

First Order of Business:

"Two New Tires... Please"

By Ltjg. Paul Oyler

Just one month after arriving at my first fleet squadron, I flew an offensive-counter-air (OCA) hop as Dash 4 of a mixed division with our sister squadron. The weather had been terrible all week-end, but it was sunny and warm on that Monday morning in August. I was fresh out of the FRS and thrilled to be working on my strike-fighter weapons and tactics (SFWT) level II qual.

The brief was thorough; I would be flying on my XO's wing. The XO took time after the brief to make sure I was comfortable with the plan and had answered all my questions. The man-up, start-up, launch, and mission went off without a hitch. I was exhilarated as we headed home. I had managed to maintain sight and mutual support for the entire flight and had effectively employed simulated weapons against multiple targets—just as I had been briefed. I felt great.

The division recovered to NAS Oceana in a right

echelon, parade formation for a four-second break. I broke, dirtied-up, went through my landing checklist, and flew the ball to touchdown on runway 5L. I landed about 1,500 feet behind Dash 3. After touchdown, I extended the speed brake and applied gradual aft stick to help decelerate. Just as I passed the short-field arresting gear at about 100 knots, I applied the brakes. The jet did not respond; the brakes felt mushy. I pushed the pedals all the way to the floor, even stood on them, and still nothing happened. I released the pressure and pumped the brakes a second and third time. The pedals again went all the way to the floor, and the jet did not slow down.

The distance between Dash 3 and me rapidly was closing, though he had moved to the right half of the runway. I decided to try the emergency brakes. I released the brakes; grabbed the yellow, emergency-brake handle palm-up; and pulled it out to the detent.



I then reapplied the brakes. No sooner had I applied pressure when I heard a bang and felt the jet swerve hard left. I realized I had blown the port mainmount, so I applied more pressure to the right pedal to counter the significant swerve induced by the tire failure. Another bang and sudden deceleration told me I just had blown the starboard mainmount.

Even though I had blown both tires, I breathed a sigh of relief, knowing the jet now was controllable, decelerating rapidly, and tracking straight down the runway again, about 20 feet left of centerline.

I told tower I had experienced a brake and tire failure and would need a tow as I taxied the jet at less than walking speed off the runway at the 3-board. Tower quickly responded. They had seen the tires fail and were sending a tow and a cleanup crew to remove the remains of my tires from the runway.

As I rode in the base-ops truck to the hangar, I had a sinking feeling. I was sure I had made a mistake or overlooked something critical during preflight. Maybe, I had not executed the appropriate NATOPS procedures? I must have done something wrong. As soon as I got to the hangar, I grabbed my pocket checklist and went through the procedures. I had experienced what I perceived to be a brake failure. I reviewed the procedures and confirmed that I, indeed,

had executed them appropriately.

In the ready room, the discussion already was well underway when I finally arrived. Everyone agreed you never should troubleshoot a brake problem on deck. In my situation, the safest course of action would have been to advance the throttles and go flying again; I immediately conceded the point. Fuel had not been an issue, neither had airspeed or runway remaining. My inhibition toward passing another aircraft on the runway was unwarranted, considering there was plenty of room to pass Dash 3 on the left, even had I reached him before getting airborne.

Maintenance inspection and troubleshooting revealed no failures in the anti-skid system. The lack of braking action I had experienced was attributed to my flight being the first after a weekend of very heavy rain, which had soaked the brake pads.

The “Brake Failure” emergency is something normally associated with flight-deck operations. This experience proves, however, that a brake failure at high speed, which does not involve a loss of directional control, warrants the same initial immediate action seen elsewhere in NATOPS, “If detected after touchdown and flyaway airspeed available-Execute Emergency Takeoff Procedure.” Next time, I will do just that. 🏆

Ltjg. Oyler flies with VFA-105.



Photo by Matthew J. Thomas. Modified.