

Interrupted Routine



Navy photo by PHAN Charles Whetstine

By AN Candice Flanders

Everyone who ever has worked aboard ship knows how repetitive things can get. You get in a routine, despite all the warnings about complacency. Well, I continued to follow a simple routine until I made a very costly mistake.

Each day was the same: Get up, grab a snack, go to work, and suit up with my float coat, cranial, leather gloves, and then head off to the flight deck to man up my jet. It was about 1815, and I was a night checker. I was getting ready to recover my airborne jet and set it up for the Alert 30.

Recovery went well, the deck crew parked the aircraft, and I helped the blueshirts chain it down. I then started working on my turn-around inspection. Part way through my inspection routine, my jet had to be moved from the fantail to elevator No. 3. At that point, I was nearly done with the inspection. I already had dove the starboard intake, walked the top of the jet, checked my APU numbers, and just was finishing up the lower aircraft walk. All I had left was to dive the port intake duct. But I had to stop the inspection, climb into the cockpit, and wait for the move to be completed.

After my jet was parked, I got out and helped the blueshirts tie it down. I then finished what I thought was the rest of the turn-around inspection. The next step was to sign my name in the required places, stating that I had gone through the A1-F18AE-MRC-100 turn-around-inspection deck, and no discrepancies existed on my jet. I took my paperwork to maintenance control and went back to my jet, standing by in case the Alert 30 was launched.

At that point, I knew I had to do a daily inspection after the Alert-30 watch was over for the night, so I decided to begin working on it. I grabbed the strut X-dimensions and my tire pressures. At that point, I realized I had forgotten to dive the port intake, keeping in mind I already had turned in my turn-around-inspection card and had stated that this jet was ready.

I then “dove” the port intake duct and suddenly noticed the port engine had damaged blades from FOD!

I couldn't leave my jet because it could be launched at any time, so I told the assistant lead plane captain about what I had found. I asked him to dive the port duct, too, to look at the first-stage fan blades. He then

Downs the Alert

went to get the leading plane captain. They both agreed my Alert-30 aircraft probably was a down jet for FOD, so they told the flight-deck coordinator. The chief then called the mechs to look at it.

After all this happened, the jet was downed for a FODed engine. I was in quite a situation. I already had signed my turn-around card, which stated both my intakes were good. Maintenance control had processed the card and had put it in the aircraft-discrepancy book.

My PC qualification was suspended for a week, and I had to take the 4790 portion of the CDI test again before I could get back my qual. The lesson I learned was not to let things become routine. Double-check the things you are being held accountable for. In this scenario, it was the MRC-100, the turn-around inspection I had completed.

If you are interrupted for any reason in middle of your work, start over to make sure you don't overlook



The insert photo shows the damaged blade.

My jet already had been set as the alert aircraft for a couple hours, and now my squadron had to cancel the alert and set it on a different jet.

A lot of maintenance had to happen to compensate for the mistake I had made. We had to wake up a pilot to turn the new alert aircraft, so it could be set as the alert. The ordies had to download the ordnance from aircraft 305 and move it to the new alert, requiring the jet to be respoated for a wing spread—a difficult task during flight operations.

anything. Had I followed that advice, this whole situation could have been avoided. Now, I just have to keep my head up, and look forward to working as a plane captain again.

The whole division learned a lesson about the dangers of complacency. We learned to be consistent, to follow the pubs step by step, and to remember personal accountability is critical. ✚

Airman Flanders works in the line division at VFA-146.