

Saved by the Net

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The January-March 2004 edition of the Naval Safety Center's Ships' Safety Bulletin contained an article about trunk-safety nets by STSCM(SS) Robert Dingmann. He explained that, throughout the fleet, these nets often are not up to specifications. Many are too wide, some are missing weight tags, and a large number sag. The following account is a testimonial to the importance of ensuring the proper safety nets are in place.

The morning of Nov. 27 was like any other aboard ship, during operations in the Arabian Gulf. We were conducting replenishment at sea, with a sun-filled sky and calm seas. The hangar bay was buzzing with the sounds of forklifts and conveyor belts, while the crew was below decks, preparing for various watchstation duties.

Hours passed without incident before we heard the 1MC blaring, "Deep rescue, deep rescue, deep rescue in compartment 7-128-4-T, 4B shaft alley." With those words, various emergency personnel throughout the ship rushed into action to rescue a shipmate who had fallen off the ladder in an access trunk. The rapid-response team from the medical department and damage-control division quickly assessed the scene and provided critical information on how to proceed with the rescue.

Moments before, an experienced DC3 had been carrying out her duties and preparing for watch in list control. Damage controlmen who stand this watch routinely climb down from the second deck to the seventh deck, using a vertical ladder. Unfortunately, the DC3's descent ended up being anything but normal.

About halfway down, she lost her footing and fell approximately 15 feet—from the fourth to the fifth deck—landing partway in the safety netting. She sustained head trauma and broke some teeth when she hit the steel deck plate and knife-edge. But, her ordeal didn't end there. She was hanging with most of her weight dangling over the edge of the net. Any wrong move could have sent her down to the next level.



Quick response of the watchstander in list control may have saved her life. Hearing screams, the watchstander hurried to the victim's side and moved her legs inside the net. The list-control watch then sounded the alarm for deep rescue by using the sound-powered phone circuit to notify damage-control central.

Within minutes, the rapid-response team was rigging rescue equipment for the deep rescue, while corpsmen assessed the DC3's injuries. She was evacuated from the space on an elevator and was taken to medical for evaluation and treatment. Inspection of the spaces leading from the second deck to the seventh deck revealed all ladders were normal and in good condition. The safety nets worked as advertised and truly saved the life of the DC3.

As noted by Master Chief Dingmann in his *SSB* article, the reference for trunk-safety nets is section 612e of General Specifications for Overhaul of Surface Ships. It says that, for every ladder extending through three or more decks, safety nets must be installed, beginning at the topmost deck. One also then must be installed at every other deck all the way to the bottom. ■