

Short Fall Leads to a Big Knock on the Head

By AD3 Xiao Yi

It was a Friday night, just after my shift began, and after mid-check pass down, around 2330. The mech shop divided up the jobs, and we headed out to our aircraft, knowing that we had a busy night ahead of us. I wish we had known how badly it would turn out.

An AD2 and I were assigned to install fuel nozzles on the No.1 engine of a P-3C, which was parked inside the hangar. PD-000 is a P-3C Orion that our maintenance department was working hard to return to service after an involved ISIS period and MCI inspection. We checked out PPE and tools for the job and then walked to where the plane was parked in the hangar. Two B-4 maintenance stands already were positioned on either side of the engine.

I put my tools on the stand, put on my cranial, and climbed the ladder built into one end of the stand. I jacked up the B-4 stand high enough to allow me to reach the fuel nozzles—a height of about five or six feet. Knowing all the B-4 stand's railings were installed, I took off my cranial and started installing new fuel nozzles, which was an accepted practice within the VP community.

I noticed that one of the fuel lines was in the way, preventing me from accomplishing the job. I grabbed a wrench and tried to take off the fitting on one side of the fuel line. The fitting was on very tight, so I turned the wrench harder, trying to loosen the fitting. When it finally came loose, my hand slipped and hit the frame of the engine, cutting my knuckle. It started to bleed steadily, but a banged-up knuckle and some blood isn't anything new for a mechanic. I looked down at my finger and thought, "Ah, not so bad." Suddenly, though, I felt dizzy. The rest is a blur.

When I opened my eyes, I felt like I just had awakened from a dream. I was confused as to why I was looking up at the underside of the wing and didn't know how I got there. After a minute, I realized that I just had fallen from the stand. When I tried to sit up, a stream of blood ran down my head and into my right eye. Another maintainer, who happened to be walking by and saw me, ran to the duty office and called an ambulance.





The corpsman took me to the emergency room of a local hospital, where I was treated for more than 12 hours. My injuries included a fractured vertebra in my neck and a deep cut in my scalp, requiring eight staples to close.

Considering that I was unconscious when I fell and possibly landed headfirst on a hard concrete floor, I'm extremely lucky my injuries weren't more severe.

The aircraft or support equipment wasn't damaged, a good thing, but the cost for my shop and me was substantial. My time away from work left my short-handed shop struggling even more to get the work done.

My chain of command said my accident was extremely rare; in fact, no one could remember anyone else ever falling from an elevated engine stand before.

We fly and fix airplanes everyday. Often, our maintenance tasks are repetitive which can lead to complacency, and we sometimes forget that our jobs have many hidden dangers. Safety extends far beyond following standard operating procedures, and risk-management cannot always eliminate every risk, especially those we overlook or cannot see. ORM is a tool we use to minimize the risks associated with our day-to-day tasks, and it helps us accomplish these tasks safely and efficiently.

Had I continued to wear my cranial while working on the B-4 stand, my injuries wouldn't have been as bad. In addition, a safety rope, strap, or line across the rail-less side of the stand near the ladder could have minimized or even prevented my fall. We saw a way to improve how we do maintenance on an elevated work stand, and now my wing has eliminated the previous

practice of "optional cranial usage" with the rails installed.

I learned a valuable lesson about always being alert. Accidents can happen at any time, so use ORM and challenge questionable practices or procedures that are commonplace. It may keep you from a big knock on the head. ✦

Petty Officer Yi works in the mech shop at VP-9.

Injuries From Falls (Aircraft, SE and Vehicles)

Year	IC-A Fatals	IC-C PPD	IC-D >5 LWD	IC-E 1-4 LWD	IC-F First Aid	IC-M <1 LWD	Totals
2001	1		2				3
2002			4	2	1		7
2003			8	1	1		10
2004			3	4	3	3	13
2005			9	6	2	15	32
2006		1	3	4		13	21
2007				6		2	8
Totals	1	1	29	23	7	33	94