

Things happen when you least expect it, especially on a flight deck. I learned the myriad hazards and the possibility of death by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

After a day recovery on board USS *Kitty Hawk*, I had to tie down an E-2C for a hot-pump, crew switch on the bow. The aircraft was parked on cat 2, and yellowshirts were launching aircraft off cat 1.

I had chocked and chained the port side of the Hawkeye and headed for the nose to make sure my plane-captain PQS got signed. Shipmates all around were waving at me, but I didn't understand their anxiety and was intent on getting the signoff. I slowly walked forward but didn't see one of our QARs getting down in a football stance, and I didn't realize I was ready to play in a football game. I still was confused and continued to walk forward.

I took several steps before that QAR lined me up like a lineman for the New York Jets intent on a sack. I stopped and wondered what he was doing, but, before I could react, he hit me, knocking me on my back.

I got up, brushed off the shock, and tried to stand up. I still wasn't sure what had happened, so I stood there, trying to collect my thoughts. Meanwhile, the pilots came out and gave me something to take below. I waited for them to clear the prop, and I then began to walk around it.

I followed the safe-shot line but felt a tug on the back of my float coat. The same QAR from my earlier incident pulled me away from another hazard. I wish the story ended here, but it doesn't.

I made it back to my shop, took care of business, and then headed back to the plane. On the way back to remove chocks and chains, I noticed a Hornet on cat 1 but didn't see it was ready to launch, because I had turned my back to the action. I then crossed the shot line, thinking that route would be safer as I tried to get to the other side of the prop. I still hadn't thought about the FA-18 on cat 1.

That QAR again came to the rescue. He grabbed me and told me to leave the flight deck. He also wanted me to talk to the flight-deck coordinator after the launch was completed.

I knew I had screwed up again but still was confused about the past 20 to 30 minutes. The QAR explained that I first was tackled five feet from a prop. The second time I had come only three feet from a prop, and he was trying to get me to duck. I realized my third mistake: trying to cross the shot line after the Hornet had been cleared to launch.

The flight deck has many hazards, and you must keep your head in the game. If you don't, a linebacker might hit you, or, worse, no one will be there, and a shipmate will have to pick up your pieces. 

Petty Officer Leffler works in the line division at VAW-115.



Photograph by PH2 Lisa Marcus