

by Lt. Hunter Ware

On my second set of work-ups in preparation for my second cruise, we had been bouncing for a week or so. As a pilot, FCLPs seem like running a marathon in the desert: tiring, repetitious, even a little boring. The main challenge seems to simply make it to the end in one piece. As a landing signal officer, it's the same as above, only barefoot on cactus the whole way. I was exhausted, which was the first link in the chain of events that followed. And the routine had begun to flirt with the monotonous. Maybe that was the second link, but I wasn't counting.

I raced to the outlying field used for FCLPs, waved a day period, hurried back to our home field for a day bounce flight of my own, grabbed a fast-food burger, then waved again. It was now zero-dark thirty. I had to hot-switch and hot-pit into a jet for my last night-bounce period. I'd done this a hundred times (OK, maybe only 50). I taxied into the

hot-brake/hot-switch area, and the brakes felt good. I set the parking brake, shut down the starboard engine, and thought of another addition to our next foc'sle follies skit. I was really compartmentalizing now.

The plane captain gave me the pull-chocks signal, and my muscle memory took over. In almost one motion, I stepped on the brakes and pushed in the parking brake. In that split-second, my right foot slipped from the toe brake and kicked in full right rudder. Quickly, I reset the parking brake and put my foot back in place. It seemed like a close one,

# My Foot Take Your



but I didn't think the aircraft moved, because I came off one brake for only a microsecond.

I got my gas, started motors, taxied, took off, bounced a zillion times, landed, and then walked back to maintenance control. The maintenance chief on duty immediately said, "Sir, we got an Anymouse report—you almost took off a guy's foot."

I replied, "Chief, that's right, and it was totally my fault. I wasn't concentrating, and my foot slipped. I need to apologize to that Sailor."

My chief said, "No problem, sir. It was a great learning point for the line shack. We

won't remove chocks from the front of the tire, we'll kick 'em out from behind and pull them out from the side. Just in case."

"Wow, chief, that's one squared-away line division."

"Very funny, sir. You wouldn't be saying that because you're our division officer now, would you?"

Just because I had been through hot-refueling 50 times didn't make it any less hazardous. Dangerous activities (such as carrier aviation) don't change just because we gain experience—we simply learn to manage the hazards and risks better. In this case, a moment's inattention on my part almost maimed or killed a squadronmate. This lesson reminded me how much I need to pay attention to detail at all times, and also how much the troops operating around our aircraft depend on me to do just that. 🏆

Lt. Ware flies with VAQ-131

# Slip Can Foot Off



photo by PH3 Tom Gibbins