



# We've **Blown**

By Lt. Albert Geis

**F**leet-replacement-squadron (FRS) requirements always seem to conflict with good ORM analysis by evolving into a “get the ‘X’ no matter what it takes” attitude. I was getting ready to fly my first night formation in the EA-6B FRS, and our event would be the perfect reflection of that attitude. The day was a standard winter day for Whidbey Island: light to moderate rain, with overcast layers up to about FL200. The temperature was no more than 10 to 15 degrees above freezing.

A German exchange officer would be in the ECMO 1 position on my right side. The brief was standard. We took off from Whidbey as singles and planned to meet in the Okanogan military operating area (MOA). Because of the layers of clouds and snowfall, the lead selected a new join-up altitude for the rendezvous. We managed to press through that portion of the flight. However, on the first breakup and rendezvous, we had significant trouble finding lead as we went in and out of clouds. The poor visibility between clouds was because of the storms. We managed to fumble our way through the join-up, and, once aboard, we followed lead as we looked for workable airspace. After five

minutes of flying in and out of clouds, lead called it quits. Because of the reported poor weather at Whidbey Island, we broke up the section as singles and headed back to the field.

On the return, we checked ATIS; the weather was worse than when we had taken off. The ceiling had dropped to 400 feet, and enough rain had fallen to cause standing water on the runway. There were no reports of braking action. We set up for an ACLS approach to runway 25. ECMO 1 and I discussed not aero-braking and not applying the brakes right after touchdown to mitigate the possibility of hydroplaning on the standing water. As a new pilot, I was a little nervous about the approach and landing, given the conditions and how the flight had gone so far.

After tip-over and while flying down the chute, I tried to squeeze the black out of the stick. I relaxed a little bit when we broke out with a little under a mile to go at 400 feet. Even after we broke out, the hard rain obscured the runway. ECMO 1 was Johnny-on-the-spot with the windshield air that nicely cleared the windshield. The groove went smoothly, and, on touchdown, I let the nose fall to the runway.



# Ze Tires

The landing went smoothly until the jet decelerated through 110 knots—then the fun started. The first indication of trouble was a yawing motion to the left as we continued to track straight down the runway. I slowly added in right rudder but with no effect. Then, in a violent motion, the starboard mainmount blew, and the jet’s nose swung to the right. I now looked directly at the large—and getting larger—yellow ball that marked the right side of the arresting gear.

Startled, I jammed on full left rudder and nose-wheel steering. It was either a failure of the sidewall strength, the pressure I put on the left brake, or a combination of the two that subsequently blew the port mainmount. This blowout turned out to be a good thing because it swung the jet’s nose back to the left, away from the arresting-gear marker. We now were pointed off the runway to the left side.

About the same time as the left tire blew, my ECMO 1 called out to tower, “We’ve blown ze tires! We’ve blown ze tires!”

The jet’s nose continued oscillating as we slid down the runway on two blown mainmounts. While passing midfield, ECMO 1 had the presence of mind to pull the

arresting hook. We crossed the long-field gear aimed about 25 degrees to the left. We slid into a long-field arrestment, finally stopping 50 feet left of centerline.

We shut down in the wires and got out of the jet to talk with the crash crew. As we inspected the jet and surrounding area, we noted several things. Both mainmounts completely were blown, and the wheel was ground down to a flat base on the bottom of each tire. An inspection of the cross-deck pendant revealed a large gash in the wire, with frayed metal cable. The gash went about 20 percent of the way through the cable and was caused by the port mainmount going over the cable: metal on metal.

The most important lesson learned was our failure to discuss a short-field arrestment. With the bad weather, darkness, and our inexperience in the type aircraft, we definitely should have considered an arrested landing. Just having standing water on the runway automatically should have had us consider an arrestment. While we kept the jet on the prepared surface, with only minimal damage to the tires, this incident easily could have escalated into a Class-A mishap. 🇺🇸

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