

When I first joined the Air Force and decided to become an Aircraft Armament Systems Specialist, I thought the most dangerous part of the job would be working with the explosives that we load on a day-to-day basis. It has been more than 20 years since I made that naïve assumption.

Throughout my career, I have seen or heard about a lot of situations that now make me realize — it's not the weapons that are dangerous in the loading world — it's complacency. Why is it so easy for loaders to fall into this dangerous realm? I believe it's because most of the tasks we perform on a daily basis are repetitive.

We all have checklists that we follow, and we're supposed to erase them when we're done and fill them out again each time we load a new aircraft. *Yeah right! There are 40 steps, and I have 10 jets to load with the same configuration. Just to cover myself, I'll at least change the tail numbers in case quality assurance shows up or God forbid something goes wrong.* Well, more often than not, we end up dealing with the latter. Here are just a couple of examples of how complacency leads to something going wrong.

While stationed at Torrejon AB, Spain, I was an F-16 lead crewmember. A guy I'll call Wallace was the load standardization crew team chief. He was a very good loader and was meticulous when it came to evaluating loading procedures. He always said, *"If a load crew messed up, it better not have been because of the training they received from us."*

The one thing that amazed me was when we would watch the LSC load, Wally was smooth. *So what, he's the LSC — man!*

One day I had to ask Wally what happened to his hip. He told



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Photo by MSgt Terry L. Blevins



Photo by TSgt Dave Ahlschwede



Photo by SMSgt Edward E. Snyder

Don't Become COMPLACENT

By MSgt Kenneth Gantt, Nellis AFB, Nev.

me that his crew was loading six MK-82s off MHU-110 trailers onto five aircraft, and that on the third plane he attached the extension arms without inspecting them for serviceability. When he pulled the bomb towards him, the arms snapped at the welds and the bomb fell on him crushing his hip. Complacency? I have always wondered if that was why he was so strict when it came to us training load crews.

Then there was Steven, an energetic young 3-man who liked to show off his skills. If given a task, he'd always want to be the first one done.

One day his crew was tasked to remove and replace chaff and flare modules between the first and second go. After the first jet, he told his crew chief that he would go and finish the rest of the jets while the crew chief finished up the forms.

After loading the chaff, Steve went around to the other side to load the flare. If he had checked the forms, he would have noticed

that the jet came down code 2 for a chaff and flare malfunction. He also probably would have noticed there was a specialist in the cockpit troubleshooting the system.

Steve told me that while screwing in the flare module, all he heard was click, click, click, click, and said to himself: *"OH! NO!"* But it was too late. Steve ended up laying butt-naked on the ramp with melted sun glasses and combat boots! He had third degree burns from his nose to his shins. I have listened to him tell the story to some of the new airmen in the armament shop and he is the first one to tell you, *"That was a stupid thing to do. I knew better. That's what happens when you get complacent!"*

From some of the expressions I see on their faces, I don't think they will ever forget what can happen if you become complacent in the loading world. Don't let this syndrome impact your career or your life. Do things by the book every time. ▶