

Crash During a

By AM3 Kawin Gilliam

I was finishing my second detachment to Bahrain as part of HSC-2, Det 2, the “World Famous Desert Ducks,” who, at the time, still were flying the tried-and-true UH-3H Sea King. It was three days before I was scheduled to leave, and I would be lying if I said I wasn’t thinking about going home. The day, however, would end with my wishing I had concentrated on work!

The morning started off like countless others: a 0645 muster at the NSA Bahrain gate for the ride out to the Bahrain International Airport where we operate. I had

plenty of sleep that night and even dreamed about being back in the States. The workload started off normally enough, with an ATAF (all tools accounted for), workload reports, maintenance meeting, etc. The detachment was planning a two-bird launch up to the North Arabian Gulf to drop off passengers, mail and cargo to U.S. and coalition ships operating in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

As normal, we went out to the line to prep the birds, get them ready to fly, and check servicing before



Mundane Task



the pilots walked for their preflight. After the aircraft were ready, we moved one bird from our assigned parking spot to the JBD (jet blast deflector) spot. It was around 0850 when the pilots arrived to preflight and get ready for the launch.

As the pilots arrived, the cargo and mail personnel arrived, too, with the boxes of cookies, bags of mail, and CASREP parts for the ships. As usual, the maintainers helped the aircrew load the aircraft to expedite the launch. Standard operating procedure on the flight line, in the blistering heat of Bahrain, is to ensure that our CamelBaks are full of water at all times. With the balmy 42-degree-Centigrade temperature and the heat index hovering around 125 degrees Fahrenheit, our CamelBaks quickly were going empty.

When the first bird was loaded, we were running low on water. The pilots finished their preflight, strapped in, and launched without a problem. After the first launch, half the maintainers walked into the shop to refill their CamelBaks with some cool, refreshing H₂O. I stayed out to help load the second bird. When most of the maintainers made it back to finish up, I took it upon myself to jump on a tow tractor and drive back to the shop to refill my CamelBak. Once I was topped off with water, I drove the tow tractor back to the line to help with the launch.

To get where the bird was parked, I had to drive around the perimeter of the flight line on a paved access road. This trip can take a couple of minutes, so I hurried. I could tell the bird really was close to pushing out because I could see the No. 1 engine was online, and

people were standing around waiting to disconnect and move the NC-10.

Everyone was waiting on the tow tractor and me. I got around the back of the JBD and was looking to get to the bird as fast as I could, but I had to make one final, no fuss, no muss, left turn to cross the access road and drive out onto the line. I was focused on the bird and the need to move the NC-10. As a result, I failed to look straight ahead to see if anybody was coming down the opposite side of the road. As I turned left, a little Toyota pickup appeared right in my face. We hit almost head-on. I wasn't hurt, and the tow tractor wasn't damaged, except for a couple of small scratches on the nose.

The local Bahrain Airport Services employee in the Toyota wasn't hurt either, but the truck didn't fare so well. The damage was significant, and it couldn't be moved without help of a tow truck. Needless to say, the launch went late, and I was speechless. The detachment had to borrow a tow tractor, and I began what turned out to be a very long day.

After explaining everything to my chief, the maintenance officer, the police, and my OinC, I had the opportunity to explain what had happened one more time to the airport manager himself. In short, my focus and concentration on launching the bird, mixed with some end-of-deployment get-home-itis, caused me to lose situational awareness. This otherwise simple maneuver totally went awry. While no one was hurt, it easily could have ended differently. Trucks and pride can be fixed; I'm simply glad a person didn't need to be repaired. ✨

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