

A New Kind Of **E** Ordnance



On land, the procedures become very complicated. Difficulty arises when working with ordnance members of other branches, who often are not familiar with the Navy's weaponry.

While waiting for the fire department and the disposal team to arrive, a few people in the area asked why we didn't just pull out the hanging flare. I explained

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Our squadron was deployed on board USS *Enterprise*, and we were called upon for troop-movement assistance in Bagram, Afghanistan. On short notice, we expeditiously deployed three aircraft and 27 maintainers to the area. In a combat area, aircraft carry various countermeasures to ward off attack. This day, we would have to find a way to counter a returning countermeasure.

Our Prowlers carried MJU-8s, which is a decoy flare 5.8 inches long with a diameter of 1.4 inches. It burns at 4,000 degrees F. for approximately six seconds. During day missions, the aircrew would fire flares for a "confidence check." The missions were going as planned, and ops were normal, until one EA-6B returned with a surprise.

When the aircraft landed, we began our post-flight inspection. During this process, I looked back and saw a flare hanging down from the bucket, almost three-quarters of the way out of the container. I then cleared all personnel to a safe distance and told my QASO of the situation. Our flight-line chief called the Fire Department, and our QASO contacted EOD.

On the ship, EOD also is called for a hung flare, and they usually throw the entire flare bucket over the side of the ship and into the water. Unfortunately, in Afghanistan, we didn't have the luxury of a large body of water.

that it had the potential to cook off, and they were quick to withdraw their question. The fire department arrived, and the EOD team quickly came up with a plan to remove the bucket from the aircraft and to take it out to a remote area. It then would be destroyed.

This plan seemed reasonable at first glance; however, after a disposal team member looked at the flare up close, he decided the bucket was too unstable to be carried in a vehicle. A large pile of dirt did exist on the edge of a taxiway. They brought in a backhoe to dig a 10-foot-by-10-foot hole in the ground, so the bucket could be destroyed on site.

After the hole was finished, EOD put the bucket in the hole, and moved everyone away. They wired two-and-a-half pounds of C-4 to the bucket and then used a remote detonator. The first attempt to detonate the C-4 was unsuccessful, but the second try worked. The entire process took approximately six hours to complete.

Hung or unexpended ordnance of any kind is dangerous. In my short five years of being an ordnance technician in the EA-6B community, this was my first experience with hung ordnance. Had anyone simply pulled out the flare, it could have ignited and caused serious injury or death to anyone in the vicinity. This event was a good lesson for me and to those who don't work with ordnance on a daily basis. Everyone should be aware of the dangers and the potential injuries that hung ordnance can present. ✨