



*by Lt. Andre Ragin and Lt. Kirk Schneringer*

**W**e were in the third month of our deployment and our second month in the Arabian Gulf. We had the routine down pat. The “It can’t happen to me” attitude had set in.

This day started off with a typical flight brief for a short one-hour hop. The crew consisted of two other cruise-experienced junior officers and a guest photographer’s mate. We covered all of the mission items and, although we had heard the flight safety brief 50 times before, the pilot gave it anyway. This part of the brief is always important, but since our guest rider had few flight hours, we took the extra time to meticulously brief this portion. We didn’t want any questions if something went wrong. It was a good thing we did.

Man-up, start-up, and taxiing to the catapult were uneventful but, by the time we left the pointy end of the ship, we realized this flight wasn’t going to be routine. As soon as the plane jumped off the deck, we couldn’t talk to each other—we had lost our ICS. Per the brief, we worked through this difficulty by yelling and gesturing. Since it was Case I, zip lip, we decided to climb to our squadron altitude and troubleshoot.

Soon we had something else to troubleshoot: a master caution light for an unlocked wing. The COTAC (front-right seater) and TACCO (back seater) pulled out their pocket checklists, and we went through the procedures. After reviewing the checklists, we agreed it was probably just a proximity switch, but to be on the safe side, we

# outine

## After All

would do a precautionary straight-in. We tried to contact departure to talk to a squadron representative, but all we heard was, well, nothing. For the first time, we realized we might have a total communications failure and couldn't talk to anyone. We tried using the backup radio, cycling circuit breakers, and anything else we could think of, but to no avail. All our resources were exhausted, and we resigned ourselves to the fact we were NORDO.

Per the NORDO portion of the safety-of-flight brief, we joined up with another S-3B overhead. To get the ship's attention, the COTAC rolled in 7600 as our new squawk and broke out his PRC-90. Using standard hand signals and a quick call over Guard, we were able to notify our playmate we were NORDO. To avoid a comm-jam of Guard, the COTAC signaled our new wingman to switch up the alternate SAR frequency. The COTAC pushed the other S-3B forward, and the pilot passed them the lead. They relayed our problems to the squadron representative in the tower, who began coordinating with the air boss. Since our problems were not too serious, we decided to stay on the wing of our newfound friend and land in the next recovery.

Just when things were looking up, the weather began to deteriorate. The first sandstorm of the deployment rolled in and engulfed the carrier. Visibility rapidly decreased, and it became obvious

we'd be making a Case III recovery. The lead aircrew confirmed our suspicions, as they passed the approach information to the COTAC over SAR frequency.

Flying NORDO was no different than flying normal form. We were comfortable. Why? Because we often had trained for this situation by practicing NORDO approaches. The lead aircraft took us through the entire approach and was able to drop us off at one mile and 400 feet behind the boat. Visibility was so bad we barely were able to break out a ball until just inside three-quarters of a mile. With help from the COTAC, the pilot was able to break out the ball and fly it to touchdown. We were safe on deck and our not-so-routine flight finally was over.

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No matter how boring the safety-of-flight brief seems, it is the building block for a good flight. Thanks to the brief and all of our section-formation practice, we were prepared. Despite the stress of being NORDO, having an actual emergency, and flying in IMC conditions, we were able to overcome, adapt and improvise. ✈️

Lt. Ragin and Lt. Schneringer fly with VS-22.