



Navy photo by PH2 Casey Hutchens

By AM2(AW) Brandon Green

Just another day in Afghanistan: I arrived at work and found we had three downed jets. That left only one jet for the flight schedule, but we needed to have at least two to make our flights scheduled for the next day. We got busy. Before the day was done, me and two of my guys would learn a lesson that I thought never would happen to me.

Aircraft 523's engine was out, and my shop was trying to fix a leak in the wishbone panel on the keel. I had a couple guys working that gripe, and another person doing dailies and up gripes. On another jet, all we had was an all-shops turn, and then it would be operational. I was running around trying to keep track of all the gripes and the job on aircraft 523. Shortly before the all-shops turn on the first aircraft, my guys finished the maintenance on 523. The only work that remained on that job was doing a quick leak check and installing a panel.

Just as I was going out to leak check 523, maintenance called for the all-shops turn. I decided I could complete the leak check before running out for the all-shops turn. I did that check and looked inside the panel. I told my guys to have QA look at the panel before installing it, then ran out to the line for the all-shops turn.

When I got back from that turn, my two guys were done with 523, and they had put away all their tools. I trusted that someone had looked at their tools. I didn't think anything else of the job. I told maintenance that 523 and the all-shops turn were done. I then sat down and signed off the two MAFs.

The mechs were working hard to install the engine in 523, so we could try to have it turned before day check came in. As the night went on, they did finish, and we got the turn done on 523. We felt good because we had three jets up for the next day's flight schedule. When day check came in, we checked the tools and did

pass down as usual. After the maintenance meeting, the night checkers and I headed back to camp to get some sleep before we started the whole routine over again.

It seemed like I just had gotten to sleep when someone started yelling my name and saying we were missing a tool. I thought I was having a bad dream, but it was worse. I arose, got dressed, and started walking to work. On my way in, I tried to remember everything we had done the night before. How could I have lost a tool and missed it at our morning ATAF?

When I got to work, my LPO pulled me out of the shop and told me they had found the tool, but only after they had recalled all the airborne jets from combat missions. When 523 returned, the mechs removed the tail-pipe door, pulled back the heat shield in the area where we had worked, and found the wrench. It was a one and a quarter-inch bonnie wrench. That moment marked one of the worst days in my life.

My division chief, the QAS, and the QAO counseled me. They pulled my CDI qualification for 30 days, wrote up my first report chit, and assigned me EMI. It was an excruciating long waiting game to see if the command was going to send me to captain's mast or handle it at the chief level.

They decided to let my chief handle it, but the harshest penalty was that I recognize that I had sent a

jet flying with a tool on board. The fact the aircraft were on a combat mission to protect ground troops killed my pride.

Ever since this incident, I have been a tool freak. I check tools all the time. If my guys leave tools lying around or have more tools in the jet than they have hands, I give them a really hard time and make them fix the problem before I walk away. I also no longer trust anyone with tools—no matter who they are. If they open a box, I make sure it gets checked when they are done using it. Even if they put it away when I'm not around, I go back, pull out the tools, and check them.

I was one of those people who said "nothing bad ever will happen to me." This mistake has helped me, in a weird way, because I no longer am complacent. I don't think I ever will lose another tool because that pain is something I don't want to face again.

This incident put me in the spotlight where no maintainer wants to be. Like other stories in *Mech*, I learned the hard way. Take my lesson to heart. Make sure you are doing required tool checks, and don't trust anyone, even if they are senior to you. It's your reputation and the safety of the aircrew on the line. 🙄🙄

Petty Officer Green works in the airframes shop at VAQ-142.

Lost, Missing, Broken, or Worn

By AD1 Patricio Florendo

This story is going to read like many others in this magazine—it sounded familiar as I wrote it. That's the funny part about naval aviation maintenance. There are no new mistakes, just the same ones, with different people making them over and over again. I know because I made a simple and stupid one.

Our squadron was preparing for an upcoming detachment to the Japanese island of Iwo Jima. It was crunch time, and the maintenance pace was hectic. Part of our workload included removing two engines, with the potential for two more later that day. The

engine changes were made more difficult because the supporting activity had only one engine trailer (ETU-110 E/F) and adapter. To make matters worse, our sister squadron in the air wing already had checked out that piece of ground support equipment (GSE). I called them and arranged to get the trailer after they were finished.

Later that afternoon, I picked up the engine trailer and gave the sister squadron a tool tag. I did this because they originally had checked it out from AIMD, and I simply was borrowing it. The first shortcut had occurred because I was in a hurry.