



Fighting the War on Terror One Rock at a Time

<http://www.379aew.afcent.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123124091>

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11/14/2008 - **Southwest Asia** -- An enemy surrounds us with a high potential to endanger our efforts in the Global War on Terror if they make it onto the flightline of this Southwest Asian air base.

One man leads the war effort against this small, but dangerous foe - rocks and debris.

"If you've ever been on the flightline, you probably thought very little about the effects of that small rock on a jet engine," said Tech. Sgt. Mark Weisbrod, 379th Air Expeditionary Wing Foreign Object Debris prevention monitor. "But being a jet engine troop, I think, 'O' my if that rock makes it to that jet engine there goes a million dollars, there is the possibility of people dying or of aircraft not being able to perform their mission."

Every day the FOD boss patrols the base's extensive taxiways and aircraft parking areas looking for anything that could be ingested into an engine.

"When I'm out there I'm focused directly on what's laying on the ground," he said. "I take my little bag out and set it on the passenger's seat. By the time I get back, the bottom of it is full of stones right off the taxiways where the aircraft are moving. Aside from the enemy they are one of the most dangerous things out there."

Airfield management and wing safety also patrol the area and flightline units perform FOD walks looking for these small dangers. Sweeper trucks also fight a never-ending battle against an innumerable foe.

"It's the weirdest thing," said the FOD boss, deployed from Dover Air Force Base, Del. "Sometimes I swear I'd been through a place 10 minutes ago when I return to find a rock sitting in the middle of a taxiway."

Although stones are a primary enemy, anything small that enters the flightline could become a potential danger. The base's FOD fighters have recently found nuts and bolts, a vehicle magnet, an equipment lanyard and even an electronic cargo pallet tracker.

"This was found right up here on papa ramp in between the main taxiway and the runway where they take off," said Sergeant Weisbrod holding up a paper clip. "When you're driving along you don't know what it is. It catches your eye and you stop. I opened the door and looked at it and said, 'How did that get out here?'"

Flightline units each have a FOD program to look for small items like this. Sergeant Weisbrod oversees these programs for the 379 AEW vice commander who heads the wing's FOD prevention efforts.

"This is one of the most important prevention programs we have for airfield operations," said Col. Paul Guemmer, the 379 AEW vice commander. "We have a lot



A rock sits on the flightline near an aircraft on a base at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia. Rocks and other foreign object debris cause millions of dollars in aircraft damage each year. To deal with the problem the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing has an active FOD prevention program. (Courtesy photo)



Tech. Sgt. Mark Weisbrod, foreign object damage prevention program monitor assigned to the 379th Expeditionary Maintenance Group, removes a rock from his tire using a FOD picker as part of his rollover foreign object debris check before driving onto the flight line Nov. 10, 2008, at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia. FOD accounts for millions of dollars in damages to aircraft every year. Sergeant Weisbrod, a native of Verona, N.Y., is deployed from Dover Air Force Base, Del. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Darnell T. Cannady)

of aircraft that are very susceptible to FOD; many with engines close to the ground or that have high-intake velocities. It's critical to keep the taxiways clean."

To keep the flightline clean the wing uses everything in its arsenal. In addition to the patrols, FOD walks and the sweeper trucks, wing units account for the whereabouts of all their tools to avoid one of them accidentally being left on the flightline or on equipment that could be moved there.

"You leave a tool in the wrong place and airplanes could fall out of the sky," said the FOD boss.

Another weapon is mandatory FOD checks at each flightline entry control point.

"Every entry control point is a perfect opportunity to alleviate FOD or become a FOD problem," said Sergeant Weisbrod. "It depends on whether people are doing their job stopping and pulling out rocks and making sure they get them off the road. If people are doing their job, they are your best friend. If they are not, then people are driving in and dropping rocks. Now you have a big pool of rocks that are just waiting to get tracked onto the taxiways."

Constant awareness is the most important weapon in this fight against FOD. Although the many different units and airframes here make this challenging, the base has regular meetings to keep awareness high, analyze trends and find ways to mitigate hazards.

"They could put 10 of the best people in my chair and that won't accomplish what a little bit of awareness from everyone out there will," said the FOD boss. "Because that is what it takes. It takes everyone to stop and pick up that rock. I can't be everywhere. I'm one guy. It's all about awareness and getting people to buy into the program. If I can do that, that's where I'm successful."

The FOD boss said the program is successful when planes aren't getting damaged by FOD. The wing has had one preventable incident that cost more than \$20,000 in the last 12 months.

The FOD boss is located in the same building with 379th Expeditionary Maintenance Group quality assurance inspectors, which provides him expertise in investigating FOD damage incidents. Investigations are important because they can point out weaknesses in the wing's war on FOD.

"The execution of the air tasking order really starts with the FOD prevention program," said Colonel Guemmer. "About one-third of the Air Force Central Command ATOs are being flown out of here so it's particularly important we do everything we can to get missions off safely. The FOD program is a critical component in (the Global War on Terror)."



Members of the 34th Aircraft Maintenance Unit conduct a foreign object debris walk at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia. A FOD walk is used to remove FOD from the flight line and the 34th AMU conducts two FOD walks each day. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Darnell T. Cannady)



View of the front of a B-1 engine that ingested pieces of a main landing gear tire on takeoff at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia. Repairs will cost between \$260,000 and \$1 million. Incidents like these highlight the need for foreign object debris prevention efforts. (Courtesy photo)