

By AN Erick Duran

Our squadron was on board USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN 74) for pre-deployment work-ups. After the routine man-up of an E-2C, the blueshirts removed the tie-down chains, and I carried them with me. I was beside the Hawkeye and walking toward cat 1. I wasn't flight-deck qualified, so I stayed between two qualified people and was being as cautious as possible. Things were about to change, though.

As we headed toward cat 1 for the launch, the jet blast deflector (JBD) started to go up for a Greyhound, which was preparing to launch. Not wanting to get stuck behind the JBD, we hurried around to the starboard side and began to move forward. We still were aft of the JBD on elevator 1 and about four feet from the side of the ship when the C-2 went to high power. The Sailors in my squadron know the dangers of the props, but the unexpected strength of the prop-wash from a turbo-prop at high power was remarkable. The amount of air rushing around the JBD and outboard onto elevator 1 caught us by surprise.

The chains that had been across my shoulders got whipped across my neck. Before dropping to the deck to grab a pad-eye, as I had been taught to do, I turned my body to the left and away from the side of the ship. I thought that move would let me grab the chains to keep them from choking me and would keep them from going over the side. That's when the blast fully hit, though, sending me backward, over the side of the ship, and into a safety net outboard of elevator 1.

If that net hadn't been there, I would have had a quick 70-foot drop to the water. Two shipmates tried to stop me, but everything happened too fast. After the C-2 launched, they ran over and pulled me out of the net. I was scared; the incident gave new meaning to the term brownshirt, but I wasn't hurt.

That episode made me realize just how quickly the flight deck can become a dangerous place. Prop-wash like jet blast must be respected anytime a plane goes to high power. Everyone also needs to remember that danger exists behind the JBDs and also outboard of them. I'm living proof that a mishap can happen when you least expect it.

Airman Duran is a plane captain at VAW-112.

*I did a story in the fall 2001 issue about a Sailor blown overboard. It was a freakish incident but, nonetheless, gave a maintainer an unwanted swim. A Sailor in November 2002 spent 7.5 hours in the water after*

# Blown Into the Net



*being blown overboard. He sadly watched as his workplace and temporary home floated away. He had lost his cranial, and his light didn't work. Two critical visual clues were gone, and search crews couldn't see him at night; you can read the full story in an upcoming issue of Fathom. This hazard is not new or unheard of, but the statistics are interesting. From 1997 to mid-2001, Naval Safety Center records show one person blown over the side or into the nets. Since mid-2001 (most after 9-11), I know of at least four other cases, and the real number actually could be higher because our hazrep database is backlogged and some incidents go unreported. I can't say with statistical purity that the surge in this type of incident is due to the perceived urgency of current events, but the numbers are noticeable. The story I just shared—and the future Fathom story—is an attempt to grab every reader's attention. It doesn't take much to become distracted, to take a step in the wrong direction, or to have an aircraft unexpectedly turn on you. Our country needs you safe and dry, and you don't need ORM to tell you never to take unnecessary risks, to rush a job, or to do maintenance by shortcut. Any of these bad practices could lead to a damaged aircraft or a dead Sailor or aviator.—Ed.*