



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 25-14

### *Shipboard Ladder Mishaps VI*

*"Whatever you do, don't fall down. That would break my @\$%&\*& heart!"*

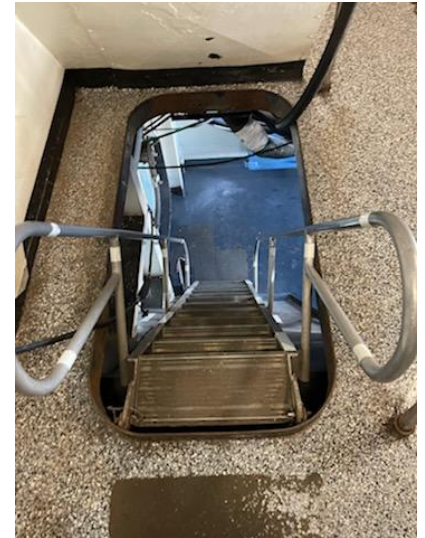
*—Gunny Hartman in Full Metal Jacket*

Welcome to this sixth edition of pain and life lessons from the school of shipboard ladders. If you've spent any time on a ship, chances are you've slipped or mis-stepped on a ladder. Sooner or later, we all do. It's a thin line that separates us who've slipped and held on from the unfortunate souls who made it into the mishap reports. "How many souls?" you ask...well we're glad you did.

Based on our unofficial divisional FY 2024 mishap count, we had more than **500** shipboard ladder falls resulting in at least 40 head injuries (concussions included), 27 lacerations, 20 fractures, 4 dislocated shoulders; 2 dislocated knees, multiple strains/sprains, countless abrasions, scrapes and contusions—not to mention an overwhelming number of lost workdays and light duty days. It's worth remembering that shipboard ladder mishaps lead to more lost workdays each year than any other type of afloat mishap. Last year's 500 reports were about 200 more than the yearly average (around 325). We can't say if the spike is because of better reporting or worse ladder navigation, but either way, it should be enough to warn you not to be one of the future mishaps.

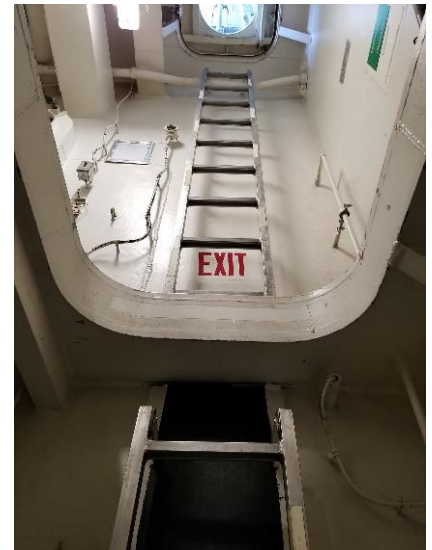
A little healthy fear is good for you, so—to help you avoid pain and to keep you mission ready—please read and remember these true stories as you do life on ladderwells.

- He Didn't Wear His Cape. The report states a Sailor "was rushing down to their berthing." In his rush, he missed a step, lost his footing and flew (*fell*) Superman-style the rest of the trip, landing face-first at the bottom. He managed to walk to medical who informed him that he broke his nose. —*The key word here was "rushing." If you're rushing up or down ladders, it's not going to end well. We say it all the time, "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast." Trying to go faster takes longer, especially after the trip to medical.*
- Ambushed. Sailor 1 (S1) was carrying a large piece of machinery (about 40 pounds) to a workspace. He began ascending a ladderwell. At the top of the ladder, a canvas wall blocked the view of other personnel approaching the ladder to descend. As S1 approached the top, another Sailor (S2) rounded the canvas wall quickly, and began to descend without noticing S1 ascending while lugging his load. He startled S1 and, at this point, it began to go downhill (*pun intended*). S1 missed a step and struck his right knee. To avoid losing his balance, he leaned forward to avoid dropping the gear. Leaning forward caused his right foot to slip on the ladder step and he struck his right knee again. S1, now injured, regained his balance and completed his ladder climb to deliver the machinery. He then reported to ship's medical. —*Good job by Sailor 1 hanging on tight. Sailor 2 (and all of us): Eyes front. Look where you're going.*
- The Drill Becomes an Emergency. A Sailor was on watch when man overboard was called. He was under the impression his chain would muster him as being on watch. At time +14 he found out they didn't. At +18, a Senior Chief directed him (*this may have involved yelling*) to head to the deckhouse to muster within two minutes or the ship would fail the drill. He ran up 2.7 ladderwells. Only 2.7 because when he tried to duck through the scuttle at the top of ladder #3, he hit his head and fell backwards down the ladder into the bulkhead. Dizzy and disoriented, he made his way back down to his workspace where the same Senior Chief called away a medical emergency. Head laceration. Staples. —*Whether it's a drill or real, walk, don't run. Otherwise, you make it worse. You don't usually see firefighters running to and from their trucks when the alarm goes off. They walk fast. Learn from them. Leaders, mentor your Sailors.*



## Shipboard Ladder Mishaps VI

- Meat Missile. Multiple Sailors were loading frozen food breakouts down a submarine's missile compartment escape trunk when...a 10-pound package of frozen meat escaped from the grip of someone above and fell like a ballistic missile, about 6-8 feet, landing dead on target on a Sailor's head. Another Sailor on the ladder noticed the missile-impact victim was bleeding from his head. They conveyed him to medical where he received one staple (owww) for the cut and was treated for a concussion. —*Stores movements down ladders are regular business -- and stuff regularly falls on people. If you're the one down below, keep your head up and eyes open (and you ought to have hard hat). If you're the one above, don't rush and make sure you have ahold of whatever it is you're moving. The folks at the bottom of the ladder will thank you for it.*
- I Do Not Like Green Eggs and Ham. One fine Navy morning, a Sailor was headed down a ladderwell like he did everyday. But today was different, because there were eggs on the ladderwell (yes, eggs), placed there during movement of food to the galley. He wasn't expecting eggs (*Who would?!*) and wasn't paying attention (*He should!*), so he stepped on the eggs, slipped, and fell down the ladder. He struck and injured his hand on the way down. —*If Dr. Seuss were with us, we're pretty sure he'd say this is the lesson: 'Whether you're on a sub or on a ship, watch where you're going so you don't slip.'*
- ♪ All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth. ♪ The report says a civilian employee (C1) was headed down a ladder "carrying adhesive glue," (*which make us ask, is there such a thing as "non-adhesive" glue? But we digress...*). As he handed the glue to another employee, C1's foot slipped off the ladder rung causing him to slam his chin on the ladder (*BAM!*), breaking two of his teeth. The dentist couldn't fix them, so he had to pull them (*more owww*). —*Admit it. If you saw a video of this on your phone, you'd laugh out loud! But you wouldn't be laughing if it happened to you. That had to hurt, A LOT! We have to use our hands to hand stuff to another person (it's in the word: "hand"), but when you do, please be careful. If you're going to let go with your hand, make sure your feet are stable. Or better yet, wait till you're off the ladder before handing off your cargo.*
- Keep Your Hands and Arms Inside the Ride at All Times. A Sailor was tasked to ensure all hatches in the space were closed. He climbed up a vertical ladder to close a watertight scuttle and placed his left hand on the knife edge (*they call it that for a reason*). As he tried to close the heavy scuttle with his right hand, he accidentally dropped it on his left! In great pain, he used his right hand and shoulder to raise the scuttle to free his left hand. His crushed left hand was the only one holding on; so, as soon as his left hand was free, he fell to the deck below. Another Sailor, who was just a spectator until now, went to get help. Sailor #1 had "multiple open metacarpal fractures of his hand" (*the bones were sticking out; eeesh!*). At the hospital he had surgery to realign the bone pieces and install metal plates and screws. Two days SIQ and two months of limited duty. —*Closing a scuttle on top of a ladder is difficult and dangerous. Keep your head and hands clear of where the hatch will fall.*



### Key Takeaways

Remember these simple real-life lessons and takeaways:

1. **This isn't soccer. Use your hands.** If there are handrails on the ladder, use them. They're there for more than decoration. It'll save you from a list of injuries and it'll save your ship or squadron a lot of lost workdays.
2. **Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.** Rushing may feel faster, but falling or smashing your head will slow you down way more than walking. Just like you learned in school fire drills, "Walk, don't run."
2. **Eyes Front, people.** Look where you're going, not where you've been. It will save you and others.

**We say this every time, but it's not a tagline; it's really what we want you to do:**

**"Let's be careful out there."**