

How Battle.

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By Lt. Joe Alden

With two nights of flying left in CVW-8's time in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, our flight of two Hornets was tasked with attacking targets in Afghanistan. The air wing primarily had been flying night missions, ours would be the same. We were scheduled for the second event, which would launch just past midnight and land at sunrise.

Each jet carried two AGM-65E, laser-guided Maverick missiles. All four of our weapons and stores-management systems indicated go, on deck and airborne. After a quick top-off from the KC-135, we headed north for our "hunting" expedition. The targets were parked neatly along a mountain road and where they were supposed to be. They were trying to hide from us. We made quick work of target acquisition and dropped ord-

nance on the first run. The feel of the LMAV coming off of the jet was something I hadn't heard or seen since our missions into Kosovo in 1999. With a resounding "woosh," my missile headed downrange. I waited for the explosion that never would come.

I thought the missile had gone dumb and over-shot the target, so we continued the mission. We came around for the second pass; both our weapons successfully hit the targets. We left to the south and headed toward Iron Maiden for a final top-off before the return trip to USS *Enterprise*.

The sun peeked over the horizon as we got ready to push out of marshal on the Case III approach. After landing, the yellowshirts parked me on the bow's starboard side. As I climbed out of the jet, our gunner looked at me in amazement and pointed at station three. I couldn't

Photo by PH3 Clifford L.H. Davis

About That -Damage Check!

believe what I saw; a LMAV still hung from the launcher!

I thought I was looking at the wrong jet. I had heard, seen, and felt the missile fire several hours earlier! We cautiously approached the missile and saw the back half of the launcher was roasted to a crisp. It looked exactly like a sparkler; it was burnt out, gray and charred. The rocket motor had fired and created quite a flash airborne so I thought it had left the jet.

EOD was called and they removed the weapon.

I had to come up with a good story on how I didn't notice the weapon still hanging on the jet. I had plenty of good excuses. It was on station three, which isn't visible from the cockpit, and

the LMAV is too short to be seen from under the leading-edge extension.

To make a short story even shorter, we neglected to do a proper battle-damage check. My stores page showed both missiles had left the rails. The AAA was light in the area and no shoulder-launched SAM activity had been seen, so I didn't think a check was needed.

We train like we fight, which includes doing a battle-damage check at the end of any flight. This night we didn't do one. The only negative that came out of this mission was that it provided some humor for the air wing at the next foc'sle follies, but it easily could have been much worse. 🦅

Lt. Alden flies with VFA-87.

Photo by PH3 H. Dwain Willis