PREVENTING AVIATION GROUND MISHAPS: KHAKI PRESENCE MATTERS

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With engaged khaki leadership you can help prevent ground mishaps.

Since the HSC-11 “Dragonslayers” established in June 2016, they have successfully executed Safe-To-Operate certification, Carrier Qualifications, Helicopter Advanced Readiness Program, Flight Deck Certification, Air Wing Fallon, Tailored Ships Training Availability (TSTA), Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX) and a Dynamic Force Employment deployment onboard USS HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN-75). How does a squadron go through all of these complex exercises with no break in operational tempo, log an astounding 5,800 flight hours in the MH-60S and earn the Carrier Air Wing One Golden Wrench Award during COMPTUEX, without having a ground mishap? Our answer has been through engaged khaki leadership walking the deckplates, asking questions, and ensuring there is procedural compliance no matter how routine the task.

“Since 2012, Class C (ground) aviation mishap rates have more than doubled – 9.86 mishaps per 100,000 flight hours in FY12, steadily increasing to conclude FY17 at 20.25,” said Vice Adm. DeWolfe Miller, III, head of all Naval Air Forces. One of the causal factors to this increase is the lack of experienced supervision at the deckplate level.

At HSC-11, when a maintainer is performing maintenance, we focus on making sure a khaki is present to ensure procedural compliance. This builds a relationship between the khaki leadership and the Sailors, which is vital to preventing ground mishaps. When asked about that relationship, AD1 Aaron Russell, Power Plants Leading Petty Officer, explained “When an
experienced Chief is involved and shows that he or she has the willingness to turn wrenches, that goes a long way with the comradery between the khakis and the work center.”

The Commanding Officer (CO) of HSC-11, Commander Matt “Wrecking Ball” Wellman, sets “Slayer Standard” from the top down and ensures his team is safe and ready to execute with precision. When you have engaged leaders, from the CO down to the newest chief petty officer, who truly care and are involved with each evolution in the command, you will have a positive, and safe working environment that prevents mishaps. The Sailors at HSC-11 value the input and presence from the division officers, chiefs, and pilots as they perform maintenance, but it takes more than simply walking around, to ensure procedures are followed. During HSC-11’s recent Enlisted Safety Council meeting, AD1 Damian Gomez, a Quality Assurance Representative with 14 years of experience in aviation maintenance, explained his views on khaki leadership.

“A proactive engaged khaki that has the experience and care factor for the task at hand, makes a difference in staying safe on the flight deck or hangar bay,” he said.

With HSC-11 executing several hundred flight hours a month, there are numerous maintenance actions taking place daily and there is a chief in the background overseeing it all-whether on the flight line ashore or on the flight deck at sea. Often, additional khaki leaders such as the quality assurance officer, maintenance material control officer, maintenance master chief petty officer, and division chiefs spot check progress and show their support and interest in the junior Sailors and their work. It is also important to have an experienced set of eyes assigned to observe the larger picture of an evolution. Those involved in complex maintenance tasks are sometimes so focused on their job that they may lose sight of potential hazards around them. They may also not consider the effect their work may have on others around them.

Encouraging junior officers to be out on the deckplates not only provides some oversight, but also demonstrates interest in maintenance evolutions, is important in building team comradery, and helps further develop the officers as future aircraft commanders. You can frequently find HSC-11’s more junior pilots in the hangar bay observing and learning what it takes to maintain the MH-60S.

“Going through the training syllabus, we memorize NATOPS diagrams to learn the different components of the aircraft, said LT Sean “Hobo” Carrigan. “After combing through the NATOPS for a year, I was eager to see and touch the components to increase my systems knowledge. Working with and observing the maintainers further increased my appreciation for the intricacies of the aircraft components and the knowledge required to maintain our aircraft. The maintenance professionals explained each procedure in great depth and displayed enthusiasm and pride with completing their job. Working together is the best method to build trust and appreciation between different squadron departments.”

With it known throughout the maintenance department that khaki leaders are engaged in maintenance evolutions, the maintainers ensure they utilize their publications, don proper Personal Protective Equipment, and use the correct tools for the job. When asked how he views the khaki leadership at HSC-11, his first rotary wing squadron, AMCS Anthoney
Johnscott, Aircraft Division Leading Chief Petty Officer, explained “Sailors are more prone not
to cut corners because of the khaki oversight. They are there to ask questions and point out the
potentially hazardous situations that the Sailors may not see in the heat of the moment while
conducting maintenance. Overall, khaki presence enhances a safe work environment.”

Do we at HSC-11 do it perfectly every time, all the time? No, but the culture of
khaki involvement and constant presence has paid dividends over the past few years of high op-
tempo workups and deployments. Creating a culture of safe maintenance practices takes
engaged deckplate leaders present at each evolution. They need to be effective communicators
who know how to create a dialogue with the maintainers who execute the maintenance. Asking
open ended questions and sharing knowledge, builds comradery with the Sailors and strengthens
safe maintenance practices in our command.

“If I know I’m never going to see a khaki it is easier to take a short cut,” said
AVCM Tom Jackson, HSC-11 MMCPO, who has 27 years of aviation maintenance experience.
“The goal is to keep them honest. I want to catch them doing it right.”

And doing it right, the first time, every time is our goal. Double one ... second to
none!
AEC Peter Corp, HSC-11’s Hangar Bay Chief, looks on to ensure there is clearance as AE2 Chase Eymer and AE3 Melanie Sawyer spread a blade on the Hangar Bay onboard USS HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN-75).
AVCM Tom Jackson, HSC-11 MMCPO and AMCS Chad Bauman, HSC-11 QAS looks on as the Airframes work center disassemble the rescue hoist as part of the Phase C inspection on aircraft 617 at night onboard USS HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN-75).
AMCS Anthoney Johnscott, HSC-11’s Aircraft Division LCPO, ensures that there is no perceived pressure to cut corners as AD1 Craig Gatlin reviews the PEMA while the Power Plants work center finalizes the rebuild of the Main Gear Box on aircraft 615 within 72 hours of deployment onboard USS HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN-75).
ATC Christopher Dale (Center), HSC-11’s Flight Deck Coordinator, ensures all Sailors are in place and safe before the “Break and Hold” call comes for aircraft 614 onboard USS HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN-75).