

PON-6 Confusion

By Lt. Darrin Mullins

It was inevitable. This problem was going to happen to someone else at some other time. The culprit was change, and the human element failed—as it normally does when faced with something new.

The problem was a change in oil-servicing requirements for the SH-60B engine-and-transmission system throughout the command. The Seahawk can use engine oil in the main, intermediate, and tail gearbox-transmission systems. This flexibility allows detachments to use only one servicing unit for both engine-and-transmissions systems while deployed.

The command changed this requirement. DOD-L-85734 transmission fluid would be the only fluid used in the transmission systems. MIL-L-23699 engine oil only would be allowed in engine servicing; it no longer could be used in servicing transmission systems.

The command maintenance department drained and flushed the transmission systems on all squadron helicopters during the next phase maintenance and documented everything in the aircraft-discrepancy books. Detachments now would have to maintain two PON-6 servicing units, one filled with DOD-L-85734 transmission fluid and one filled with MIL-L-23699 engine oil. This simple step would ensure servicing requirements were met.

However, this small change was the catalyst for a near-catastrophic sequence of events. Our detachment had procured a properly drained and flushed PON-6 that was painted in accordance with the command instructions. A PON-6 with MIL-L-23699 was painted white, and one filled with DOD-L-85734 was painted “GSE yellow” to stand out and to eliminate any confusion. Everyone thought this solution was great and would help identify the two different servicing units for two different fluids.

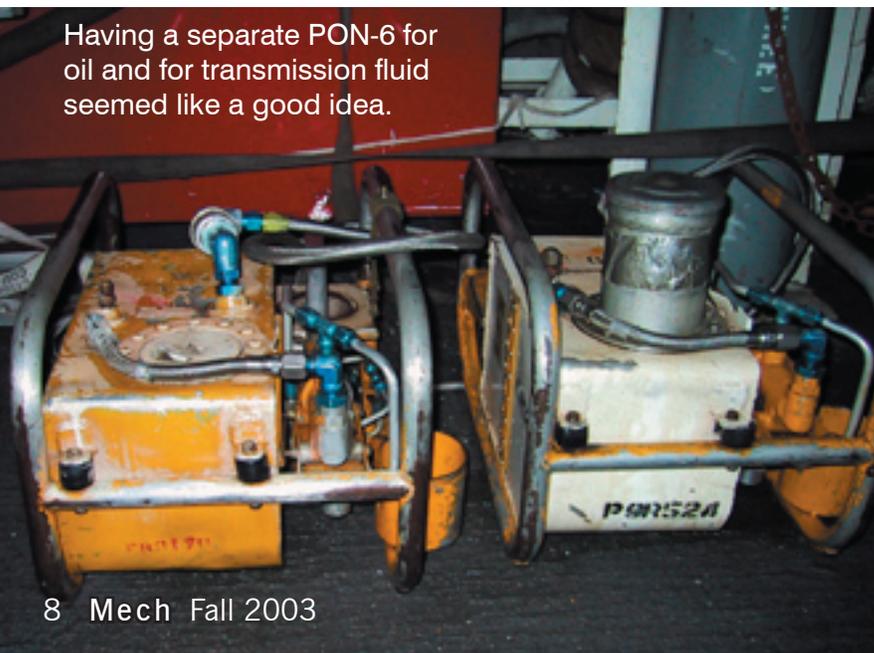
The problem occurred at sea when the ship had set darkened ship. The yellow-light configuration in the hangar during darkened ship led to an aircraft engine being serviced with DOD-L-85734 transmission fluid! It was an honest mistake, caused by a lack of attention to detail and a color scheme that did not take into account different shipboard lighting schemes.

Our junior night-check mech needed to service the No. 1 engine. He went to the PON-6 storage area and grabbed the one that looked white under the yellow hangar lighting. Unfortunately, he grabbed the wrong one. He serviced an engine with transmission fluid and downed our aircraft, which had been tasked to fly a mission six hours later.

We woke up our senior AD, and he supervised the drain and flush and did training on engine servicing with the proper PON-6. I am sure this servicing error never will happen again on my detachment, but we came close to a possible mishap. Change isn't bad, but it may have serious consequences in different environments. We need to be prepared to adjust. A simple two-inch tape strip placed horizontally along the PON-6 labeled “NOT FOR ENGINE SERVICING” would have helped identify the proper PON-6 servicing unit. We need to hedge our bets to make sure we are giving our maintainers the greatest chance for success. Our safety chain caught this error—this time—and prevented a possible catastrophic event. 

Lt. Mullins flies with HSL-51.

Having a separate PON-6 for oil and for transmission fluid seemed like a good idea.



Canopy Capers

By Lt. Justin Hendrickson

The day started innocently enough. The carrier steamed under a small patch of gray clouds, and a light sprinkle fell to the deck. The flight-deck chief yelled for his plane captains to close the canopies as the rain started to come down hard. The plane captains, taking great pride in the condition of their jets, scrambled to their Hornets to close the canopies. For one unlucky airframer, the rush to keep the cockpit dry almost cost her life.

The airframer was working around the starboard side of the cockpit area with her body halfway in the cockpit. The canopy suddenly came down on her lower back, pinning and subjecting her to excruciating pain. A plane captain heard her screams and quickly raised the canopy off the airframer before any permanent damage was done. She was lucky to escape the incident with only a sore back and a few days of light duty.

This isn't the first time this has happened. Fast forward to the next cruise. This time, the scene of the accident was the hangar bay. In an effort to do

a little housekeeping, another maintainer got "the squeeze" put on him. The victim was an AME who just had finished installing a kick panel. The canopy came down on him, and, this time, the person lowering the canopy did not hear the AME's screams.

When a canopy is closed without a quick look at the cockpit, a serious injury can occur.

Maintainers often reach into the cockpit.



This action causes them to stretch over the canopy rail.



The maintainer did notice the canopy would not close all the way, so he raised it a bit and again tried to lower it—much to the chagrin of the AME getting crushed on the other side of the cockpit. The AME's shouts finally were heard, and he was freed from the grip of the canopy. He was shaken but not injured.

People are not the only items endangered. By not taking time to check the canopy railing, you can damage the ejection-seat SEAWARS Koch fittings and the canopies. This careless attitude wastes maintenance time and money.

Rushing the job is the common theme in these two near-disasters. Closing a canopy is a simple job, but steps still must be followed. The simple act of clearing both canopy rails of personnel and equipment before moving the switch can prevent a grave injury. Maintainers can take personal and material safety into their own hands: Disconnect the cannon plug for canopy power or pull the battery circuit breaker before doing maintenance around the cockpit area.

Our squadron was lucky in these two cases. Maintainers and aircrew alike have been injured seriously from canopy mishaps. Don't let it happen to you!

Lt. Hendrickson is the quality assurance officer and flies with VFA-15.