

Tail Rotor Meets Hangar Door

By Type Acft

FA-18	13
S-3	5
H-53	5
EA-6	5
P-3	5
C-130	4
C-2	2
T-34	2
F-14	2
H-60	2
AV-8	1
C-12	1
DC-9	1
E-2	1

By Equipment

Tow tractor	22
Truck or Vehicle	7
Forklift	7
GSE (not tractor)	5
Sweeper	2
Crash crane	2
Disengaged Tractor	1
P-25	1
Spotting dolly	1
Manlift	1

By AD3 Benjamin Nelson

HSL-46 Det 6 recently returned to Mayport for a scheduled 10-day intermediate-maintenance availability (IMAV) before continuing with the second half of a CDOPS and UNITAS deployment. During this period, the detachment planned to change an engine, but we ended up changing an engine and a tail-rotor paddle after the tail rotor met its fate with the top of a hangar door.

The move started like any other one; however, this time, we were moving the aircraft to an adjacent and unfamiliar hangar. The plane captain identified that spot as a potential hazard, taking time to point out the differences between it and our own hangar. The PC then briefed the crew on where we were going and made sure everyone knew what to do. I was assigned as the safety observer.

The team took their assigned places, and we started the move across the flight line, toward the transient hangar. We towed the aircraft to the C-12 flight line, parked it, and disconnected the tow tractor. This step was necessary to move the tractor so we could push the bird into the hangar.

It appeared we had another uneventful aircraft move; something we've done a thousand times. The PC and I saw that the hangar's roll-up door was not up all the way, but we concluded the helo had sufficient clearance. This first mistake was critical because

all we had to do was push the door button to open it fully. When the aircraft was halfway into the hangar, the move crew focused on the forward main-rotor blades because equipment was parked on the left-hand side of the hangar and mechanical-hoist chains were hanging from the overhead on the right side.

We almost were inside the hangar when I heard a pop. At first, I thought it was the tow bar because the tractor was on a slight incline. That's when the PC and I looked up at the tail rotor, and our mouths dropped. I blew the whistle to stop the move, and everyone froze. We quickly backed up the aircraft and examined the tail. One of the tail-rotor blades had a two-and-a-half-inch tear.

This mistake reminded us that even the most routine tasks can go bad when situational awareness is lost. It just was a momentary slip but cost the squadron thousands of dollars. We received a harsh reminder that the move brief is the time and place to identify all the hazards associated with moving an aircraft. A lax attitude during a routine job is one thing that can ruin the day and damage an aircraft. 

Petty Officer Nelson is a member of HSL-46 Det 6.



The blade that caused it doesn't look bad from a distance.



A closer look shows the damage.