

Hitchhiker FOD

by Capt. John Dugene

“Now all hands muster on the bow for a FOD walkdown.” These familiar words echo over the carrier’s IMC as we begin another day of routine flight operations. As a carrier aviator and now the Air Boss, I had participated in hundreds of FOD walkdowns and heard almost as many briefs on types of FOD, ranging from hard to liquid to micro to migratory.

Leaving the Mini Boss in the tower, I went down in my yellow jersey, joining 200 Sailors walking the line. Heading aft, we were picking up the remaining ball-bearing shot from recent work on the non-skid work. Focusing on finding these tiny metal nuisances, I scrunched down near JBD No. 1 to begin the tedious work of clearing another area.

Much to my surprise, there on the deck was a commander’s silver collar device. It was the FOD find-of-the-day, although it bothered me that all-hands walkdowns increased the risk of careless shipmates bringing FOD up from throughout the carrier. Careless commanders, no less.

Immediately after the walkdown, the Mini and I called all the commanders on the ship to see if they were missing a collar device. We had prepared a stern lecture on flight-deck cleanliness. No, everyone had their devices; we dropped the subject for the day.

Four days later, as I was preparing my khakis for pulling into port, I was embarrassed and shocked to find I was short one silver oak leaf. It took a few minutes for the FOD lesson to sink in. The circuitous route the FOD had taken seemed unbelievable. But there was no other explanation.

While I had been straightening my stateroom, one collar device had fallen onto the deck, and I’d stepped on it. The pin of the device embedded in the bottom of a shoe. Now in the shoe, the device went across an athwartships passageway, up to the O-10 level, circulated around Pri-Fly for 10 minutes, went back down the ladder, on to the flight deck (still undetected), up to the bow, through

part of the FOD walkdown and continued aft to a spot near JBD No. 1.

When I bent down to gather more BBs, the device had fallen off right in front of me. That was tenacious, migratory FOD.

I now tell this story to anyone who will or has to listen. Migratory FOD is insidious. It begins anywhere on the ship or aircraft and works its way up to the flight deck, waiting to be picked up, blown over the side, or sucked into a jet intake. The bags of FOD after each walkdown prove that many of the pens, paper clips, staples, snuff cans, and rivet shanks began their journey elsewhere on the ship.

As a result of this incident, we took even greater precautions. A key issue is the cleanliness of the hangar bay, sponson and door light-locker. The junk that originates in the ship, pools in a ready-up area like the hangar bay, and then arrives on the flight deck is significant and preventable. ✈️

Capt. Dugene is a former F-8 and F-14 pilot. He was the Air Boss onboard USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 79) at the time of this story. He is currently an instructor at the Naval War College.

