

The Flight Deck Always Wins

By Ltjg. William Gilbert

At the halfway point of my seventh deployment, the flight deck was showing signs of wear and tear, but that factor wasn't going to deter an old pro like me. I had been hurdling tie-down chains, dodging wing flaps, and jumping over slick catapults for six previous deployments, and I was determined this day would be no different.

After a brief stretch and warm-up, I was off to the races. My first couple of laps would be my so-called "recon" laps, in which I mentally would map out my route for the day. I noticed flight-deck personnel had placed aircraft chocks at the end of catapult No. 3 to keep people from walking on the centerline strip they were painting. "This won't be a problem," I thought, as I passed by. "Just a slight detour, or better yet, I can jump over the cat."

I had been running about 10 minutes when I started daydreaming as usual. I was deciding how I'd spend the lottery if I won it when my feet hit hydraulic fluid and water on a catapult track. I immediately lost my footing and went tumbling to the deck. As I fell forward, I instinctively put out my right arm to break my fall.

The pain in my right hand was excruciating as I peeled myself off the deck. Non-skid had ripped open the outer part of my palm, and blood was pouring from the wound. I almost passed out when I looked because the cut was so deep it nearly had exposed a tendon. Non-skid filled the wound.

Two maintenance people who had seen me fall came over and offered to help. They wrapped my hand with towels and checked me for more injuries. Both shoulders had "road rash," as did my hip and right knee. I was in quite a mess for a salty flight-deck jogger.

I spent about four hours in medical while corpsmen tended to my wounds. I can't describe the pain I felt as they scrubbed

the non-skid from my hand and shoulder. My hand required six stitches. I knew I would be sore the next day, but I also knew I would heal in time.

Looking back on that event, I realize I'd stopped focusing on the dangers of the flight deck. I had worked on the roof so long I had developed a comfort level in this dangerous environment. Taking it for granted finally had caught up with me.

The flight deck is not a place for daydreaming, whether flight operations are going on or not. Be aware of your surroundings and keep those eyes in the back of your head, as well as the ones in front, focused all the time. As I learned that day, doing otherwise chalks up another mishap for the flight deck. ☺

The author, now deceased, was assigned to VFA-83 when he wrote this article.

Cdr. John Mahoney, USN(Ret.), director of the Media Department at the Naval Safety Center, echoes the advice of this author. He, too, once was daydreaming while jogging on a flight deck, and an A-7 nearly blew him over the side. A roommate caught him just in time.

The flight deck is not a place for daydreaming, even if you're a salty jogger like the author of this story.

