

Use Those Deck Pla

By GSCS(SW) John Davis,
Naval Safety Center

Are your deck plates in place and secured, or missing and leaving an opening that is now a fall-hazard? This is not a meaningless question, especially if you're the Sailor who just got hurt because of a missing deck plate. Or, think about a family who learns their Sailor fell to his death through an opening that should have been covered. Following are some mishaps resulting from missing deck plates.

Maintenance personnel were conducting fire-pump PMS, which included lifting a deck plate for pump access. During the PMS, both Sailors left the scene to retrieve more tools, but they did not replace the deck plate, nor did they rope off the nearby area. You can guess what happened next. The inport equipment monitor—while taking readings in the space—rounded a corner and was unaware of the missing deck plate. The Sailor's left leg went through the opening,

Looking aft on the port catwalk, the opening in the catwalk grating for the amidships vertical ladder cannot be seen. It is where the crew member is crouched.

ates and Gratings!

and, as he fell through the deck opening, he hit his right elbow. He was able to quickly catch himself with his hands, and did not fall to the deck below, thus avoiding more serious injury.

Another open-deck mishap aboard an amphibious ship didn't end so well. In order to refuel a vehicle, crewmembers had to run a 250-foot refueling hose from fore to aft along the port well-deck catwalk, then lower it to the well deck. The hose had to reach the farthest forward point in the well deck. An embarked Marine was going to help run the hose, and he climbed to the port catwalk via one of the well deck's forward inclined ladders.

Meanwhile, a Sailor had climbed to the catwalk via an amidships vertical ladder. He began hauling the hose aft, but he did not close the ladder's access hatch. He assumed that another Sailor (who was also helping with the refueling operation) was going to follow him up the ladder. However, this second Sailor got distracted below and didn't.

The Marine—coming from forward—didn't notice the open deck in the catwalk. He fell through the catwalk's amidships opening. He hit his head on a vehicle 20 feet below, and died from his injuries.

These two mishaps emphasize why Sailors must use deck plates, grates and authorized cover-



A closeup shows the opening where the Marine fell to his death. A distracted Sailor didn't climb through the opening and close it when he was supposed to, resulting in an unaware Marine falling through the opening to the well deck below, sustaining fatal injuries.

ings, or to clearly rope off as out-of-bounds any areas where plates or grates have been removed. Go out and regularly check your spaces to make sure all deck plates, grates, and coverings are in place. Also be sure associated safety chains are installed and in the required material condition if they're used to block an opening in the deck.

Lives depend on it! ☺