

Prop Arc Safety

By AMC(AW/SW) Curtis Marcantel, VAW-121

Four years of sea duty, two combat cruises, multiple detachments, and no Class A mishaps—in the air or on the deck. ORM works, plain and simple.

What are the marks of a successful tour of duty? Some might say promotions, awards, warfare designations, or maintaining a vigilant safety circle around prop arcs. To me, the real answer is no loss of life.

Workups in Fallon, Orange Air in Puerto Rico, numerous at-sea periods, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, one crane-off of Bluetail 600, and we still had all those that we started out with. Not that the potential for disaster wasn't always present... it was. But, a "safety first" attitude, maintaining the prop "safety chain," and a thorough briefing before each evolution have proven to be real keys to success.

I feel it really started with my first LPO chewing me out for using a chair as a ladder while working on a plane in the hangar. "If you live long enough to make third class, what kind of example are you going to set?" he asked. Now that I have used those same words on others, I reflect back on the impact they really had on me and how much sense they made. Safety, regardless of where you are or who you are, always should be the foremost consideration.

Working in and E-2 command, we catch the usual jokes from others: "If it has wipers, it must be a target," "Too slow and too low to be a real plane" are just a couple. But let CAG see a Hummer start up without a safety chain and all the jokes are gone, and someone has to answer to the Handler. That's been my job for the last four years, and, thankfully, we, the "Bluetails," have maintained the chain in all types of weather,





night and day, and all types of flight OPS. We never have heard the call of “man down” on the flight deck because of a propeller mishap.

Not everyone is as vigilant about prop arcs as a Hummer squadron. Too many times, we have had to grab wayward red shirts on their way to the “farm,” or grapes trying to get to the next bird needing fuel, but vigilance has paid off. Not everyone has been fortunate enough to see a video of what a prop can do to another aircraft or to the human body, so that is where the prop-safety chain comes in. The safety chain is there to protect the aircraft and you. We work with the props every day; we know their dangers, their abilities, and have strived to teach them to others. This protects the new check-ins at our command and others, too.

Our airmen have grabbed, tackled and stopped all sorts of people from crossing the “line of death,” and we still ask ourselves, “Doesn’t anyone know why we are here?” Ask the weight-board operators on board USS *George Washington* if they know why we are here. During a night launch for Operation Iraqi Freedom

AMC(AW/SW) McCammon and AM1(AW) Bunton pulled two of them from certain death.

The examples are too numerous to count: a brown shirt rushing to chain his aircraft, a final checker racing to the cat to give the thumbs up to the shooter, even myself, too engrossed in the problems which arise during launch. We all have seen those hands waving in the air, the wands constantly moving at night. And we all know why they are there. Sometimes we just forget and try to meet the clock for the next recovery or launch. So remember, the chain is there for your safety. Don’t break it because you are in a hurry; it is not worth the 20 seconds you will save by cutting through the prop-safety chain.

We have established numerous guidelines to follow when working around both static and spinning props; they exist for the safety of everyone on board. On the flight deck or on the beach, a spinning prop will kill. Respect the safety chain; don’t even walk through a static prop! Should our airmen tackle you, they will just have saved your life. ✈️