

TACICAL RISK MANAGEMENT – Defeating the Blue Threat

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How do you get your best and brightest to think risk management? How do you bring the operators, those raised on getting the job done at nearly any cost, to understand that preventing mishaps and preserving assets are vital components to mission accomplishment? How do you get the hard chargers who do not strive to be safety officers or labeled as risk managers to team with those assigned to those important jobs? The answer to these questions is to redefine safety and express it in a language they understand. To take the principles and steps of operational risk management (ORM) and present them in the same way we do the foundational tenants of our profession. You give them safety and ORM as tactics against an enemy.

Tactical Risk Management, or TRM, is an educational package that presents safety and ORM in a way that connects the young warrior, the tactician, the technician, to these concepts as weapons to train to and use in a fight. TRM introduces personnel not assigned to safety related jobs to a way of thinking that brings common-sense processes typically thought of as safety related, and perhaps as obstructive to getting the job done, into the war-fighting realm. TRM harnesses the same energy and ingenuity we put toward subduing and defeating our potential enemies and directs them toward combat against real dangers faced every day in training and in combat. The threats we pose to ourselves and can control are very different from the red threats, enemy threats, we study, plan and train to engage each and every time we strap on an airplane. These Blue Threats are often hidden from us. They are subtle and well camouflaged as just part of daily operations. But they are very real and as deadly as any enemy we currently face.

TRM was born of the marriage of two unlikely partners – the tactical giants of Marine Corps aviation, MAWTS-1, and the safety scholars of the Navy, the School of Aviation Safety. The concept came in response to an unacceptable spike in Marine Corps mishaps, several involving Weapons and Tactics Instructors (WTI). The underlying idea was this: If we could introduce safety and risk management concepts to the tactical leaders of the Marine Corps in a new way, a way that causes them to view asset preservation as vital to mission success, they would then become allies of the squadron safety professionals. If the WTI could be enlisted as an important, credible voice for aviation safety in the ready room, a powerful voice typically not known to espouse safety on a routine basis, a synergistic partnership could be formed between the WTI and the Aviation Safety Officer (ASO) – the Red Threat expert and the Blue Threat expert.

In the TRM classes designed for the weapons and tactics instructors, important elements of safety and risk management are presented not to try and turn the WTI into a safety officer, or to rename or repackage ORM, but introduce the concepts in a way that relates directly to combat, to training, to the core of the Naval Aviation profession. The TRM course introduces the young aviators to subjects like mishap analysis, fatigue and decision making, human factors, safety ethics and safety culture. TRM introduces the warrior to safety by presenting hazards as threats, real threats that are faced each day.

The Navy Fighter Weapons School was formed in the Viet Nam era when our kill ratio dropped to 2 to 1 – in our favor. Since 1991, the Blue Threat has better than a 30 to 1 kill ratio against us when compared to the red forces we faced. It seems only logic, perhaps imperative, that that we bring all of our best efforts toward winning this fight.