

During COMPTUEX, our squadron sent a detachment to USS *Thorn*, a Spruance-class destroyer, to participate in an international ASW exercise and further efforts in HS- and HSL-integrated operations. As a new pilot with only six months in an operational squadron, I was excited to complete RAST qualifications and to experience the life of our SH-60B brethren firsthand. Filling out the detach-

ment were the squadron's senior JO HAC, an AW1 with over 2,000 hours in the H-60, a junior AW, and a small group of maintenance personnel.

After several days of learning about life aboard the destroyer and daily ULT flights, it was time for the primary ASW exercise. We launched that night from *Thorn*, ahead of the HSL aircraft, and, after a quick

check of our equipment, went to our assigned position to search for the "enemy" submarine. During one of our automatic approaches, our tactical systems operator (TSO), the senior aircrewman, noticed a muffled roaring sound coming from over his head in the aircraft cabin as we pulled into a hover. We departed and discussed what could have caused the sound. In forward flight, the sound subsided. We couldn't feel any restrictions in the flight controls or find any other indications of a problem. The HAC asked if everyone was comfortable flying approaches to determine the origin of the sound. While in a hover, both crewmen described the sound as, "A train running on tracks, with the roar in the background." By holding his ICS microphone up to the cabin overhead, our TSO allowed us to hear the noise he had been telling us about. We soon agreed the unidentified condition warranted returning to the ship for an inspection by our maintenance personnel before continuing into the next exercise.

After landing, a troubleshooter climbed the aircraft to assess our status and came back down with a grim look on his face. Part of the No. 2 engine firewall had separated and had been filing down the rotating swashplate next to where the pitch-change rods attach. The wear was well beyond limits. That ended our flying that night, and we weren't able to continue the exercise around which our detachment had been planned. We were disappointed, but, at the same time, were relieved since we hadn't known the reason for that ominous sound.

Our maintainers, assisted by the HSL maintainers, proved the viability of major aircraft maintenance in a small hangar. Replacing the swashplate required removing all four main-rotor blades and the main-rotor head, something our HSL friends hadn't attempted before.

Listen to each other's concerns and draw upon the experience of everyone in the aircraft.

We decided to end a flight early with a condition that didn't fall into a convenient NATOPS description of an emergency. It's unclear how much more wear a longer flight would have caused to our swashplate. With the rate of erosion caused by the filing of the firewall, our decision not to fly the second leg of our mission might have prevented a loss of control and a disaster. 🇺🇸

Lt. Smiley flies with the HS-3 Tritidents.



Photo by Matthew J. Thomas
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