

My Kingdom for an Assist MAF



Navy photo by AN Maebel Tinoko

By AME2(AW) Scott Cutler

Two weeks into our first underway period of the year, things were going well for our AME shop. I only wish that we had paid more attention to all the things that could have gone wrong on a simple seat removal for inspection.

After the morning maintenance meeting, I was tasked to be the collateral duty QAR (CDQAR) and to oversee the removal of an FA-18F Super Hornet's two ejection seats for 728-day inspections. Maintenance action forms (MAFs) were placed in work, and checkout procedure for the tools, individual material readiness list (IMRL), and maintenance requirement card (MRC) deck was followed before we went to the work.

Our team of three arrived at the jet in the hangar bay, and the other two AMEs began to set up the area around the aircraft while I climbed on top of the aircraft to get in the cockpit.

One of the steps to remove the aft ejection seat requires access to the upper catapult-mounting bolt. While the seat removal can be accomplished without first removing the starboard cockpit-video-recording-system (CVRS) box, it is easier and often less painful (literally) to remove it. The potential for pain exists as a maintainer holds the socket wrench on the upper catapult-mounting bolt. It sometimes slips off the bolt head and

subsequently slams the maintainer's hand into the starboard CVRS. In order to prevent injury to my hand, I decided to remove the recorder and place it aft of the canopy actuator, and on top of the number one fuel cell access panel located behind the aft cockpit seat.

Two days before this maintenance evolution, our LPO told us after the morning maintenance meeting that we (as a shop) were not to touch any aircraft components that did not belong to us. The CVRS box belongs to the AT shop. Before beginning the seat removal, I thought to myself, "This job is so easy. What harm could it do to remove the CVRS box myself?" I rationalized this problem and reassured myself that I could remove it in far less time than it would take to call the AT shop for help. Little did I know I would soon learn the hard way what harm would occur.

After removing both ejection seats and placing them in the seat cage, I inventoried the IMRL no longer needed for the job and returned it to the shop. Before walking away from the aircraft, I told one of the other AMEs, a collateral duty inspector (CDI), to sweep the cockpit area for tools and hardware. I arrived in the shop, put the IMRL away, grabbed some water and sat down for a few minutes. Just as I was getting comfortable the AME CDI whom I had asked to sweep the cockpit



The canopy rail and areas around the canopy need to be free of objects. This damage shows why.

walked into my shop and relayed the sentence every maintainer fears, “We’ve got a problem.” After wracking my brain to think about what could possibly be wrong, and since we had already taken the seats out of the jet and carefully placed them in the seat cage, I asked, “What is it?”

The CDI replied, “You know that starboard recorder box?” Instantly, I felt like someone had punched me in the stomach, because I knew exactly what had happened.

I rushed to the hangar bay, climbed on top of the aircraft and looked at the spot where I had placed the recorder. The No. 1 fuel-cell access panel had a gash in it the same length of the CVRS box, and the support rib running across it was bent out of shape. The CDI had overlooked the recorder I placed on the access panel behind the aft seat and had closed the canopy on it. When the canopy was closed, it pinched the CVRS box between the canopy glass and the No. 1 fuel-cell access panel.

Through this mishap I learned some valuable lessons that hopefully will prevent recurrence of this or similar incidents. First, if an aircraft component does not belong to your work center, **do not touch it**—no matter how

small the job seems. I should have cut an assist MAF and had the appropriate work center remove its piece of gear. Effective communication is key, and I should have told the other AMEs about the recorder. Had I told them, someone might have reminded me to reinstall it after the seat removal was done.

We can’t afford to lose focus or attention to detail in this high-risk business. AMEs always preach to other squadron personnel to thoroughly check the canopy area before closing it to make sure nothing is in its path. On this day, my lapse of judgment allowed a fellow AME to close the canopy on an object that I had placed in the canopy’s path. As the CDQAR, I should have known that doing maintenance by the book meant not skipping any steps and seeking assistance from other work centers, when needed.

Because of my seemingly minor decision to remove the CVRS box, it cost the Navy \$2,000 to replace a fuel-cell panel. In addition to the large expense, this incident had a deeper cost to our squadron, my shop, and me. Our professional pride was hurt, and you can’t put a price tag on that. ✖

Petty Officer Cutler works in the AME shop at VFA-102.