

Thorns on the Way

By ADAN Brandon Ramirez

Well, it finally happened...I was involved in a near-mishap. I had been working in Hawaii for my squadron's line shack for about nine months.

I just had returned to the shop after running some errands when maintenance control called and informed us that one of our birds needed to be moved to the compass rose. My supervisor told me to check out a hand-held radio from flight planning. After a successful pre-operational check, I returned to maintenance control. The move sheet already was completed, and we were ready to move the bird.

An AE3 needed to do his 90-day currency, so he was designated as the move director. Another airman was the tow driver. I was the brake rider; and two AD3s

and an a third airman were the tail and wing walkers. We had our team and now were ready to brief.

In maintenance control, a PR1 was running the show, and he wanted to make sure everyone knew and understood their responsibilities, especially the director. It was then we learned that, because we were crossing the active runway and it was getting dark, we would need to use the anti-collision lights. That fact meant we would have to use the aircraft's auxiliary power unit (APU).

During the brief, the PR1 said he wanted us to have an APU operator on board the aircraft to run it. He also asked each of us if we understood our roles and where we were going. We responded in the affirmative and headed out to the flight line.



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to the Rose

Taking up our positions, we began to prep the aircraft and turned up the APU. An AT2 volunteered to run the APU, so he was in the flight station with me. We pulled out of the spot and headed to the taxiway. Upon reaching it, we jettisoned the wing and tail walkers.

That's the point where we encountered our first thorn: The radio died. The AT2, AE3 and I then met in the flight station to discuss our communication dilemma. We determined that the aircraft radio would suffice as an alternative means of communication with the tower. But what can be said about communication with the director and tow driver in the tractor? We did some brainstorming and decided we could use the wheel-well lights to communicate among the tow team.

As AE3 departed the flight station and boarded the tow tractor, we requested taxi clearance and proceeded down the taxiway toward the runway. When we got to the hold-short line, the tower called us and ordered, "hold short of runway four." The AT2 then flipped the wheel well lights on and off rapidly, illuminating the entire rear of the tractor. From my position in the flight station, all I could see was the driver and director looking at each other, exchanging confused looks—our next thorn, and yep, you guessed it, we didn't stop moving. In fact, we continued across the runway, flashing the lights the whole way.

When we got to the other side, the tower called us and requested our supervisor's name and a number. They wanted to talk with him. What followed was a resounding "OH #\$\$%@" (Insert explicative of your choice.) When we got to the compass rose the duty driver was waiting for us, and he said, "PR1 wants you all in maintenance control in five minutes." All I could think was, "I'm having a bad day!"

You're probably asking yourself, "How did this happen?" First, our director had the knowledge to direct a plane move but lacked the requisite knowledge of the communication involved when traversing the runways and taxiways of the airfield.

Second, a lack of communication exacerbated the situation. If we only had had a backup for the hand-held radio or if we only had thought to use the ICS cord to communicate with the tow tractor, we would have been in a much better position. Third, the brief was lacking as well. There should have been a more thorough brief of the communication involved in crossing the runway and taxiways. Even if everyone said they understood the comms, more specific questions about the phraseology of crossing an active runway would have been more appropriate.

The final lesson was that we were complacent, and it almost cost us our aircraft. It also could have cost an aircraft trying to land and the people on the runway.

I don't know about the rest of the crew, but I learned a lot that night. ✚

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Navy photo by PH3 Shannon Smith