

by Lt. Brian Smith

It's a beautiful day, and you have completed the painful brief, done the walk-around, started engines, and finally received your clearance from the ATC guys. Pushing up the throttles, you notice an off-speed on the starboard side and hear something "different." Well, so much for a perfect chance to get airborne.

This common series of events happened to me after we completed Eager Archer, a joint exercise with the Kuwaiti Air Force. The result, however, wasn't ordinary.

It had been a tough week for our single Hawkeye—we'd been plagued with several mechanical and electrical malfunctions that kept us grounded. Our frustration with mechanical failures was at a peak. The maintainers also were frustrated, because the problems were never the same; something new always seemed to be popping up.

We were supposed to launch and get back to USS *Carl Vinson* for an 1100 overhead. We wanted to put this frustrating detachment behind us. But after realizing we weren't going flying, we cancelled our clearance and pulled off the runway to check for

switchology problems. After a few checks, we realized that the mighty Hawkeye was suffering yet another mechanical problem. We discussed our options with the crew, then the CAPC decided to taxi back to the line with the engine running and let our mechs have a look at the problem. Seeing the off-speed might help them to make a quicker fix and save them some troubleshooting.

At first, the Hawkeye taxied as advertised. We then realized that we had a significant horse-

To Secure or That Is the

Photo modification by Allan Amen

power split between engines, causing the pilot to be heavy on the brakes. However, he felt that control was adequate and wanted to proceed to the line so our troubleshooters could start to look at the sick beast.

The pilot started having a hard time slowing to make the turn-off and decided that he needed to secure the engine. At the same time, from the backend, came a panicked announcement: “The starboard wheel is on fire!” We quickly secured

the starboard engine, called the firefighters, secured the left engine, and egressed the aircraft. Both mainmount brakes were on fire, and a Hawkeye on fire with 12,000 pounds of JP-5 on board is not a pretty sight.

Our CICO and the firefighting crew extinguished the fires. There we were with a problem on the starboard engine and two crispy main mounts. We started out trying to save time and help the maintainers; we ended up costing us two more days and tripling the workload.

I can sum up this lesson in two words: “Secure it.” Decisions may be easier when you’re faced with an actual emergency. Consider the fact that troubleshooting a problem can create an emergency. When faced with an unknown, the best course of action is to listen to the little voice in your head. We could have easily taxied back to the line with one motor. We also could have cleared the runway, shut down and been towed, which would have taken only a little more time. Our frustration with our aircraft’s mechanical woes throughout the week did not help the situation either. Our motives were admirable, but in hindsight, our decision process could have been better. 🇺🇸

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Not Secure, The Question



“The starboard wheel is on fire!”