

a 40-unit difference in angle-of-attack. I began taking out the transmitter and could feel my throat tightening up because I already knew what I would find.

The transmitter has two guide pins, which go through the lip of the case and stick out on the back and front. The front pins are for the index ring to sit on; the backside pins are for the transmitter to be seated into the aircraft properly. These pins were not sticking out on the back—they were completely flush. By this point, my heart was pounding rapidly, and I was red with anger at myself.

I tapped down the pins and properly seated the transmitter, then stopped to call a CDI. He came up with the book and did a proper look-over as I installed the transmitter. It now was installed and CDI'ed properly.

I was upset with myself and knew I was in for it when I told maintenance control. I didn't give them a bull story but, instead, explained I had improperly inspected the installation of the transmitter the last two times. In fact, we had created the discrepancy from the start and had forced the pilots to land on the ship with no angle-of-attack input—twice.

I spent a lot of time contemplating how I had failed to do my job right, and, with input from my shop, we determined it came down to tunnel vision. I had allowed nothing else to be as important as the gripe I was obsessing over. When I CDI'ed a job, I wasn't thinking about what I was looking at; I still was rolling schematics through my mind for another gripe. Even though I found the mistake I had made, my head wasn't in the game. To top it off, as 502 prepared to fly and aircrew were given a big assurance from the AEs the AOA gripe would not come back, the aircraft went down for AOA again. We lost that sortie before an AE really had a chance to hop up there to discover the plug wasn't completely on the indicator.

The disappointment of my poor performance, and the question of how much confidence the aircrew may have lost in me have been punishment enough to keep me focused and alert. I'll never repeat the problem. I'm an excellent maintainer and a diligent CDI, so my pride was deeply affected by my carelessness. I was embarrassed. I now try to step back and take a breather when my head isn't in the game. Training, better communication, and watching out for one another when we're not focusing is key. And, don't forget the books. 

High Is Low

By AM1(AW) John Elmore, VFA-151

It was a Thursday just before a three-day weekend. I was short-handed because of the leave period, with only a few junior personnel. At the morning meeting, the maintenance chief told me he wanted 306 ready for Monday's flight schedule. The aircraft had a momentary unsafe tone for the landing gear upon landing, and, based on previous gripes of unsafe-gear indications, our squadron was troubleshooting these occurrences as unsafe gear. In each case, we jacked up the jet, serviced the landing gear, and did a thorough visual inspection of all landing-gear components.

I printed out the publications and handed them to my third class. I had complete confidence in his doing the FA-18C strut-servicing because he had done this task dozens of times with assistance.

After catching up on my paperwork, I went to the aircraft to check on the third class. He asked if I would operate the NAN cart because he didn't have a license. After double-checking the pubs for the correct pressures, I pressurized the lines with nitrogen while he serviced the shock struts. Because of the position of the NAN cart, I only could see his back. Then it was time to perform the operational test of the landing gear. Late afternoon was upon us, and the entire maintenance department was waiting for us to finish before we could all secure.

With pub in hand, we supplied the jet with hydraulic and electrical power and began the operational check. I told the person in the cockpit to select gear up. The hydraulic jenny groaned as it began forcing 3,000 psi to the actuators. Suddenly, we heard something snap. A thousand thoughts raced through my mind in a split second. What could have gone wrong? One phrase seemed to stand out in my mind. From the time I first had started working on Hornets, I always had heard, "High is low, and low is high."

On FA-18C landing gear, the top servicing port must be filled with low-pressure nitrogen, and the bottom servicing port must be filled with high pressure. After I checked the gauge on the struts, I knew where we had gone wrong. My AM3 had serviced them backward, which resulted in the shrink link breaking

W, and Low Is High

in two like a toothpick. By servicing the top port with high pressure and the bottom port with low pressure, the landing gear didn't shrink down to fit in the wheel wells. In a split second, the aircraft went from almost ready to fly to hard down.

I asked the AM3 about the servicing, and he simply said he had forgotten the procedure. I explained to him

that was why I had given him the publication and that, if he was unsure, all he had to do was ask.

This story is similar to many I have read in *Mech*, especially all the distractions we had had that day: just coming back from leave, being short-handed, a long weekend approaching, and having the whole maintenance department waiting for us.

Several things could have prevented this mishap, starting with me, the supervisor/CDI. I could have queried the third class on the procedure he just had completed, verifying he had serviced both struts according to WP. I could have moved the NAN cart so I would have been able to watch the work he was doing. I could have ensured we had enough time to do the maintenance on this jet and monitor the progress throughout the day, making sure we weren't swinging the gear late in the afternoon right before a three-day weekend.

Following procedures and supervising are critical in our business as a means of checks and balances. Whether it's a frequent task or one that only is done periodically, we always double-check our work before operational testing. We missed a very important step this time, and the gunshot sound of those links failing never will leave my mind. I was glad the gear had failed on test and check. What if the plane had flown? We could have lost the aircraft and a pilot. Follow the MIMs, supervise your people, communicate critical steps, and train to prevent mistakes, instead of learning from them. ✨



Photo by Matthew J. Thomas