

Be Careful What Y

By Cdr. Gary R. Schram and AM1(AW) Dawn L. Bryce



What better place to have an incident than right in front of a couple of khakis from your own wing...

CO: “Congratulations, you won the Battle E!” I told my squadron, “Awesome! Our hard work had paid off.” Formal recognition and a bit more chest candy; I love it. Since we had been so busy, I hardly had noticed that the aircraft at the front gate (which everyone passes on the way to work) still had the markings of last year’s Battle E winner. Other type-wing aircraft already had their aircraft painted, but not us. We had a good excuse—we were gone. But now that we were back, we needed to get that fixed—like now. I called in our MMCO and said to get a crew up to the front gate and paint that aircraft with our squadron colors. On reflection, this was the start of a series of events that resulted in three separate incidents, all in an attempt to “get that bird painted.” Now, let me turn over the story to our corrosion LPO.

LPO: On Friday, after the morning maintenance meeting, I was called into my MMCO’s office. He said we had won the Battle “E” for 2003, and the skipper wanted my workcenter (corrosion control) to paint our squadron colors on the static-display aircraft located at the front gate. He also asked if we could have it painted before our MMCO’s retirement, which was scheduled for next Thursday. I responded by saying we would do our best, but I knew we would be pressed for time and personnel.

I returned to my workcenter and told my shop about the MMCO’s request. We already had

a challenging workload and very few people to accomplish the tasks at hand. After discussing our workload and our new project, we came up with a game plan.

I reported to my division chief to see if he could help us get the special paint needed for the static-display bird. Because the paint would not be available until after the weekend, we planned on doing the painting early the next week. It was not until Tuesday that we had everything we needed and were ready to start our project.

That morning, I told two of my personnel to check out a B-2 stand and take it down to the front gate, a



You Ask For...



two-mile trip. We could not check out a tow tractor from the line or AIMD–GSE because they were all being used or otherwise were unavailable.

My AO3 decided to use the squadron's ordnance truck to tow the B-2 stand to the gate. There were two people in the truck, so that one could drive and the other could act as an observer. They proceeded to pick up the B-2 stand and drive down the flight line from our hangar to the flight-line access gate.

CO: *O.K.—let me jump in here. So far, so good. This project was being handled as expeditiously as possible. Using ORM at this point probably would have prevented what was about to happen. Lesson learned No. 1—apply ORM to any unusual project. Back to the story...*

LPO: While crossing the main road, the B-2 stand hit the overhead traffic-light wire, causing the light to fall to the ground and shatter. The ordnance truck's tail end was lifted completely into the air as the towed B-2 stand fell on its side. Some onlookers, who just happened to be a couple of CPOs from our wing, called security to the scene. What better place to have an incident happen than right in front of a couple of khakis from your own wing...

CO: *I was thankful no one was hurt. Unfortunately, the story does not end there. I had said I wanted that bird painted—make it happen!*

LPO: After talking it over with my division senior chief, we decided to go to a local squadron that had a diesel man-lift (A/S48M-2) and ask if we could borrow it. At 0830 on Wednesday morning, my senior chief and I ventured down to the flight line to check out the man-lift. However, neither of us had a license for it.

CO: *Uh-oh. Warning, warning—don't do it. Never check out gear you are not qualified to use. Doesn't everyone know that?*

LPO: I had operated this type of equipment for the last 10 years, but my license just had expired. At that point, I should have found someone with a current license, but, instead, I checked out the man-lift and proceeded to the job site.

After completing most of the painting that day, we headed back to return the man-lift. On the way, the man-lift started making a funny noise. I stopped and gave it a rest. After letting it cool, I started it back up and proceeded to the gate leading to the flight line.

Once I went through the gate, the man-lift died and started leaking hydraulic fluid. We checked it back in



and told the first class petty officer that it was leaking. Before we secured for the day, I told my senior chief what had happened. It was Thursday morning before I found out the hydraulic motor on the man-lift was blown.

CO: *Well, it was blown because it hadn't been operated according to specs. My "can-do" LPO, while trying to satisfy my desire to paint the bird at the front gate, did indeed get most of the job done but at too high of cost. But remember, the painting job is not quite done, and neither is this story.*

LPO: It now was Thursday morning, the day of my MMCPO's retirement. At approximately 0900, I directed my AM3 to check out a B-2 stand and tow it to the main gate to finish painting the static-display aircraft. While he was towing the B-2 stand, I acted as a safety observer. Base security was following behind our tractor as an escort.

While the tractor was making a turn, I moved to the side of the stand and saw an obstruction that crossed high above the road. It was steel framing along some steam piping that formed an overpass (the sign said 14'7" for clearance).

I yelled to the driver of the tow tractor, and he stopped. However, it was too late. The stand hit the steel frame, which caused the safety bars on the B-2 stand to break at the welds.

I was interviewed and talked to nearly everyone in my chain of command that day. I felt horrible! Three incidents in three days! On Friday morning, I called GSE, which provided a driver, but, understandably, they would not check out any of their gear to me. They towed a B-2 stand to the front gate for us, and we finished painting the static-display aircraft.



I was a Sailor wanting to get the job done with a limited amount of time.

CO: *I know what you are thinking, "This incident never would happen in my squadron." I'll let my LPO finish her story.*

LPO: I learned a lot from this experience. I take full responsibility for what happened. I failed to adequately use the ORM process and did not follow regulations when using GSE. I did not have a license for the man-lift. I did not have enough personnel or preparation for the job. I was a Sailor wanting to get the job done with a limited amount of time. The price I paid was heavy—damage to my professional reputation.

CO: *The fault is mine. Even though we just had won the Battle "E" and Safety "S" and were busy patting ourselves on the back, this happened and made us look like a bunch of amateurs. In the end, this was a cheap series of lessons. No one was hurt, but we took a significant hit in the credibility department across all levels of the chain of command. We immediately set about to correct our clearly obvious deficiencies. One of those lessons was this article.*

How is your ORM process? Is it as solid as you think? Everyone involved in this incident is a good person, who was working hard to get the job done. However, you still have to do it the right way. 

Cdr. Gary R. Schram is the CO and AM1(AW)
Dawn L. Bryce is the corrosion control LPO at VS-22.

