

The Hazards of the Flight Deck

By AN Adam Phillips

Working on the flight deck can be dangerous, and I saw several examples of just how dangerous while working in the VAQ-141 line shack on a recent deployment to the Gulf. Although no one was killed, several minor accidents and near-misses occurred, including one in which a flight-deck worker almost lost his leg. I survived the deployment without injury but gained a new appreciation for how important it is to pay attention while on the deck.

While waiting to move one of our aircraft, I was watching a few F-14 maintainers servicing their aircraft late one afternoon. The plane captain signaled that the hydraulics needed to be serviced. One of the plane captains got the hydraulic servicing unit (HSU) and went to service the hydraulics. On an F-14, the hydraulic servicing reservoir is located next to the air starter unit's (ASU) connecting port. About 20 seconds into servicing the hydraulics and while I was tying my laces on my boot, I heard a loud pop and heard some screaming. I looked up and saw the PC who had been servicing the hydraulics lying on the ground. A hose from the ASU flailed



Navy photo by MC3 Jon Hyde



Navy photo by MC3 Dominique Lasco



Navy photo by MCSN Patrick Mullen III

uncontrollably, whipping around and striking anything in its path.

As it turns out, the tractor driver operating the ASU did not inspect his equipment correctly, and the hose had popped off the jet, hitting the PC in the back of the head and knocking him unconscious. He wasn't injured too badly, but it could have been worse. He was able to return to full duty only two days later.

Some people aren't as fortunate as this Sailor. As a matter of fact, a couple of friends of mine can attest to being injured on the job. One fell off the jet and broke his hand. He was on light, limited duty for almost two months before being able to contribute to the war effort. Another guy, a close friend of mine, was getting off a jet, after putting in wing struts, when he slipped. He attempted to grab the aft canopy as he fell backward. It didn't work, and he fell to the deck, tearing some muscles in his shoulder. He was on light duty for almost a month. Yet another squadronmate fell off a jet while wiping down the canopies. He fell off the boarding platform and was fortunate to land upright. He looked around to make sure no one saw him and went on like nothing had happened.

There were a couple of serious injuries that I saw, however, while on deployment. One occurred when some Sailors were using a crane to lift and carry some heavy equipment around on the flight deck. One of the men wasn't paying attention, and the crane swung around and hit him in the chest, crushing it and requiring a medevac to a hospital in Kuwait. It's been several



Navy photo by MC1 Michael Obney

months, and he still hasn't recovered completely. The other accident I witnessed was a C-2 greyhound that had landed with a bad nose tire. A QAR was watching the tire change when the nose wheel shot off and hit the QAR in his shin. He also needed a medevac flight and never may have full use of his leg again. These incidents all occurred in about a seven-month period.



Navy photo by MC1 Michael Obney

The flight deck always has been and always will be one of the most dangerous places to work, but Sailors must work there. We simply must remember that anything can happen to anybody at anytime. The adage "keep your head on a swivel" is good advice, and we must stay vigilant and follow all the rules while on deck.

Airman Phillips works in the line shack at VAQ-141.