

How To Lose Your **QUALS**



By AME1(AW) John Shorb

I had 32 days left until I checked out of the command and headed from Washington D.C. to Point Mugu, Calif. I was the only qualified QAR working, and all of the shops needed me to CDI their MAFs. But I was seasoned to this work tempo, and being an AME1 and full-systems QAR meant I practically could do it all. I had been working in QA longer than anyone else in the command and had seen it all, so I thought.

Our first priority was to remove and replace three of five, M-193 fire-extinguishing CADs for high time. As the QA/SO for the task, I was ready to go. Our ordnance board just had qualified two third class petty officers as ordnance handlers, and this was to be their first “live” ordnance evolution. We prepared for our task, placed the MAFs in work, set HERO condition,

and roped off the aircraft. We carried our tools and parts out to the aircraft and set up to work.

We removed the right engine and APU fire bottles. The right bottle has two CADs, and the APU has only one. The left engine CADs had been replaced three months before, so they were good and didn’t need to be removed. Once the bottles were out, we removed the old CADs, installed the new ones, and prepared to do our firing-circuitry test.

We decided to take a break. I made a head call and checked with the other shops to check progress on the gripes with our other aircraft. When we came back, we were ready to hook up electrical power to the aircraft and do the test.

The first note in the book about the test says, “This test will discharge the fire bottles.” No kidding,



so we removed them. The second step of the test says to remove the positive leads of all the CADs. Well, if the bottles are out, the leads are off. We then checked the voltage at the leads to make sure there was 28 volts to fire the CADs. I asked one of the workers to go to the cockpit and pull-and-turn the fire handles, while I stayed with the second maintainer in the tail to check the voltage. We hooked up to the right bottle leads and turned the right-hand fire handle to shot No. 1: 28 volts, checks good. We turned the right-hand fire handle to shot No. 2: BOOM!! 28 volts went to the left bottle, the CAD exploded and sent the extinguishing agent into the right engine nacelle. The fire-extinguishing system worked as advertised.

My first thought was that I had killed the worker in the tail compartment reading the volts. I asked him if he was OK, and he said, "Yeah, just a little hard of hearing after that explosion that went off." As we climbed out of the tail compartment and could see the white smoke coming out of the engine nacelle, it hit me...I was an idiot.

The second maintainer came out of the cockpit and asked if we were all OK? We answered yes, but we were just a little shaken up. The CAD went off less than three feet from us. We gathered all our tools,

locked up everything, and went to maintenance to give them the news.

Maintenance control's first reaction was, "Yeah right, so you're done? Can we secure from HERO condition and get some work done?" To convince them, it took about 10 minutes of discussion and a visit to the aircraft. Why didn't they believe me? I guess because I'm the ordnance program manager, and guys like me don't make mistakes...until now.

In my case, I lost my ordnance certification, which in turn makes me ineligible as a full-system QAR for workcenter 13B. As an ordnance board member and program manager, I also am required to be ordnance-certified, so there went those positions. But none of that matters to me at the moment. I almost had killed a shipmate. That is the part that I cannot fully grasp. He has a wife and baby, and a mother and father could have lost a son. Speaking of family, my wife just had our first child 17 days ago. I could have widowed my wife and could have left a newborn baby without a father.

Naval aviation can be dangerous, but it's not until something like this happens that you realize just how dangerous. No one was hurt, and no damage was done. This was my freebie, but I'll have to work at my new command to back my quals. Most people will forget this event ever happened, but I will live with the memory for the rest of my life. 🙏🙏

Petty Officer Shorb worked in the AME shop at VR-48 when he wrote this story.

the LINErats



by J. HOBATH 2008

Jeff Hobrath is a retired PR chief who has volunteered to help MECH with this comic series. We take some liberty with the Rats for the price of a message through humor. For more info on Jeff Hobrath, simply do a search for Jeff Hobrath on the internet.