

23,000 Feet and No Where's That Green Wh

by Lt. Steve Barr

How many times have you been behind the JBD and gone through your settle-off-the-cat procedures? How many times have you rogered the weight board and practiced touching the ejection-seat handle? How many times have you practiced finding the emergency-oxygen handle? In my case, for this last question at least, the answer was “Not enough.”

a rapid descending turn back towards the ship and struggled, for an extremely long few seconds, to find that green loop. I finally gave up and proceeded with the other steps. After I secured the OBOGS, the oxygen plenum had drained, and I found myself gasping for oxygen through my

It was during my first cruise. When we weren't flying combat missions over Kosovo, we'd fly training missions over the Ionian Sea. One night, I was scheduled for a Red Air AIC hop. There was an overcast layer at 13,000 feet, with layers reaching up to 26,000 feet. I had just launched and was proceeding to my cap point, climbing through 23,000 feet, when I saw the master-caution light and both bleed-air warning lights illuminate. I looked to the left DDI (digital display) to confirm the bleeds had shut off automatically (L/R BLEED OFF CAUTION present).

After I gathered my thoughts, I proceeded through my immediate-action items in accordance with NATOPS. I got through the first step but got hung up on Step 2: “Emergency oxygen green ring - Pull.” There I was, climbing through the overcast at night with a dual bleed-air warning, and I couldn't find the little green apple. I started

mask. I removed my mask, told lead about my problem, and double-checked my altimeter while increasing my descent rate, trying to get down to 10,000 feet. At this point, I was more concerned about losing altitude than I was about finding the green apple.

The rep in CATCC was now talking me through the steps to ensure I had completed all the immediate-action items. When asked if I had used the emergency oxygen, I answered, “No” and didn't elaborate. He told me to put my mask back on, and after a frantic search, I was able to find the handle and start the emergency oxygen.

Thinking that all my problems were behind me, I realized that I still had 800 pounds of fuel in my centerline external tank and absolutely no way to



o Pressure— natchamacallit?



Photo modification by Patricia Eaton

He told me to put my mask back on, and after a frantic search, I was able to find the handle and start the emergency oxygen.

get it into the aircraft. The Hornet can not recover aboard the ship with more than 500 pounds in the centerline tank. Consequently, this flight ended with a divert to NAS Sigonella.

I could have avoided some of the problems associated with this emergency. I'm not sure how long it took me to descend to 10,000 feet, but the time of useful consciousness at 23,000 feet is 3 minutes and 50 seconds. That is the time between oxygen deprivation and the onset of physical or mental impairment (hypoxia). Can you say cham-

ber ride? What some people don't know is that the first stage of hypoxia is the "indifferent" stage, when the only adverse effect is on eyesight. In the chamber, we've all experienced these symptoms and those that follow.

In the past, I never went off the catapult without reviewing procedures and touching switches and handles. Now there's one more handle that I find prior to every flight. 

Lt. Barr flies with VFA-15.