

# Seeing Is Believing



Check the tank, and make sure you have the right people to drop a tank.



Dropping a tank with fuel can damage the tank, a cart, or people.



By AD2 Mark Preszler

Our squadron just had returned from a successful deployment in the eastern Med where we flew missions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). It was a relatively incident-free cruise. Morale was high, and we all had confidence in our abilities to do our jobs. However, a routine task with a fuel tank would force us to step back, re-examine ourselves, and re-focus our procedures.

I had to release drop-tanks from their wing stations with a team of other mechs. I was the team leader and was inspecting the tanks to make sure they were fuel-free before we released them. Other team members were doing the same. Looking back, I realize we had no organization and had not decided who would inspect specific drop-tanks. I assumed they all were checked and completely empty. Part of this procedure calls for an AO team leader to do visual inspections as a backup, just to make sure everything is safe. We failed to have an AO on the team, and that decision almost was disastrous.

I approached aircraft 310, the next one to have its fuel tank released. It just had returned from a flight, so I assumed the tank was empty. I also asked other members of the team, believing one of them already had checked it. Once I verbally confirmed the status, we placed a tank skid underneath it, unhooked the pivot ball in the back, and disconnected the "I" cable.

Other members of the team stood on both sides of the tank, interlocked their arms, and prepared to carry it. When everyone was ready, I released the tank; it immediately fell onto the skid and then to the ground. I asked what was wrong, and the team members said it was too heavy. Luckily, no one was hurt, but I realized that the tank still had fuel inside. I opened the cap on the top of the tank to look; it was half full.

The tank was dented slightly. This incident occurred because of a breakdown in procedures and a "hurry up and get the job done" attitude. Too many assumptions were made, and doubting Sailors stayed silent. As I learned, if anyone has doubts, there is no doubt; stop what you're doing, and start again from the top. Procedures are written for a reason, and no steps can be skipped. That missing AO definitely would have prevented this incident, and a simple ORM review would have pointed out that control. 

Petty Officer Preszler works in the power-plants shop at VFA-15.