



By Cdr. Dave Bean

**T**he H-60 series of helos is equipped with a large, electronics-compartment door on the nose of the aircraft, which makes servicing avionics and related gear a snap. The engineers at Sikorsky clearly had ease of maintenance in mind when they designed the door: I'm sure they didn't intend on using it as a device for simulating instrument conditions in flight. Yet, that's exactly where one HS crew found itself one day.

That day offered a break from fixed-wing flight operations, which gave the command a chance to focus its maintenance efforts without the distractions of a regular flight schedule. Following an initial, functional check flight that ended with a low-autorotation Nr reading, the aircraft recovered aboard the CVN. Power-plant troubleshooters made the necessary control adjustments, but as they worked, the showers that are characteristic of the mid-Pacific began to sweep the flight deck. Maintenance control contacted the avionics shop and told them to

place a vinyl cover over the AFCS computer to keep it dry. The young airman who was sent to the deck to do the job talked with the copilot regarding the need for the cover. Although the copilot had asked for the AFCS protection, the pilot said the aircraft would be flying again, and turned away the AEAN.

A short time later the crew was airborne and started another maintenance auto. Following their entry into the maneuver, the electronics-compartment door rotated violently up and aft, crashing into the windshield wipers and the OAT gauge located in the center windscreen. Although the two glass screens in front of each pilot were cracked badly, they remained intact. The plexiglass in the center screen, however, broke into pieces, which then became missiles with sharp edges, hurtling aft through the cabin.

The crew recovered from the shock of this event and tried to find its way back to the CVN.



Because the door remained fixed against the windscreen, the crew effectively was operating IMC. The crewman in back was able to give verbal directions to the pilots by leaning out the cabin door on the starboard side of the aircraft. The crew still had difficulty finding the ship as they navigated around the isolated showers. As fortune would have it, the ship had established EMCON, and it took some strong words of encouragement for them to answer on the approach frequency. Before receiving radar vectors to the ship, the effects of the rain soon hit the AFCS computer, which failed en route because it had gotten wet. Even though the crew had no flight-control stabilization and no forward visibility, they brought this tale to a happy end by recovering aboard the carrier just a few minutes later.

What's worth learning from this misadventure? Spend time checking the security of your

aircraft, especially following maintenance. Did the AEAN leave the door open? This crew focused only on the area where the power-plants troubleshooters had been working. There wasn't a standard requirement to touch the door latches to ensure security. A visual check of the aircraft was all that was done. Given the position of the latches, they might have appeared to be closed.

The value of wearing helmet visors down was reaffirmed. The plastic shrapnel went whistling through the aircraft cabin and grazed the cheekbone of a crewman working the VATS gear in the after station. He escaped with only a superficial laceration. The plastic just as easily could have hit a less forgiving target only a few centimeters away had the petty officer not been wearing his PPE. The two pilots—neither of who had his visor down—suffered from corneal windburn during their return flight to the CVN. 🦅

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