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During a rigorous and mind-bending week at Landing Signal Officer (LSO) School, instructors put each student through a challenging course on the fundamentals of “waving.” This tutorial of helping a fellow aviator land aboard a 1,000-foot floating runway ranges from advanced geometry to debriefing techniques. The instructors also cover various shipboard and field-related safety items.

[OK, I can hear all you readers saying, “Hey, this article belongs in Approach magazine, not Ashore!” But read on, because you’ll find out why it’s here.—Ed.]

During the course on field-carrier-landing practice (FCLPs), we discuss the training roles an LSO can play in each squadron, how to keep aircraft safe, and what to look for while waving at the field. Something we don’t cover is the danger that may lurk near an LSO shack at the approach-end of runway 27 at Point Mugu, Calif.

After a grueling day and night of FCLPs, a squadronmate and I were walking from the LSO shack back to our line when we noticed a large piece of what we thought was rubber—maybe from a blown tire. It was lying there in the darkness, near the hold-short line for runway 27. We were surprised that without a moon, we still could see this foreign-object-damage (FOD) hazard on the taxiway.

[Here comes the connection I promised earlier.—Ed.]

Being safety-minded, I reached down to pick up the unusually large piece of FOD when it suddenly turned and looked at me! I realized the object was a six-foot (OK, maybe it was only a five-and-a-half-foot) rattlesnake. Summoning my best athletic prowess, I jumped straight up and back about 10 feet, yelling, “Snake!” at the top of my lungs.

My buddy, in a moment of bravery (or stupidity), ran toward me with a quizzical look on his face but quickly halted his gallop when the snake craned its head and stared at him, too. He immediately put my athletic skills to shame with his own jumping demonstration.

Apparently, the reptile was using the warm concrete to fend off the night’s chill. Being good neighbors, we gave him a large berth and let him enjoy the remaining heat the pavement provided.

What’s the lesson here? We preach flying safety in our briefs, we monitor our friends flying around in the pattern to ensure their safety, and we’re always watching the flying environment around ourselves. I suggest, however, we also need to remember the environment where we may be standing or walking.

LSO shacks are always out in the “weeds” where our leg-less friends like to hide and often curl up to stay warm at night. Make sure you look around, whether you’re at the shack, in your workcenter, or at home. The next time you find a pen or other similar object you’ve been looking for, remember the cliché, “If it had been a snake, it would have bitten me,” because it just might be one. **A**

*The author was assigned to
VAW-117 when he wrote this article.*



What They Didn't Tell Me at LSO School