

Fingers: Flexible, Handy... and Fragile—Case No. 2

By AM2 Dale Hazelton

I had been working at AIMD SEAOPDET for a couple years and was on board USS *Eisenhower* (CVN-69) as a hydraulic technician. We received a shock strut for the nose landing gear with a blown slipper seal. This happened on a regular basis, but this time the outcome would be different.

After we broke down the strut and repacked it with all new seals and O-rings, we started to rebuild the strut. We were having a hard time placing the piston assembly into the strut housing because of the new O-rings. The piston just didn't want to go in. We then decided to stand the strut assembly on end and beat it with a mallet. The housing moved a bit but not enough to seat the housing in the piston. Now, being well-trained airframers, we next decided to bounce the strut on the deck. A few good bounces, and we were looking

good. A few more bumps, and it would be perfect.

For those of you unfamiliar with the strut assembly, three holes are on top of the housing assembly. Two of the small holes on each side are for servicing the strut. The larger hole—top dead center—allows the metering pin to slide through. With one more bounce needed to seat the housing, I wanted to get a good grip on the strut. Grabbing the assembly around the top with one hand, I placed the other hand right on top, with the ring finger inside the large center hole. We then gave the strut one last bounce.

With this final bounce, the housing seated onto the piston while the metering pin tried to come through the hole—yes, the same hole where I had placed my finger. I got an instant broken finger: black, blue and purple. I hadn't realized I had put my finger in the

hole. I had built up these struts dozens of times before.

What had gone wrong this time? Where or when was ORM applied in our procedures? This incident showed that just because “we always do it this way” and are in a hurry doesn't mean it always is done the right way. Had we taken time to assess the situation and identify the hazards, I would have kept my finger out of that hole and out of a cast. 🙄

Petty Officer Hazelton works in the airframes shop at VFA-137.



This is the strut assembly.