

While heading toward the Arabian Gulf in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom on board USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68), I received a call from maintenance control to do a low-power turn on one of my squadron's FA-18Cs in the hangar bay. This turn was my first one in the hangar on this deployment. I expected it to go as

What Flap Locks?

smoothly as any other task. I would be proven wrong!

After reporting to maintenance control and reviewing the ADB for any pertinent gripes, I headed to the hangar bay. I made sure all the required safety devices were in place, that observers were available, and did my pre-turn, walk-around inspection. When finished with that task, I prepared the aircraft for the low-power turn. I was

convinced every issue had been covered, that the other maintainers were familiar with their responsibilities and procedures, and that we were ready.

Once in the cockpit, I completed my pre-turn checks, established ICS communications with another technician, and confirmed everything was set for the turn. I started the APU, after receiving permission from hangar-deck control, and I got a thumbs-up from my ground technician. I initiated the start sequence on the starboard engine and waited for electrical and hydraulic power to come up.

As soon as the engine came online, one of my safety observers noticed the flap locks still were installed, and the flaps were trying to drive down. They were locked in the up position. He yelled at me to shut down, and I immediately complied. I had missed the flap locks during my pre-turnaround inspection, and the safety observers hadn't noticed them before engine start. I'm sure they thought I had taken care of everything, and, during the turn, their jobs were as safety observers only.

A lot went wrong because I didn't follow the aircraft turn procedures outlined in the pubs. One specific caution that I noticed after the incident read, "To prevent damage to flaps, make sure the flap locks are not installed." I was unaware that aircraft in a hangar bay were required to have flap locks installed. It is done to protect people transiting the hangar bay and moving

around aircraft. My inexperience in hangar-bay turns and lack of an ORM review downed the aircraft for several days. We had to do multiple NDIs and spent many man-hours removing and replacing parts for those inspections.

My error did not cause major damage to the flaps or aircraft, so I feel fortunate. However, I learned a big lesson. We expended many unnecessary man-hours, and that aircraft wasn't available to train our pilots for possible combat operations when they needed it most. I still live with that guilt. 

Petty Officer Fox is assigned to AE shop at VFA-94.

Flap locks prevent the flaps from moving but do not stop the flap-drive motor from cooking.



The Naval Safety Center is dedicated to reducing mishaps by 50 percent in two years.