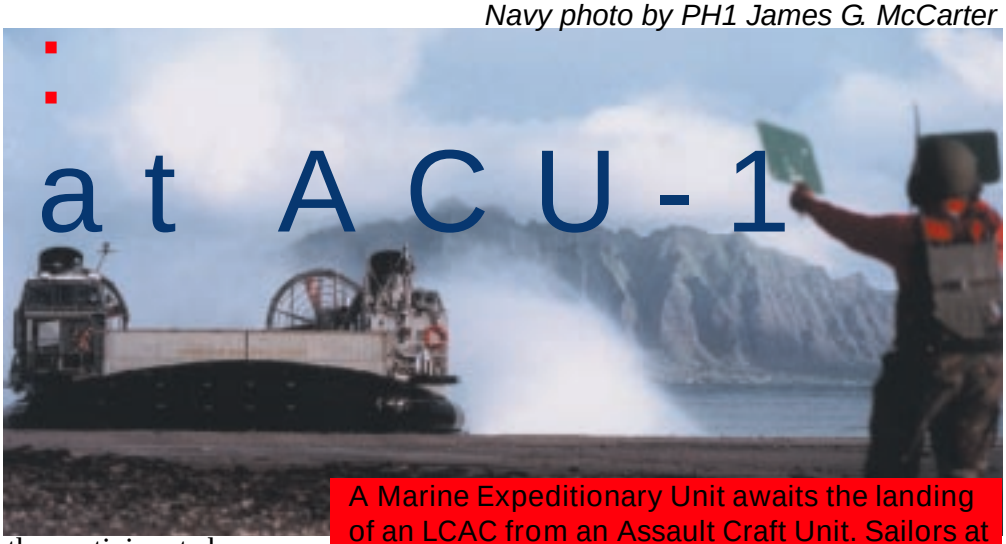
ORM: SOP at ACU-1

Navy photo by PH1 James G. McCarter



A Marine Expeditionary Unit awaits the landing of an LCAC from an Assault Craft Unit. Sailors at ACU-1 use operational risk management in planning all missions.

By Ltjg. Land Anderson, ACU-1

Case 1:

A fleet commander schedules an amphibious operation months in advance. All the participants know their parts. The Marines launch toward the beach. As they approach the entrance to the bay in 17 combat rubber raiding craft, they are startled by waves up to 20 feet high. The day ends with one Marine dead, 10 injured, and thousands of dollars of equipment lost.

Case 2:

Personnel use LCACs and LCUs to offload Marine Corps vehicles from an LSD as part of an amphibious exercise. Procedures call for moving a vehicle from the flight deck, down through the truck tunnel, then positioning it on a turntable, which revolves clockwise until the vehicle lines up with a ramp. Once an LCAC or LCU is ready for loading, personnel roll a vehicle down the ramp, into the welldeck, then into the landing craft.

The procedures work smoothly until afternoon, when the LSD ballasts down to get 8 feet of water in the welldeck. An LCU is scheduled to deliver cargo that's to be loaded aboard an LCAC for transfer ashore. When the water level reaches 6 feet, with a two-degree trim by the stern, disaster strikes.

An unchocked, five-ton truck with a trailer attached is on the turntable and aligned with the ramp. Personnel had parked the equipment there earlier. Suddenly, the truck and trailer roll down the ramp and slam into a Marine. Corpsmen from the ship's medical team start CPR on the victim and move him to an LHA, where doctors pronounce him dead.

These mishaps, as discussed in the June-July 1990 and May-June 1992 issues of *Fathom*, respectively, are typical of what can happen when a command doesn't use operational risk management (ORM). At Assault Craft Unit One, though, we use ORM in all our plans for landing-craft missions, including beaching, station-keeping, combined operations with LCACs, and welldeck operations. We also use ORM in operations with USMC rubber-raiding craft. It prepares everyone for the expected, as well as the unexpected.

Our ORM process for landing-craft beaching incorporates such factors as range of tide, littoral current, obstructions, weather, visibility, beach gradient, man overboard, engineering casualty, and personnel offload. The mission planning requires a craftmaster to evaluate the severity and probability of each hazard, and to assign a risk-assessment code to each one before the operation starts.

As part of our process, we also evaluate conditions in real time, list problems, implement controls, and provide feedback for future use. Here are examples of controls we use for operations in heavy seas:

- Require people to use a safety harness.
- Limit the number of people topside.
- Set no-go criteria to cancel operations.

The final step before every event is an operational brief with the CO.

In short, ORM has become an everyday way to ensure safe amphibious operations, focus on important details, implement controls, and review lessons learned.

Ltjg. Anderson is the engineering and safety officer at ACU-1. His e-mail address is cheng@acu1.navy.mil.