

## Oh, So That's Why They Told Us a Hundred Times

We had no hope of getting out of the clouds without descending too low for our mission.

by Ltjg. John Joseph

One night, we were tasked with a triple-cycle, airborne early warning mission—lots of time to spend on station with no tasking. Just as we launched, UHF 1 failed. No problem, it had been written up and fixed before, and we had five UHF radios left. We tried our “airborne” call on UHF 3 while we flew the departure. No luck.

Then our TACAN failed, so now we really needed a call to departure. A third radio finally allowed us to call out and request a climb on course. A minute later we were in the clouds, climbing to station, discussing how we were going to get back UHF 1 or 3, since they are the only two radios available on emergency generator.

With our attention fixed on this problem, we failed to notice the temperature steadily falling below freezing. Once we reached station, we took profile, and the pilot got out of his seat to check some circuit-breakers on the failed radios. As he climbed back into his seat, the copilot's airspeed indicator began to rapidly decrease (its pitot tube had frozen). Lots of ice had accumulated on the windshield, so we decided to turn on our engine anti-icing system. We called the ship to get help from the ATs in troubleshooting our radio problems. They suggested we swap a few boxes, so we set to work and eventually fixed our radios.

Five minutes later, both the back- and front-end crews reported hearing what sounded like something bouncing around in the

forward equipment compartment. While we were worrying about the radios, ice had been building on the props. Now, chunks of ice were smashing into the fuselage. Vibrations began to pick up. Long after we should have, we turned on the prop de-icing system. We gave the system a few minutes to work, but nothing happened.

A quick check of the amperage on the prop de-ice panel revealed it was not working. As vibrations increased, we descended to warmer temperatures. We had no hope of getting out of the clouds without descending too low for our mission. Eventually, the ice dissipated, as did the vibrations.

On recovery, we still didn't have a TACAN. Marshall eventually vectored us in for a recovery, then switched us to approach, where we were told to fly bullseye. Well, we had no bullseye, which was par for the course. We flew a CCA until we locked up needles at one mile and made an uneventful trap.

Our icing problem had escalated farther than it ever should have. Had we prioritized our problems, we would have put the radio troubleshooting aside and focused on the potentially dangerous icing conditions. From day one, we're told to *aviate, navigate, then communicate*. It is easy to forget this mantra when the mission is routine or when problems arise. 

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