

THINGS AREN'T ALWAYS AS THEY APPEAR

What started out as a routine engine installation on an FA-18C would end up anything but routine.

By AO1(AW) Joe Cool



I am a QAR and just had finished the cavity inspection. The engine was ready to be installed. The

power-plants maintenance crew positioned the engine stand and raised the engine. The stand was moved forward to mate the engine with the air seal at the rear of the intake. The forward thrust mounts were torqued to the required specifications. The engine finally was positioned to align the aft mounts with the connecting link.

And that's where things headed south.

The maintenance technician failed to align the connecting link with the engine mounts. The expandable quick-release pin was installed, and, although it appeared that the securing cam was locked and the latch spring was in place, it wasn't.

You can guess what happened next. The stand was lowered slightly, and the table was moved aft. When this adjustment was made, the aft section of the engine fell about four inches onto the stand's aft support. We couldn't believe what had happened. The crew quickly lifted the aft section, repositioned the stand to secure the engine, and lowered it to inspect for damage. We also checked the aircraft.

No one was injured, and the aircraft, engines and stand were not damaged. However, we could have caused a mishap. The possibilities are frightening. In this case, the pin appeared to be inserted and secured,

but a closer look would have shown it wasn't. When looking straight down the panel, it is difficult to check that the pin is aligned or fully inserted. The fabled 18-inch rule really would have been useful. One purpose of a QA inspection is to ensure the pin is in place and that the latch spring conforms to the locking cam. To make sure this step happens, I suggest inspectors use a flashlight and inspection mirror to align the aft engine mounts and connecting link. Those steps go above and beyond what is called for but, in this case, would have prevented an unfortunate incident.

I was new to the Hornet, but that fact does not excuse me from being one of many people who failed to catch this error. Even though this step was vital, we missed what now was an obvious item. I learned that, even when a job seems to be going right and each step seems to follow the book, things may not always be as they appear.

I also learned we need to go beyond what appears obvious in every task. With the effort to reduce mishaps, it is essential that maintainers go the extra mile. If we don't, the same old mistakes will get repeated again and again. 

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