

# A Shocking Revelation

By AE3 Michael White



Our squadron's schedule had been hectic: We had completed a whirlwind set of work-ups, departing two months early for Operation Enduring Freedom. We'd been underway for six weeks. Coming off back-to-back port calls, our maintenance department was getting back into full swing, preparing our jets for the upcoming missions. Two maintainers prepared to apply ground power to NG 502. What happened next was far from routine, and it gave one of our young AEs a real hair-raising experience.

Anyone who has had the privilege of working on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier knows that it is busy, loud and often unpredictable. The constant roar of jet engines, turning props, and ground-power units makes voice communication nearly impossible. For this reason, we use clear, standardized hand and body signals to communicate.

Aircrew and maintainers can relate to the difficulty caused by a non-standard malfunction or question. This problem is intensified when signals are given at night or in the shadows. In these conditions, it is easy to confuse one signal for another, and that mistake can lead to shocking results.

Applying ground power to an aircraft is one of the more common steps maintainers perform. They do it dozens of times every day, preparing aircraft for start or when doing routine maintenance. On the ship, the job is a two-person task.

Photograph by AME1(AW) Robert Cook

One person plugs the 115-volt AC cable into the jet, and the other energizes the cable, using a power button at the ground-power station a few feet away.

In our case, it was night, but the lights from the superstructure gave the maintainers enough vision to allow hand signals—or so they thought—instead of the traditional flashlight wands. An AE started to insert the cable but saw a problem and signaled his partner to hold off on the power. Unfortunately, this signal was misinterpreted as a thumbs-up, and the other Sailor hit the power button.

Both maintainers described a fireball exploding from the end of the cable. The AE described an intense tingling sensation as he was thrown about 10 feet from the jet. The jolt caused him to drop the cord, and the other maintainer secured power. A thorough review of this incident determined the current had arced from the plug to the jet, causing the fireball and melting the copper connector.

Injuries and damage to the equipment were minor, but this incident drives home the recurring need to emphasize clear and standard hand signals. We learned never to substitute the desire to complete a task for safe operating procedures. If it's too dark or signals are unclear, confirm that signal or make the other person repeat it. We now have a good rule of thumb to follow: If you have any doubt, there is no doubt...stop what you're doing. 

Petty Officer White works in the AE shop at VAQ-138.

This cracked cranial saved a life. Can you imagine the injury had this maintainer not worn it?



## Cranial On and Chin Strap Buckled

By Lt. David Cisneros

**H**ow many times have you seen a shipmate not wearing personal protective equipment or wearing it incorrectly? Did you say anything to that Sailor? Sometimes, we all need a reminder of how important it is to wear PPE and to use it properly. I hope an incident at Helicopter Combat Support Squadron Five (HC-5) drives home the point.

A plane captain on weekend duty was doing routine maintenance on the forward rotor head of a UH-46D in the hangar. While safety wiring a shock absorber, she banged her elbow and lost consciousness from the pain. She fell off the work platform and landed headfirst on the cement, 14 feet below. The airman's cranial was her sole line of defense.

After she hit the ground, a shipmate, who also was working on the aircraft, rushed to her aid. The airman was unconscious for approximately 10 to 15 seconds. As she tried to move, two more shipmates arrived and told her to remain still, while they waited for an ambulance. The injured Sailor was transported to the hospital and was diagnosed with unstable vertebra fractures. She was sent to Tripler Army Hospital in Hawaii for treatment.

The good news is she wore PPE. That fact, and the quick reaction of shipmates, allowed for successful neck surgery. The airman was back at work in Guam a mere three weeks later. The proper use of a fastened cranial protected a shipmate from what easily could have been a paralyzing or life-threatening injury. 

Lt. Cisneros is a safety officer and flies with HC-5.

