

# FOD, No Matter How Small

By PRAN Joshua St. Amand

Around 2300 one night and half way through COMPTUEX, I was in my shop doing four 30-day inspections on oxygen-mask assemblies. My supervisor got a call from maintenance control for a turn on one of our aircraft, so he asked me to speed it up. I did but I wish I had taken my time.

I wanted to help, so I rushed through the four inspections, signing off the VIDS/MAFS and updating SEATS. My supervisor then CDI'd the masks, and I put them back on the pilots' gear.

The next day, one of the pilots put on his gear and went up on deck. As he walked across the flight deck, his oxygen mask fell apart right where the bayonet fittings attach to the mask. Screws fell on the deck next to turning jets. Flight operations were shut down, and a combat FOD walkdown was called away.

I was surprised when a PR2 woke me up. Since I usually didn't get a personal wake up, I knew something was wrong. He told me to get dressed and get to the shop. When I got there, my LPO told me what had happened. I suddenly got a sick feeling in my gut, and my heart felt like lead.

I couldn't believe what I had done. I really thought I had done all the inspections completely and correctly, like I had done a thousand times. But it was true, and one of the screws never was found. QA believes it was blown overboard, but we don't know for sure.

Despite this bad situation, it could have been worse. Had the pilot made it to the aircraft:

- The mask could have come apart while at high altitude, causing hypoxia.
- The screws could have jammed the flight controls, resulting in the loss of the aircraft and possibly the pilot.
- During high-speed combat maneuvers, the mask could have become a missile hazard inside the cockpit.

I should have used the pubs, taken my time, and re-checked the work [CDI blew it too.—Ed.]. Not following established maintenance procedures affected a lot of people and put many at risk.

I am glad that it wasn't worse, but I learned an age-old lesson about publications. I also repeated a mistake made too often: I was too comfortable with a routine task. I believed I didn't need the book anymore but was reminded to use it every time we do maintenance. 🛩️

*Airman St. Amand works in the PR shop at VFA-86.*

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**Top: pilot mask correct. Bottom: bayonet off**



*Analyst comment: Unfortunately, I don't feel this is an isolated case. Complacency in the work place is detrimental to aviation safety and affects all aspects of naval aviation. We take these simple tasks with a grain of salt and often think they aren't important. Too many PRs just wipe out the mask with alcohol and call it a day. This mental process will get riggers in trouble, just as this story describes. The book is specific and says to inspect the self-locking screws or T-nuts for damage. We all need to learn from this story because the safety of our shipmates and aviators is in our hands. PRC(AW/SW) Brian Westcott, Maintenance Analyst, Naval Safety Center.*

*The previous story, this one, and a third one on page 22, all from from VFA-86, show their efforts to share mistakes and a commitment to do better. Thanks.—Ed.*