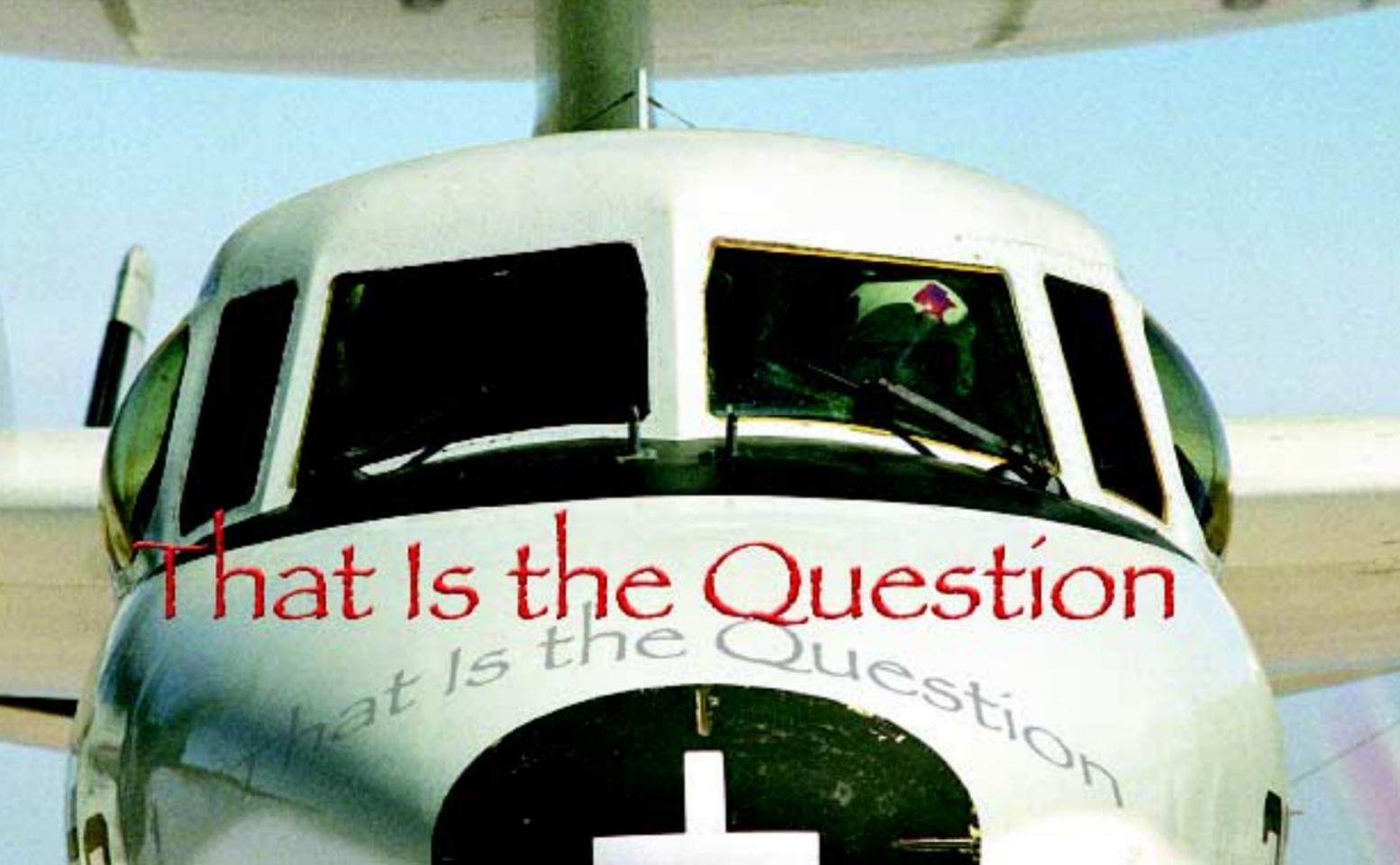


To Preflight or Not to Preflight,



By LCdr. Tony Pham

As an experienced aviator, I know the value of a good preflight. As a former safety officer, I know there is nothing we do on a daily basis that is so important we should disregard safety procedures. However, in the blink of an eye one Easter morning, I forgot all of that.

We were manning-up for another counternarcotics mission while on detachment in Puerto Rico. Other than having to fly on Easter Sunday, the day began like any other day. We got the mission brief, gave our crew brief, and started to preflight our aircraft. Except for the nugget naval-flight officer, who joined the squadron right after cruise, recently returned veterans from Operation Enduring freedom comprised the crew. Everyone knew their duties, and we proceeded with our tasks like the professional aviators we were.

When we tried to bring one of the engines on-line, it would not turn over. We waited the required time and tried to restart. The propellers tried to turn, but the mighty Hummer wouldn't start, so we shut down and got our troubleshooters into the cockpit. After a few minutes of discussion, we went to our spare aircraft.

We quickly collected our trash and headed over to "Nuts," our "Old Reliable." In our self-induced rush to get the spare started, we hurried our preflights. As the mission commander, I normally would preflight the inside and outside of the aircraft. On this morning, however, I just preflighted the interior and trusted the pilots to do their normal exterior preflights.

We were about to run our prestart checklist when a troubleshooter noticed a gash in the fuselage behind the cockpit. He immediately told the launch coordinator, and we suspended our start

sequence. The gash, which barely had missed the cables and wires inside, was in the pressure bulkhead and would have prevented aircraft pressurization during climb-out. Further damage to the fuselage could have occurred in flight.

We all felt a false sense of urgency that morning—a leftover condition from our last deployment, when we had to do everything possible and allowable to make our launch time.

Otherwise, we left the hostile skies unattended and our flights unshepherded.

We have to keep everything we do in proper perspective, and we never can shortcut established safety procedures. Although we have to trust each other in this business, we also must verify, which is why the NATOPS checklists are written that way. 

LCdr. Pham is the maintenance officer in VAW-117.

When Things Go Bump in the Day and Night

By AE3 Theodore Burbo and AE3 Joshua Deitrick

During a routine preflight walk-around of Banger 600, a large hole was found forward of the main-entrance hatch. Maintenance had no clue how it had gotten there. We traced the evidence and identified how and why this mishap had occurred.

On the previous day, an aviation electrician had repaired a broken wire on the port engine-wire harness. Before he went to work, the mechs removed the engine side panel. They incorrectly placed the large panel beside the aircraft's port mainmount, instead of inside the aircraft, where it would have been safe from other technicians and outside elements.

As the electrician was repairing the broken wire, another aircraft was doing a routine maintenance turn aft of Banger 600. To complicate the situation, a helicopter was taxiing in the same area. The wind created by this combination of turning aircraft and the taxiing helicopter launched the panel into the air. After a short flight, it hit the electrician in the back, but he was able to maintain his balance on the ladder.

Although surprised and slightly shaken, the electrician was unhurt. He could have been injured seriously had the panel hit him harder or had it knocked him off the ladder. A hole was punched in the panel during its brief journey.

The potential for accidents is constant when working with aircraft. Always secure intake



covers or engine panels when you remove them. Our electrician was lucky he wasn't hurt. Keep your head on a swivel when you're around aircraft—no matter what your location. Safety always is the main concern, whether on the boat, on a detachment, or at home. This time, the aircraft was the only thing with a hole in it; next time, it could be you. 

Petty Officers Burbo and Deitrick work in the avionics shop in VAW-117.