

# ONE SHOT, ONE KILL

By Sgt. V.S. Cruz, USMC, HMLA-367

On a cool night in Iraq, at roughly 2300, I was told that one of our AH-1W Super Cobras had returned from a flight with multiple weapons gripes. These gripes included inoperative rear-seat helmet sight system (HSS) and no fixed forward guns. The pilots cleared us to troubleshoot but told us to hurry because the bird still was on strip-alert status. After briefing my personnel on the task at hand, a MAF was initiated. My team then began to prep all the necessary troubleshooting equipment.

As the QASO (quality assurance safety observer), I cleared the M197 gun, but, unfortunately, the M89 feeder was still on, with rounds left inside (not in accordance with NAVAIR 01-H1AAC-75-1A1 checklist). I then disconnected all electrical connections, including the feeder and fire-volts cables, so I safely could pull the trigger and dry fire the gun, which would make sure it rotated like it was supposed to. I confirmed that the barrels rotated.

Then I prepped the aircraft for a fire-voltage check. This check puts the gun into the fixed forward position, with the fire-volts cable connected and all necessary circuit breakers engaged. As a precaution, the gun-motor

circuit breaker is disengaged, prohibiting the barrels from spinning. This check is used to make sure the firing contact in the gun is receiving voltage. In this case, the voltage checked 4.0.

The next step was to use a second feeder to do a hang check. I began a secondary fire-volts check with the spare feeder electrically connected but not physically installed on the gun. I then ordered a Marine in the pilot seat to turn on power. While I was waiting to make sure the gun would not rotate when the trigger was pulled, I noticed a long time delay in the gun dropping down into the fixed position. I then asked the Marine to make sure that the cockpit switches were in the correct positions.

While doing so, he inadvertently engaged the gun-motor circuit breaker, which is located beside the drive-motor circuit breaker. After verifying the switches, he pulled the trigger, causing the gun to rotate. Unfortunately, the electric solenoid on the feeder was physically stuck in the engaged position, allowing a round (20mm HEI) to inadvertently feed into the chamber and fire into a Hesco barrier, which was about 25 feet in front of the aircraft.

Immediately after the discharge, the power was shut down. Maintenance Control, Quality Assurance and EOD were notified of the incident. EOD personnel arrived shortly thereafter to safely remove the remnants of the 20-mm round from the barrier. We were all grateful no personnel were injured.

Two things would have prevented this mishap. Rounds should have been downloaded completely, and the circuit breaker never should have been engaged. We had sacrificed safety for urgency. 

Cpl. M.S. McCain contributed to this article.

