

# Dancing on the Foul Line

By AOAN George Frede and AMAN Joshua Harper

The flight deck is a place where decisions are made at a moment's notice, and maintainers make many of them in a day. You can't afford to make bad ones. You learn the things you should do and many things you shouldn't, but it is important to remember to put safety first. We didn't and learned a lesson the hard way.

We were running around the deck, trying to do our job as fast as possible. As soon as our aircraft came in for a hot-pump and hot-seat evolution, we moved in quickly to put on chains.

We went under the nose of the aircraft, which was parked inboard of the island and right next to the foul line. That safety item is a red-and-white line painted on the deck to provide safe clearance for personnel during recoveries. We were working to get the aircraft chained down so fueling and crew shift could take place. In doing so, we stepped over the foul line and put ourselves in unnecessary danger.

We got our priorities wrong and were working for speed, quality, and safety, rather than for safety and quality first and speed last. The flight deck is a dangerous place, and it's critical always to be aware of your surroundings. It isn't enough just to look out for yourself; you should have your head on a swivel and watch those around you, too. We are all a part of a bigger team, and each of us needs to look out for our fellow shipmates. We knew the general rule of staying three feet away from the foul line to avoid crossing it.

We now know that taking a few extra seconds to put on chains would have kept us well behind the foul line, and we still would have accomplished our task in plenty of time. More importantly, it would have upheld the squadron's motto: Safety, quality, and speed. ✈

Airmen Frede and Harper work in the line division at VFA-146.



Navy photo by PH2 Robert McRill

Plane captains tie down an FA-18 Hornet.