

Rushed Tool Check

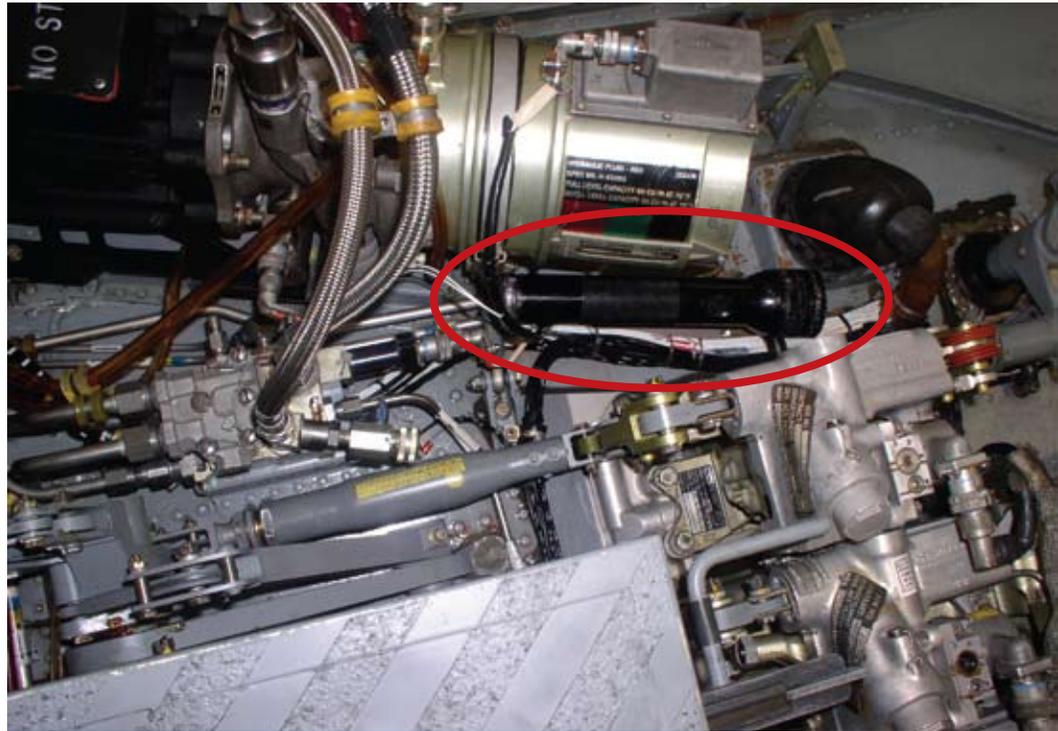
By Lt. Dave Bigay

Tool-control procedures have proven effective and are in place for a reason. However, the program's effectiveness is contingent on whether the procedures are followed to the letter, every time, and without fail. Follow them, and pilots need not worry. Neglect the procedures, even for a moment, and the results have the potential to be disastrous.

While performing a daily inspection on the flight line at night, on one of the squadron's SH-60B aircraft, a plane captain found a discrepancy that required repair before an aircraft could launch on its functional check flight (FCF) the next morning. After checking out tools from the tool room, the detachment's lead AD and two junior ADs did the required maintenance. When sufficient flashlights were not available in the on-hand toolboxes, an additional flashlight was brought from a toolbox in the hangar. When the team finished the job, they hastily packed up their tools, did a tool inventory on the toolboxes at the aircraft, and went their separate ways.

The following morning, more detachment personnel did a tool inventory before breaking for lunch and discovered that a flashlight was missing from one of the toolboxes. After they unsuccessfully searched for the missing flashlight, QA was notified of the missing tool, and all aircraft were recalled.

The flashlight was found in the hydraulics bay of the FCF aircraft that had been repaired the previous night. The hydraulics bay on the H-60 is located directly over the cockpit and cabin of the helicopter and provides the transfer of all of the pilot's control inputs to the rotor hub. This compartment contains dozens of servos, rods and linkages, where a tool could jam, render the flight controls useless, and result in an aircraft crash. Although



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the det thought all the tools had been accounted for, it later was discovered that a flashlight from another toolbox somehow had made its way into the missing flashlight's toolbox. A simple error had led to nearly disastrous results.

If you ask most maintainers, post-maintenance FCFs are like a trip to the dentist: The sooner it's over, the better. While the motivation behind this attitude is purely a desire to get the aircraft back to work supporting the mission as soon as possible, it's easy to see where this attitude can be a recipe for disaster.

This is a good reminder for supervisors that maintenance never should be rushed. Whether it's in the quality of the maintenance being done, tool control, or the paperwork to back it all up, the chance something was missed increases exponentially when we rush a job, or in this case, during post-maintenance cleanup. ✦

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