



A hit to the face...



from a worn winch assembly...



will make your face swell.

# Whacked by a Buddy Store

By AM3 Gregory Riebli

Jets steadily were hitting the deck, and the flight schedule was coming to a close on board USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70). I was working in the airframes shop of an S-3B squadron that had broken records for fuel passed during the first few months in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. We were three weeks from the end of a six-month cruise when I was injured on the flight deck.

One of our aircraft had landed with a bad aerial-refueling store (ARS). I was motivated that night and decided to help the ARS shop remove that buddy store and did so with little difficulty. We rolled out a good ARS on a dolly and began to raise it to the pylon. The dolly has metal handles that attach to a winch and hoist assembly. That arrangement allows you to crank the store into place.

The aft part of the store is the heaviest, so a great deal of weight sits on the back end of the dolly and on the aft hoist assembly. This design creates tremendous tension on the winch assembly that cranks up the store. That device was on my end of the dolly, and it was worn and tattered from one heavy load after another. I wasn't aware of any damage at the time and wasn't concerned with anything, except loading the store and getting the jet ready for the next scheduled event.

We started to lift the store, and everything seemed OK. When the ARS was about halfway up, the handle got stiff from the tension, slipped off, broke free of the

Velcro that helps to secure it, and whacked the side of my face. I'm not a little guy (6 foot 4 inches tall and weigh 275 pounds), but the impact nearly knocked me out. My entire head hurt intensely, and I couldn't move my mouth. I tried to convince myself I was fine, but the pain just increased. I decided to go to medical, and, within an hour, I was in surgery to reset a broken cheekbone on the right side of my face. The doc was good, and he was able to do oral surgery, avoiding extensive scarring. I received stitches along my entire gum line and spent three days SIQ. I also was on limited duty for the rest of our deployment.

My accident was significant for two reasons: I was injured, and the handle had fallen off before. A shipmate had received stitches on his eyebrow because of the same problem. The handle's bad design needs to be changed before another Sailor gets hurt. This problem should have been documented earlier.

I cannot place total blame on engineering, though. The crank was worn, and I was more worried about completing the task than my own safety. I should have slowed down and should have given the equipment a thorough check. Had I done those two simple steps, I wouldn't have made a trip to medical. Instead, I ended up with a broken face and had a bad end to an otherwise great cruise. 

Petty Officer Riebli wrote this story while assigned to the airframes shop at VS-29.