, I identified new hazards of fatigue, frustration, and aircraft status (not to mention the deer) and applied them to the FCLP mission. Did the mission outweigh the risks? No.

I finally made the right decision, because you’re reading about it in *Approach* instead of on the message board. 🛩️

Lt. Horn flies with VF-143.



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