

By AO1(AW) Michael Dixon, Jr.

During a detachment to Japan, one of our line guys—Airman Niedermayer—was assigned as a hot-brake checker. He and several maintainers were located at the taxiway end of 05L. An F-15 hot-brake team also was present. The first recovery was uneventful, and the Navy and Air Force teams got along well. They even compared procedures. It wouldn't be long before a Sailor would help to save an Air Force asset.

After exchanging notes, a crew chief allowed the Sailor to brake check an F-15. Airman Niedermayer stood next to the crew chief, as the rest of the Air Force team chocked the aircraft. The crew chief then left to pin the aircraft, and the Sailor walked to the port side of the jet to check the brakes with a tech sergeant. As the Air Force counterpart inspected the brakes, Airman Niedermayer noticed a steady stream of smoke coming from the left engine. He also saw a continuous stream of hydraulic fluid coming from one of the engine-bay panels and found fuel leaking from the aft portion of the engine.

He quickly notified the tech sergeant, who then opened a panel to check the hydraulic leak. The AMAD had caught fire, and flames were starting to spread. As the tech sergeant ran for his crew chief, Airman Niedermayer quickly gave the “lazy eight” fire signal to the pilot. He then ran for a nearby Halon bottle and handed it to the crew chief, who began to discharge the contents onto the fire. Airman Niedermayer then ran for a second bottle.

When the airman returned, the pilot still was in the jet and didn't get out until Airman Niedermayer finally

caught his attention and frantically signaled for him to get out. The pilot shut down the engines, unstrapped his harness, opened the canopy, and climbed out of his cockpit. Airman Niedermayer assisted the pilot, guiding him to a spot away from the aircraft. Seven minutes later, the fire crews arrived on the scene.

Afterward, an Air Force source filled in the rest of the story. The Eagle pilot had been waiting for his hot-brake check, when an AMAD warning light in the cockpit lit up. This light indicated the fire had started in the engine bay—the AMAD literally had disintegrated. Airman Niedermayer's identification of the smoke and hydraulic leak and his quick actions

Navy Man Helps Save An Eagle



Photograph by Sgt. Aaron D. Allmon II photo modified

prevented a major mishap.

We learned always to be ready for the unexpected and never fall into a routine. Everyone involved in this incident thought it would be just another day at the office, but events quickly changed, and a normal task turned into a few minutes of sheer excitement. 

Petty Officer Dixon is the safety petty officer at VFA-195.