

LOOK MA— NO HANDS

By LCdr. Greg Kashouty

Did you ever have one of those days where nothing goes right? Have you ever heard the safety quote, “All you have to do is break a link in the mishap chain of events and everything will be OK”? Yes on the former and no on the latter—for me.

be up in an hour (of course, maintenance hours don’t coincide with what a pilot considers to be an hour). Being the conscientious copilot that I am, and hoping for the best, an hour later I went to maintenance and asked if the plane was up and ready for preflight.

Link No. 1. A new maintenance-control petty officer was at the desk. Being a hard charger, he responded, “Sure, go for it, sir. Maintenance is about done, and the plane captain is doing his preflight.”

Link No. 2. I went to the plane, and the only person around was a plane captain. I assumed he had finished his preflight or was close to completing it (Yeah, I know what you get when you assume anything). I found out later that he was waiting for maintenance to finish, so he could begin his preflight. As I continued my outside preflight of the aircraft, a maintainer entered and turned on the hydraulics, and I didn’t notice.

Link No. 3. One of the maintainers working on the plane had moved the “Do not move flight controls” placard from the cockpit controls and placed it facedown on the glare shield where no one could see it (especially me).

Link No. 4. As I quickly did my cockpit-preflight checks, I heard a little voice say, “Slow

I never get quotes right, and, like everyone else, I get bored listening to the safety officer flap his gums with all those platitudes. Well, it was one of those days. I came in to brief, only to find the C-9B wasn’t working—something about the spoilers or something—and takeoff may be delayed. However, the aircraft was supposed to



down, something is not right, we are not in Kansas anymore.”

Link No. 5. As I started the prestart checklist, I didn't notice the spoiler handle was in the armed position, and the hydraulics were on. This is not the normal position during preflight—this should have clued me in to something but didn't. I moved the throttles to check the takeoff-warning horn. On the C-9B, moving the throttles to the mid position does a few more things, not the least of which is to automatically retract the spoilers.

I watched in horror, like a slow-motion scene in a movie, as the spoiler handle retracted. It hit me why things seemed wrong: maintenance still was in progress. I quickly jumped up and ran to the door. The maintainer was sitting on top of the wing with his hands above his head and a look of fear on his face. He had come to the plane after I went inside to do the cockpit checks. As fate would have it, his hands had been under the extended spoiler panel that he was working on. He had taken his hands out moments earlier to get a tool.

How could this have been prevented? For starters, better communication between the air-

frames division, maintenance control and me. When I walked in to maintenance control visibly upset, I learned from the maintenance-control chief that if I had asked him, he would have told me the plane was not ready. Well, thanks chief, that's a big relief—better late than never. The plane captain sitting in the plane could have said the plane still was being worked on. He saw me preflighting and should have questioned me when he knew the plane was not ready.

Someone should have left that nice helpful placard with the big red letters, saying, “Don't move flight controls,” in its proper place—on the flight controls. The very gung-ho petty officer who ran in and turned on the hydraulics could have mentioned something. Maybe the guys who came back out to the plane could have come aboard to see if some gung-ho copilot was in there messing with stuff. Finally, I could have paid attention to my surroundings, noticed something did not seem right, asked questions and told someone of my intentions. I could have listened to that little voice that was screaming at me. This incident could have ended in disaster, involving lots of people, tons of paperwork, and the loss of a person's hands. 🦋

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