



# It Was Our First No-Fly Day

Navy photo by PHAN Refugio Carrillo

By AOAN Kinsey M. Barnes, VS-30

**I**t was our first no-fly day since our June arrival in the Persian Gulf. The weather's reputation proved accurate: it was sweltering hot. Working on the flight deck in the middle of summer in the Persian Gulf is like sitting in a car that's been basking all day in the summer sun.

I was working night shift. Our squadron had been flying combat missions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, so most of the flight schedule was under the stealthy cover of night. We were pleased to have a reasonably comfortable night temperature. The night-check supervisor returned from the nightly maintenance meeting and gave us the passdown. We didn't have much to do: daily inspections for the following day's flights and two special 7-day inspections. The 7-day inspections are checks performed on the buddy-store guillotine system to ensure the circuits are receiving the proper amount of voltage to activate the CADs. Activated in flight during a store malfunction, the guillotine system will cut, clamp and jettison the hose and drogue.

We started work on the first aircraft, which was in the hangar bay. That check was completed without incident. When we returned to the shop, our supervisor told us to go to the flight deck and do the daily inspections. An AO3 who was relatively new to our shop, an AOAN, and I decided we would knock out the final 7-day inspections while we were doing the daily inspections and thus avoid another trip later in the evening—mistake No. 1.

Whenever you perform release-and-control checks, two items can't be left behind. First, you must have a qualified team leader on the crew; and second, you must have the checklist. We had neither. Moving right along, we completed all the dailies and set off for one

of the aircraft in need of a 7-day check. I disarmed the inboard side of the guillotines and saw the AO3 on the outboard side. I assumed he had made the same preparations as me and disarmed the outboard CAD—mistake No. 2.

With ordnance, you never assume anything. As our LPO likes to say, "Trust, but verify," a philosophy with which I failed to comply. I got a power cord and connected it to the jet. The AO3 turned on the power, and I took position as team leader. You have heard the old saying, "three strikes and you're out." Well, I just had committed mistake No. 3 and was about to get called out.

I reasoned with myself that I had completed this check a million times before and hadn't needed a team leader or checklist. I waited for the AOAN to set up the test-set and held my wand in the hold position. Shortly after this happened, I saw a flash, heard a bang, and saw the AOAN running away from the buddy store. The new AO3 had misinterpreted the hold signal for the go signal. We just had committed the cardinal sin of ordnance personnel everywhere: We had blown a CAD.

The next few minutes were complete chaos. It seemed everyone on the flight deck had heard the CAD blow and were gathered around. Some were looking at the buddy store. Others were trying to calm the AOAN, who was writhing in pain. After I collected myself, I went to the shop to get the supervisor and AOC. I told them what had happened, and neither was happy to be making this trip to the flight deck.

After all the facts were gathered, we concluded we were the luckiest people on the boat that night. The AOAN had noticed the CAD was armed, and yet he placed the test set on the deck, causing the CAD to blow. It hit him squarely on the shoulder, leaving a huge welt that turned into a nasty bruise. If he had been one second later in noticing the CAD, his face would have been on the receiving end of something similar to a gun blast. Had he decided to reach in and attempt to disarm the CAD, he most likely would have lost his arm. Fortunately, our pride was the only thing seriously damaged.

There are reasons for properly used tools, procedures, checklists and team leaders. They are there to help prevent incidents like this from happening. ✨