

Get-to-the-Ship-Itis?

Photo by Matthew Thomas
Photo-composite by Allan Amen

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One month into deployment, my S-3 crew was assigned our first good deal. We were operating in the Adriatic Sea, and I was to fly a passenger to a Greek Air Force Base.

The flight across Greece into Larissa went as planned. We kicked out the passenger and got our 15 minutes of feet-dry. We were on the runway for takeoff, and everything was going too smoothly. The return clearance, filed from the ship, was ready to go, our takeoff clearance was given, and the language barrier with the local controllers was bridged.

The fun began on the departure roll when the No. 1 engine chose to overtemp at 50 knots. The moderate-speed takeoff was aborted, using the full 13,000 feet of runway. This was to prevent overheating the brakes on a 95-degree day. On the taxi back, the crew discussed our options. None of us wanted to blow the first good deal of cruise, so we felt pressure to get back to the ship. The overtemp was still within NATOPS limits. If the motor overtemped again, we could pull back the throttle slightly, as long as we still could achieve minimum fan speed for takeoff. However, we failed to consider two things. First, even though we used the entire runway on our moderate-speed abort, the 95-degree, no-wind day elevated the temperature of our brakes and tires more than we expected. Second, our aborted takeoff awakened nearly 100 birds on this quiet Greek air base.

The Greeks were accommodating for our second takeoff attempt. The throttles were advanced smoothly, and the aircraft was accelerating nicely. Unfortunately, we were not getting the minimum fan speed from the No. 1 motor, but the

aircraft was accelerating, and we had a 13,000-foot runway that gave us plenty of fudge factor. While I was in this “Should I stay or should I go” thought process, our airspeed was passing through 100 knots. Those pesky birds were not happy to hear the screaming Hoover disturbing them from their siesta again. One brave soul tried to put an end to the noise and valiantly flew down the intake of my No. 1 engine. Upon seeing the kamikaze, I aborted again, using the entire remaining 9,500 feet of runway. This time we planned on going back to the line, shutting down, inspecting the motor, and talking about our options.

As we passed the fire truck, which was manned and parked at the end of the field, we thought the Greeks sure were nice to follow us back to the line. What we did not know was the tower controller was probably thumbing through his English dictionary trying to find the word for smoke. As we approached the ramp, the aircraft started to pull to the left. We also required more than the normal amount of power to taxi. We knew we would be spending the night for a flat tire. As we exited the aircraft, the starboard tire went flat, too.

The S-3 wheels have an overheat valve, which releases the pressure in the tire at high temperatures. This prevents the tire from exploding. Two aborts, even a slow-speed abort, on a hot day can make these valves release tire pressure.

Make sure you allow time for cooling. Use the ground crew to check brake temperatures after any abort. We were fortunate that the tire failed on the taxiway, instead of the runway. We were able to experience a little Greek culture that evening, instead of giving blood samples and interviews. 🦅

LCdr. Mulvania flies with VS-30.