

Telling It Like It Is

“Safeguarding our most treasured asset”—that was one of the Secretary of the Navy’s priorities in ALNAV 081/01. That is what this magazine is all about.

SecNav said we should all “serve as a chief of safety” for our organizations and ourselves. He challenged us to ensure our own safety and that of our shipmates—both on and off duty. He said, “If we perform our safety roles with the same passion we dedicate to our combat missions, we will better manage risk, minimize needless injuries, and enhance our combat credibility by avoiding needless loss of manpower and equipment due to mishaps.” I have that passion and try to show it in the stories selected for *Mech*.

The Naval Safety Center magazines (*Mech*, *Approach*, *Fathom*, *Ashore*, and *Ground Warrior*) tell the hard-luck stories and hard-learned lessons of aviators, maintainers, Sailors, and Marines. We deal with

the raw details of mishaps or near-mishaps in the fervent hope people will read them, learn from them, and not repeat the same mistakes reported in them.

These stories aren’t pleasant but must be told. They often seem hurtful to squadron or ship members who must relive awful experiences. Our mission is to educate and motivate Sailors and Marines to prevent mishaps and save lives. To do this, we must share tragic stories of a few for the greater good of many. That is our duty.

Losing shipmates always is difficult, but they die in vain unless we take steps to prevent mishaps from recurring. The photo on page two of the winter 2001/2002 issue is a perfect example. In the first couple of weeks after it appeared, we got a few calls and e-mails saying it was too provocative. Many more people told us it’s the perfect example for a training program. Who’s right? If one person changes their unsafe practices because of that story and photo, mission accomplished. If one shipmate isn’t injured or killed in a repeat mishap, mission accomplished. If one command looks at current policies and procedures, implements ORM and crew- or maintenance-resource management, and prevents another needless loss of life, mission accomplished.

Mech doesn’t exist to give readers happy stories that are pleasing to read; we often have to tell it like it is. This is not always popular, but it is necessary to tell the good and bad in any story.

I have 10 pending stories about dropped drop-tanks. Most all of them say, “I read or heard stories about ‘thump tests’ and knew we should ‘pop the cap’ and do a dip test to make sure the tank was empty.” In all 10 cases, maintainers dropped tanks to the deck, injuring someone and spilling fuel. It’s my duty as editor to tell these stories, to share provocative incidents, and to get maintainers to think about their safety and that of their shipmates.

SecNav said, “We will only achieve our best if every member of the DoN team carries out their duty as chiefs of safety responsibly.”

We try to do that in every issue.

Dan Steber is the Mech editor.

