

When I Was at



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for not taking a stand
when I should have.**

By LCdr. Christopher B. Walker

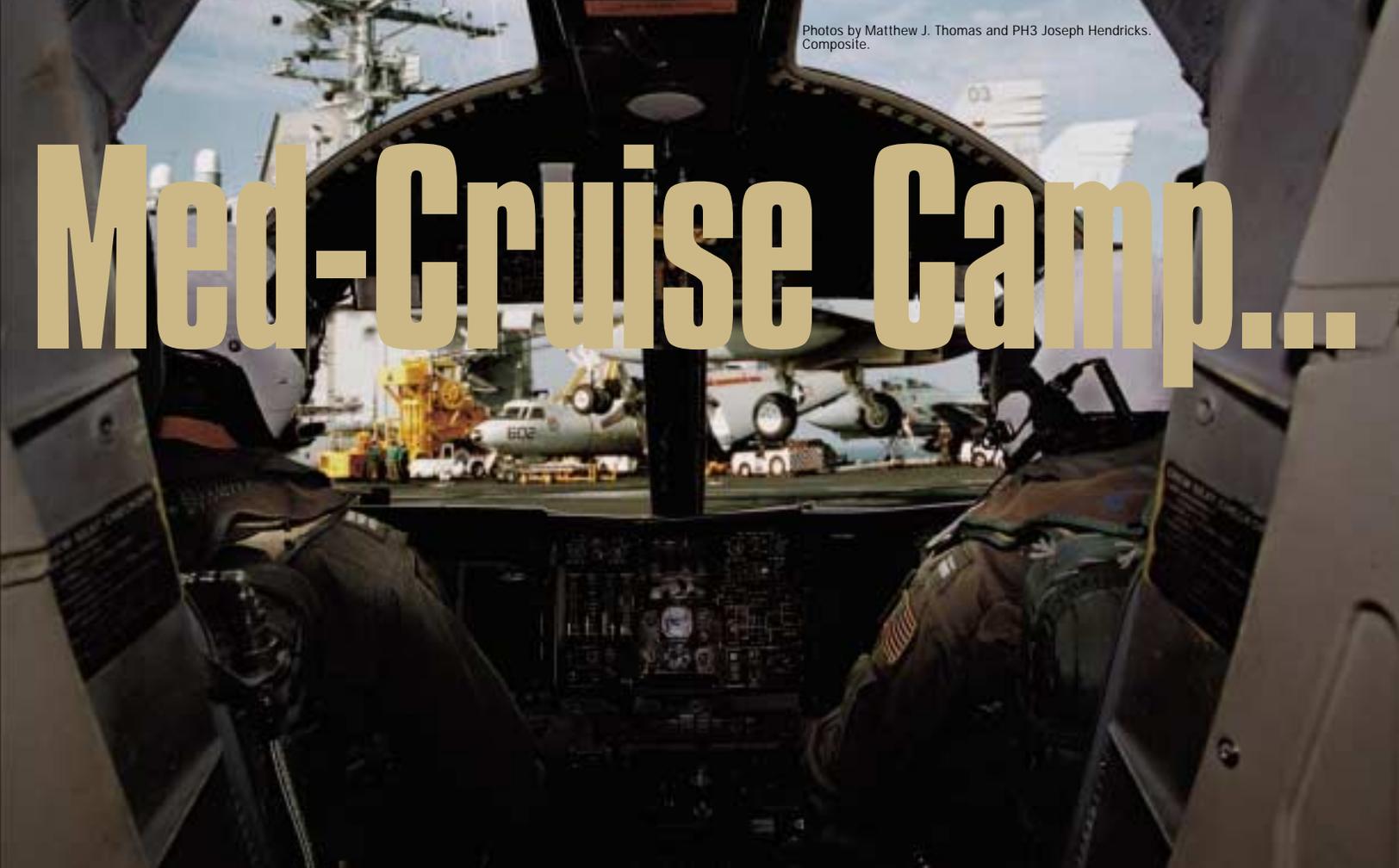
Sooner or later, you will ignore or violate NATOPS. The circumstances that tempt you may vary, but the situation always arrives unannounced and uninvited. This is my story of poor decisions and even worse ORM.

I was a nugget S-3 NFO, four weeks out of the RAG and on my first Med deployment. My pilot was the squadron CO, and we were scheduled for a day-recovery-tank mission. The flight seemed straightforward, and I was excited to go.

Preflight and man-up were uneventful. About five minutes before breaking down for launch, I noticed the No. 1 oil pressure had dropped to zero. I told the skipper and expected him to shut off the motor, call for a troubleshooter, pat me on the back, and tell me what a good boy I was for noticing the problem. Those things didn't happen, though.

Instead, the CO leaned over, tapped the gauge, rubbed his chin, and asked me for a screwdriver. My head started to swim. "Zero oil pressure, and the PCL says shut it down," I

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thought. “What in the world does he want with a screwdriver?”

Instead of saying, “Skipper, shouldn’t we shut it down?” I handed him my Swiss army knife. I figured his 4,000-plus hours of flight time allowed him to know something obviously I did not. He quietly and methodically used the screwdriver to swap out the No.1 gauge with the No. 2 gauge. We now had a reading of zero psi on the left oil pressure.

I was relieved the gauge was OK, and the problem was identified. I was sure the CO quickly would bring the left throttle to the off position, just like NATOPS says, but he didn’t.

The yellowshirt signaled to break us down. The skipper looked at me and said, “I’m certain what we have here is a popped breaker; I’ve seen this before. We don’t have time to unstrap now, so let’s take a look at it on the cat when we go into tension.”

What I should have said was, “Sir, how about if I get out while you take it to the cat with someone else in my seat,” or words to that effect, but with less sarcasm. I didn’t say

anything, though. I went to the cat with it, and we ran it up, with no indications of a problem, and off we went.

The problem was with the breaker, but that knowledge didn’t make me feel any better. I still was upset. I was angry at myself for not taking a stand when I should have. I vowed never again to let anyone talk me into doing something dumb, no matter how much they outranked me by pay grade or flight time.

To his credit, my CO apologized for putting me in such an uncomfortable position, and admitted what he did was wrong.

My intent in submitting this story is to get all aviators to think about similar scenarios now, instead of waiting until one happens. I urge senior aviators to do the right thing. You may have tremendous pressure to complete each sortie, but you also are responsible for mentoring junior aviators. I likewise urge junior aviators to stand up for what you think is right. Do it respectfully, and any good leader will listen. 🦅

LCdr. Walker flies with VS-22.