

Tools left behind can only cause problems.



# Compliance You Can't Ignore

By AE2(AW) Thomas Hebert

**F**or any seagoing squadron, CQ dets, TSTA, and COMPTUEX can get repetitious at times. Aircraft hit the deck, refuel, take off, bounce, or fly for hours on end. They finally come in on final approach several hours later. My squadron had completed workups, and we were deployed on real combat missions. A port visit was scheduled in the near future. The real danger

occurred when our minds started to think about liberty, rather than the hazards on the flight deck.

It would be our first liberty port after 57 days at sea. The daily schedule was drilled into us, and we were like zombies when it came to the daily routine. The flight schedule was relaxed, but special inspections seemed to be initiated everyday. These conditions were adding up to a really hazardous event.

Another worker and I were on our way to do a 7-day inspection on our E-2C aircraft, which involves removing an access panel to check the Freon level in our vapor-cycle system. The aircraft was parked on the fantail because we just had finished a high-

power turn. It was dark, and I had forgotten my flashlight in the shop. I told my worker what was expected of him, and I went off to grab a flashlight. When I returned to the aircraft, he had done all the required tasks, so I climbed atop the aircraft to observe the servicing. For those not familiar with the E-2C, the vapor-cycle system has a scoop on top of it and a fan inside to cool the Freon. When I got to the access panel, I noticed my shipmate had left a tool on top of the aircraft, in front of the scoop. That sight disappointed me.

I corrected the situation, continued with my inspection, climbed down from the top, and entered the aircraft. My worker was sitting inside. After asking him about the tool, I remembered that I hadn't seen the panel since I had left him the first time. This realization made me wonder, "Where are the panel and tool pouch?" He told me he had left them on top of the aircraft behind the scoop. My stomach sank. I immediately thought of where the aircraft was and how easy it would have been for the panel and pouch to slide off into the Red Sea.

How was I going to tell maintenance control we lost a tool pouch and a panel? We started searching around in the dark with the dim blue light of those things we call flashlights and found the tool pouch but not the panel. I collected all my courage and went down to maintenance to give them the news. The maintenance chief, who was an airframer, asked me to show him which panel was lost. He then told me to ask the airframe shop to make a new one. They built one in a couple of hours, and we were able to complete our 7-day inspection.

This worker's oversight cost us man-hours that otherwise could have been spent repairing the aircraft. Instead, it was wasted on our own mistake. Attention to detail is critical in aviation maintenance, and our lax attitude did not help the situation. I learned attention to detail is critical, no matter how small the job. A 10-minute fix can take hours when certain steps aren't followed or are missed. We were lucky our mistake only cost the Navy some sheet metal, not someone's life.

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Losing a panel and tool pouch is one way to get in trouble.



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