

Where's the Supervision?

By Maj. John Mott

It was the first day of a follow-up evaluation on a CH-46 composite squadron by the logistics management assistance and training team. The North Carolina sun was shining brightly and was reflecting off the hangar doors onto a rack of aircraft wheels. After a cool night, the heat quickly warmed the wheel assemblies, allowing the tires to contract then expand and setting up a possibly volatile situation. The tire-and-wheel-safety program evaluator, a staff sergeant, had just asked to look at how the squadron stored its tires. As he walked around the end of the hangar doors and stood in front of the rack of wheels, he was shocked to see one had cracked. He then asked the program manager if the tire was deflated because a deflator tag wasn't attached to the valve stem. When the program manager told the staff sergeant he didn't know the condition of the wheel, the evaluator asked him to get a stand-off pressure gauge and to check the wheel. Fortunately, the tire was deflated and safe; however, several other wheels in the rack also were missing deflator tags.

The evaluator thoroughly questioned the program manager and found out a support-equipment (SE) Marine—a lance corporal—had been servicing that wheel several days earlier, when it cracked but didn't explode. The staff sergeant found out that Marine was not tire-and-wheel qualified, but he had been doing maintenance anyway. What makes this story even worse is the lance corporal had come from an HMLA squadron that had failed a wing and AirLant inspection because of tire-and-wheel problems.

An SE Marine at that same HMLA squadron almost had been killed six months earlier while doing unauthorized maintenance on ground-handling



A maintainer serviced a tire, and the wheel cracked but didn't explode.

wheels. A tire blew up, injuring the Marine. You guessed it: he wasn't tire-and-wheel qualified, either. And, ironically, he was undergoing follow-on surgery on the day the evaluator found this wheel.

Where were these Marines' leaders?

Why didn't QA make sure an earlier problem got fixed? Why are we allowing our people to do maintenance for which they are not trained or qualified?

Tire-and-wheel program managers must understand they are responsible for training anyone who handles or services tire and wheel assemblies (SE, aviation supply, material control, AMSU, maintenance control etc.).

Too many people think it's OK to follow the NAMP or update programs only before inspections or when it suits them, then just do aircraft maintenance the rest of the time. Wrong! We need to maintain aircraft and to follow the NAMP, each and every day. 

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Rather than take care of the problem, the wheel was left on a tire rack.

