



A surgical team repairs the broken leg after the Marine suffered a compound fracture while trying to complete a three-man job by himself.



*Photo by Roy Allen Beltz Jr., Fleet Surgical Team Five*

# IT'S THE RUSH?

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Sailors and Marines routinely do more with less and take charge to get the job done. But such initiative can come at a cost if safety does not play an integral role.

Fewer than two weeks into our Operation Enduring Freedom deployment, we sent home a well-intentioned Marine because of injuries he suffered from his unbridled eagerness to do his job. It happened late one afternoon after a long, hot, and humid day of flight operations. We all were proud finally to be on our way—ready to show the world what we could do—after a demanding work-up period. This lance corporal was no different: Young, strong, and conditioned, he was the quintessential Marine.

His tasking was simple: He and three fellow Marines were to move an aircraft-engine stand from the flight deck down to the hangar bay. They could not use the elevator because flight operations were ongoing. Since the stand was at the top of the ramp, the lance corporal and his fellow Marines could roll it directly down to the hangar deck.

But where were his co-workers? He assumed they still were busy elsewhere on the flight deck, so he waited several minutes, sizing up the job as he stood there. He thought to himself, “It’s an empty stand; it can’t weigh more than 250 pounds; and it had big caster wheels.” He also thought about the ramp being covered with non-skid and being only three decks high. “Piece of cake!” the lance corporal concluded. He had been working out a lot, and after all, this was WestPac! Certainly, he quickly could complete this job and move to another task.

Using gravity to his advantage, the Marine stood in front of the stand and tried to back it down slowly to the hangar bay. After moving only a few feet—the wheels were on the incline—he realized his estimations about his ability to go it alone were wrong.

The non-skid was slipperier than it looked, the incline was steeper than it appeared, and the stand

weighed more than he thought. About this time, the lance corporal’s oily flight-deck boots began to slide from under him.

He frantically tried to reposition himself in front of the engine stand to keep it from rolling down the ramp and surely destroying anything in its path. He was able to divert it into the bulkhead—but at a price. The stand sandwiched his leg against the bulkhead and knocked him to the deck.

Nearby crew members rushed to his aid and carried him to medical, which was only 50 feet away. The lance corporal had suffered a compound fracture of both bones in his lower leg. The next day, after surgery to stabilize the leg, the lance corporal was medically evacuated, leaving the embarked Marines one trooper short for the rest of deployment.

This mishap exemplifies time-critical ORM’s importance and how everyone should use it. Just by following step one of the five-step process—identify hazards—and adhering to the principle, “accept no unnecessary risk,” would have avoided this mishap. It would have made no difference had the engine stand been moved 20 minutes later—the risks taken were unnecessary and didn’t outweigh the ultimate cost of losing a shipmate.

How often do your Sailors and Marines attempt such feats under similar circumstances and succeed? How many times do they get an “atta-boy” for their acts?

Supervision is the key. Reward your personnel for their safe accomplishments, not the ones that involved cutting corners for the sake of expediency. We cannot afford to let Sailors or Marines become acclimated to an atmosphere where any accomplished deed is a success. 🌀

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