

Are You Really Secured for Sea?

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Did you ever walk into a room and sense something bad just had happened? I had such an experience during my first deployment as an SH-60B LAMPS pilot aboard a destroyer. As a one-helicopter detachment, we were heading south for UNITAS having departed Guantanamo Bay after refueling. Air department had secured for sea—or so we thought—securing anything that could move once we got underway.

I was in the wardroom below the hangar deck when I heard a loud bang. Knowing the helicopter was in the hangar, I went up to investigate. After climbing the ladder and turning to face the hangar, I saw three squadron members standing at the helo's left side, which was secure in the starboard RAST trap. It was then I sensed something bad had happened. As I approached, I saw the helicopter had a 1-inch gash in its skin below the static air ports. On the deck next to the helicopter was a 4-foot-long, 1-inch-diameter metal rod weighing about 30 pounds.

Quick questioning identified the rod's owner as the ship's force personnel who had been working on a hangar fan. To get to the fan, the Sailors were using a platform in the hangar's forward port

section. No one knew exactly what had happened, but, based on damage to the aircraft and the large mark on the deck next to it, we determined the rod was laying unsecured on the platform and rolled off when the ship rolled. The rod then most likely rotated 90 degrees and bounced off the helo's side.

Fortunately, the metal rod did not strike the aircraft directly. Had it done so, it most likely would have impaled the helicopter, resulting in much more severe damage. We also were lucky no Sailor was walking below the platform when the rod rolled off—the visible damage to the hangar deck indicated the rod could have crushed a Sailor's skull. As it was, quick repairs to helicopter's skin had the LAMPS bird flying the next day.

We learned a simple lesson that day: You're never done securing for sea! Ship's force had begun work on the fan after we left port, so our initial secure-for-sea checks did not find the loose rod.

When you're underway, all hands constantly should make sure their spaces are secured for sea. Expensive gear and, more importantly, people's lives depend on it! 🌀