

What I Learned

During the First Three Weeks of Deployment

Ltjg. Kit Brown

Ship's company hear a lot about helo hazards during the first week of workups, but helo det's must continually review and instruct in order to avoid mishaps. Furthermore, everyone on the flight deck must learn to watch for potential threats.

During the first three weeks of the deployment, members of our LAMPS helicopter detachment and ship's flight-deck personnel witnessed a handful of serious near-mishaps.

FOD is a chronic problem for ships and airports. Pilots, aircrew, and flight-deck personnel know the damage a paint chip or pebble can

cause. While the flight deck is scrutinized for FOD before flight ops, many of the ship's other decks below the level of the flight deck don't get the same attention. These lower decks, mainly used by members of ship's company who are not associated with flight operations, contribute plenty of flying debris when they are swept by the downwash of a helicopter rotor. Paint chips from aging ships are a constant problem that no one person can control, but ball caps and soda cans usually have owners who should be responsible for keeping track of them when flight

operations start. Yet detachment pilots have seen them, along with plastic bags, can lids and expended CIWS casings barely miss engine intakes and the rotor blades while hovering around the flight deck. The problem: trash cans left unsecured and areas around unrep fueling stations not policed and littered with rags.

Many publications, particularly *NWP 3-04.1*, describe ship handling during helicopter flight operations, outlining when the ship may maneuver, based on the actions and needs of the helicopter. This publication says repeatedly that once the ship grants permission to the helo pilots to shut down and stop the rotor blades, the ship must not maneuver. On three occasions, however, our helicopter detachment had to stop an approved procedure because the ship started maneuvering. At one point, the pilots had to reengage the rotor blades to keep the blades from flapping, which could have damaged the rotor head and endangered the flight deck crew. In this case, several factors came into play, notably the bridge's failure to coordinate with the LSO prior to turning. Furthermore, the ship was trying to stay in formation with other ships and had to hastily correct its heading. The LSO didn't see the ship turning, because it was nighttime and the directional gyro lights in the Landing Control Station were burnt out, which made the gauge hard to use for quick reference.

To prevent such a perilous situation in the future, the helicopter detachment must ensure that all personnel qualified to control the ship's maneuvering are familiar with the guidelines in *NWP 3-04.1*. The LSO must know the ship's intentions and pay attention to its direction and speed, in case the OOD and conning officer forget the helicopter.

Finally, the landing signalman enlisted (LSE) is extremely important once the helicopter has landed. With so much activity on the flight deck, the LSE must know the location of everyone on the flight deck as well as the pilots' intentions. He must keep an eye on the helicopter, monitoring the installing or removal of chocks and tiedown chains.

Flight-deck directors must remember to react only to a helicopter pilot's request, consent, or acknowledgment. In one case, our helicopter was on deck after completing the first of two landings, when, to the pilot's amazement, the flight director came onto the flight deck and instructed the personnel to install the chocks and chains, without a signal from the pilots. Because this event occurred at night, neither pilot could get the attention of the flight-deck director or deck personnel. Someone could have been killed if the pilots hadn't seen people on the deck and had tried to lift off.

The flight-deck director was new, with little experience. He hadn't trained during week one of workups. Flight-deck directors must pay attention to the directions from pilots, and that takes training. This flight-deck director didn't understand the pilot's intentions, or he wouldn't have run out on the deck and started to chock and chain the aircraft. LSOs must ensure flight-deck directors

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are made aware of the helicopter's intentions during each approach. If flight-deck directors aren't sure what the helicopter is going to do, they should ask.

We dodged the bullet in all of the cases described, but each one could have been disastrous. There are far too many perils associated with shipboard flight ops to be distracted by the unnecessary hazards caused by untrained or poorly trained personnel. 

Ltjg. Brown flies with HSL-42.