

A FLIR-Pod Fumble

By A member of the VMFA-212 Maintenance Department

The day had been long, hot and humid. I had to remove two FLIR pods from our Hornets. Returning from a difficult job out on the line, I was looking forward to a 15-minute break but didn't take it. I should have.

The day almost was over, weekend liberty was in a couple of hours, and I was ready to go home. One more task and I'd be finished. This job did not have to be completed right away, but I just wanted to get it done. My mind was tired, and I was not thinking as quickly as I usually do.

I told a co-worker, who was new to our shop and in training, to get a bomb hoist from the tool room and to meet me on the line while I gathered the FLIR beam, FLIR-beam adapter, tool box, and shop cart. I didn't take the MIMs for the FLIR pod with me out to the line, but it directs maintainers to use an AERO 21C weapons skid to install or to remove the pod. Our base is supposed to have five skids for checkout; however, it had none, so we decided to make do with other equipment.

On the line, I thought we had everything needed to complete the job. However, I didn't make sure a CDI was present. My co-worker and I set up the beam, adapter and hoist on the first FLIR pod and got ready to remove it. I had done this job many times before. The difference this time was we had to use our shop cart to move the FLIR pods, instead of the required piece of GSE gear.

Once we had disconnected the pod's cannon plugs from the jet and removed the bolts that held the pod to the jet, my co-worker and I lowered the FLIR pod to the cart. I told my fellow Marine to move the pod to one side of the cart to make room for the second FLIR pod. We then disconnected the bomb hoist from the FLIR-beam adapter that was attached to the FLIR pod. As my co-worker searched for the correct blank-off panel, I moved the cart, not realizing it was unstable. While I watched, the FLIR pod rolled off the cart, fell toward the ground, and landed on the FLIR-beam adapter. The FLIR pod's bolts broke, leaving parts inside the FLIR pod itself.

Ordies who were working nearby came over and

helped us put the FLIR pod back on the cart; this time, it was centered. My co-worker and I gathered the rest of our tools, placed them on the cart, walked back to the shop, and reported what had happened.

Once in the shop, my fellow Marine told me he should have said something when we first put the FLIR pod on the cart, but he thought I knew what to do, so he decided not to say anything.

Since the incident, we have changed the way we move FLIR pods. We now use a skid platform and soft-belt adapter to hold the FLIR pod on the skid platform. We also must use a SATS weapon loader to move the FLIR pods to the aircraft.

I learned many valuable lessons in this incident. A CDI should have been present during the pod removal. The MIMs must be used on every job, no matter how many times you've done it. When you need a break, take it.

My co-worker learned the same lessons, and he also learned to speak out when something doesn't look right because it probably isn't. Everyone needs to assert themselves in these cases—regardless of rank or rate—to keep a situation like this from turning bad, to prevent people from getting hurt, or to avoid damaging equipment.

The VMFA-212 maintenance department is part of MAG-12, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, MarForPac.



This pod is strapped down and isn't going anywhere.



A FLIR pod gets raised and lowered, using a SATS loader.