

# A Steel-Beach Picnic Gets Exciting

By Lt. Nick Deleo, HSL-48

During the second day of a sixth-month deployment, our LAMPS detachment eagerly began operations. Our single SH-60B had flown onto the ship the previous day and just had returned from a quick two-hour bag. The LSO completed the post-landing straightening procedures on the aircraft, and our maintainers promptly began work on a 30/60-hour inspection.

After the scheduled maintenance, the maintainers folded the aircraft and walked into the hangar. Because it was early in the cruise, the maintenance team was fresh and focused on their everyday procedures.

In the hangar, work began on a daily and turn-around inspection, during which a junior airman was tasked to take an aircraft fuel sample. The process involves unseating a check valve, using a drain funnel with a modified pin, and allowing fuel to flow freely. After the airman completed the sample and removed the funnel, the fuel continued to flow from the aircraft! The airman immediately notified the shift supervisor.

The key to successfully fighting any unforeseen emergency is clear and efficient communication, which the young airman demonstrated. The detachment maintenance chief, maintenance officer, and OinC quickly were told about the problem. The chief arrived on the scene and evaluated the underside of the aircraft. He told the nearest Sailor to inform the bridge and central control station (CCS) that there was a major fuel spill in the hangar and to man a 2.5-inch saltwater hose on the flight deck. The chief then told another Sailor to get the fuel-spill kit and to begin staging “diapers” throughout the hangar to absorb the draining fuel.



To make this situation more interesting, a steel-beach picnic was underway on the side of the flight deck located opposite the hangar. Orders were given to personnel on the flight deck to prepare to jettison the barbecue grills if the fuel approached the hangar-bay door. Meanwhile, the shift supervisor and chief worked with the fuel-check valve, trying to stop or at least slow the leak. They routed the draining fuel through a hose into buckets, which helped lessen the spill. As an added precaution, the chief ordered a barrier of fuel-absorbent cloth to be placed along the flight-deck drains to keep the fuel from spreading.

Ship’s personnel quickly helped. The petty officer in charge of the recovery assist secure and traverse (RAST) system arrived at the scene and secured all power to the electrical portion of the system. This simple action could have kept the fuel spill from turning into a major fire. Also, the bridge passed word on the ship’s 1MC to secure the smoking lamp. They also notified the oil kings that they might have to rig defueling hoses to the hangar.

After several minutes of troubleshooting, the maintenance chief fixed the leak. The cause was simple: When the defueling valve was pushed up to drain the fuel and then released, a rubber sealing ring slipped out and kept the valve from resealing. The maintenance chief reseated the sealing ring, but it proved to be a tricky task.

Many lessons can be learned from this chain of events. First, simple and routine procedures can have very unexpected outcomes. One method for preventing injury in the event of a random accident is to make

sure participating personnel are wearing the proper PPE. The young airman who sampled the fuel from the helicopter could have suffered major injuries if he had not been wearing goggles, gloves and an apron. Second, it always helps to have extra personnel to assist in an emergency. The key to success, though, is efficient communication, combined with standard procedures and calm heads. The maintenance team acted quickly and decisively. This communication flow allowed for increased situational awareness among the ship's crew and a timely solution to an escalating problem. ✨

## PPE—It Does a Body Good!



By AN Jessie Pierce, VFA-25

On a bright sunny morning, I came bopping into the line shack of VFA-25. My supervisor stopped me as I was coming through the door, not to say “Good morning,” but to say “Pierce! Fuel samples, 422, ASAP!” It was the beginning of a great day. I gathered my cranial, splash-proof goggles, face shield, gloves, apron, tool pouch, fuel-sample kit, and a fuel adapter. I could tell my supervisor was under pressure that morning, because he was running circles around me, maybe to get me to move faster.

I went to the aircraft, donned my personal protective equipment (PPE), and took a fuel sample. I wiped down the fuel-sample port, placed the sample jar under

the fuel adapter, hooked up to the jet, and pushed up, just like the plane-captain manual states. The sample port stuck open. Even worse, the fuel started spewing out. In my haste to get a drip pan to catch the fuel, I went right underneath the stream of fuel, covering myself. I quickly used my Phillips screwdriver to un-stick the port, but my arms and face were showered with fuel.

I had followed the procedures I'd been taught for fuel leaks, which always includes a chance of taking a fuel bath, but I should have gone around the spraying fuel instead of under it.

I had to hurry home, take a shower, and change my clothes. All of the equipment I'd been using also had to be cleaned. When I came back to work, my supervisor filled out a mishap report. A fuel-sample port getting

stuck open is a common problem; causes include corrosion, dirt, the design of the port, or the way you take the sample. This problem is one of the reasons we protect ourselves with PPE. Getting showered in fuel can cause burns, headaches, and infection.

So what can we do about this problem until a better port is designed? Even taking care to inspect the fuel port for dirt or corrosion before the sample is taken is not enough to prevent someone from being sprayed with fuel. The best thing to do is to follow proper procedures and to wear all the required PPE. Be aware of your surroundings, especially when the hangar-bay doors are open, which can expose you to wind or jet blast from a turning jet on the flight line. This precaution isn't mentioned in the procedures for taking a fuel sample, but it is good ORM and, for me, a lesson learned. ✨