

# Preventable Accident Ends in Injury

By LCdr. Tom Lagomarsino

On a frigid winter morning in northern Florida, the maintenance-control chief assigned a team of young Sailors to transport several pieces of support equipment from the squadron to the Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Department (AIMD). The team jumped on the task, and the cold weather enticed them to rush the transfer. Unfortunately, this bravado and rushed job led to an injured airman because the team did not apply operational risk management (ORM).

The team leader, a third class petty officer, checked out a large trailer from AIMD to return the SE to AIMD. This trailer had been modified: The tongue jack used to support the forward end of the trailer had been removed. Someone had modified the trailer because they were “tired of replacing the tongue jack every time one got damaged.”

The team leader hooked up the trailer to a tow tractor and drove it to the squadron. Having studied diligently for rating exams, the go-getters on this team knew about the concept of center of gravity (CG). They determined that a forward CG would optimize tractor-and-trailer performance, so they loaded all the SE toward the front. The team fired up the tractor and drove to AIMD. Unfortunately, they had failed to patch test the hydraulic servicing unit for contaminants. Hey! It was cold, and the team was motivated. AIMD refused to accept the hydraulic servicing unit, so the team drove the trailer and equipment back to the squadron.

The maintenance-control chief reprioritized their original task and gave them new ones—as maintenance control is apt to do.

Intrepid airman No. 1 was told to visit a sister squadron located just 300 yards west of his spaces. Because of the cold weather, airman No. 1 chose to drive the tractor to the other squadron, rather than to risk the walk on a near-frigid Florida day.

The airman decided he needed someone to separate the loaded trailer from the tow tractor, so he asked airman No. 2 for help. Another airman, No. 3, saw the first two Sailors struggling with the trailer, and he decided to help out. Airman No. 2 and No. 3 applied

force to either side of the trailer tongue, as airman No. 1 rocked the tractor fore and aft. The loaded trailer finally came free.

Airman No. 3 let out a blood-curdling scream. The cause was simple: Once the tow tractor and trailer had separated, the two airmen could not support the weight of the fully loaded trailer, and it fell on airman No. 3’s foot. He screamed loud enough to fill the squadron spaces, “My foot!

My foot!” Several shipmates responded to his call, and they rushed to free him (he actually wore a Superman shirt under his coveralls).

His shipmates drove him to the hospital, fearing a broken foot. Steel-toed boots protected his foot from being crushed, but he ended up with a very sore and bruised left foot, five days limited duty, and loss of super-hero status.

The team missed two chances to use ORM and could have prevented this mishap, a common occurrence in the Navy. ORM, teamwork and common sense should be applied and will help to reduce the risk of repeat problems. Had the team leader or airman No. 1 identified and assessed the hazard, they would have slowed down, reevaluated the scenario, removed the weight from the front end of the trailer, and saved an injury.



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The missing tongue jack on this trailer was a clear sign of defective equipment.