

By Ltjg. Jeremy Vellon

Barely a month into my first sea tour, I was becoming a salty dog. I was confident the FRS training in San Diego had prepared me for every situation that could arise while flying the mighty H-46. I only had to master my ground job to become a well-rounded aviator.

Even that job was coming along well. I was assigned to the operations department as schedules officer. The learning curve in ops was exponential because, within a week, I was writing flight schedules, tracking and maintaining pilot and aircrew flight qualifications, and seeing the big picture. I felt invincible.

One morning I was scheduled for a good deal: a practice-vertrep hop, I reviewed the procedures and emergencies, and completed the weight-and-balance form. I thought my preflight planning was complete.

The HAC said he'd like to meet at the aircraft at brief time, which allowed a spare half-hour to reflect on everything I had accomplished that day. I hung out in the ops office and worked on our squadron's Battle "E" submission. I even wrote a "trip ticket," full of information for a crew going on a ship hop that evening.

I stopped to ask myself if I had missed anything. I knew it was times like these when people get caught off guard and end up having to write a *Mech* or *Approach* article. I was sure I had done all the necessary planning. The only thing left was the preflight inspection, and I promised myself to do that as carefully as I had done the other planning.

I checked out my survival vest, helmet and nav bag, then walked to meet the crew at the bird. After climbing onto the stubwing and then the aft pylon, I went up to the aft rotor head to survey

Stuck on a Shock Absorber





all that was mine. The crisp November-morning air filled my lungs as I continued my preflight.

I reached across the rotor head to check the security of the spider assembly that is on the far rotor blade. The assembly protects the lead-lag shock absorber. A quick shake showed no excess play. As I let go to stand upright again, I felt a pinprick in my left middle finger. My hand now was stuck to the shock absorber. I must have voiced my surprise at this turn of events in a four-letter exclamation because my HAC, who was on the port stubwing, asked me what was up.

I was gloveless at the time and found an inch-long piece of excess, braided, safety wire that secured the oil-level sight glass on the shock absorber was stuck in my finger. The wire protruded out my fingertip. After a second of disbelief, I asked my crew chief for a wire cutter, and my HAC sent a second crewman inside for a first-aid kit. As he tells it, he ran into maintenance control asking for the kit. The chief wanted to know why I couldn't get it myself. The crewman replied, "He's attached to the aircraft!"

After a couple of careful tries, I cut the wire at its root by the sight glass, then marveled at the sight of braided wire sticking out my fingertip in two places. With a little help, I made it to solid ground without compounding the injury and placed gauze around the puncture. I showed the spectacle around the squadron for a few minutes before the duty driver took me to medical. There, I experienced the most unpleasant feeling of the day: a doctor yanking the wire out of my fingertip.

I learned several lessons that day, starting with the importance of wearing gloves for preflight. I also learned that no amount of preparation or competence can protect you from a moment of carelessness. When you fail to notice one thing slightly out of order, it can hurt you. I didn't miss any work-days or damage any equipment, but I was lucky. On the other hand, I missed out on that good-deal hop and showed I'm not invincible. 

Ltjg. Vellon flies with HC-6.

Mishap-Free Milestones

VFA-147

11 years (52,000 hours)

VQ-1

15 years (93,000 hours)

VAW-112

29 years (61,000 hours)

VFA-146

17 years (71,900 hours)

VAQ-132

32 years (53,000 hours)

VPU-2

20 years (50,000 hours)

VS-33

7 years (25,000 hours)

HSL-51

11 years (70,000 hours)

VP-16

37 years (246,000 hours)

VAW-117

25 years (53,250 hours)

VP-26

40 years (289,600 hours)

VS-31

32 years (126,808 hours)

VAQ-130

21 years (36,000 hours)
