

By Lt. Mike Yesunas

Moving an aircraft can be hazardous, but, when the odds get stacked against you, a mishap becomes a certainty. In our case, several “holes in the cheese” aligned to turn a simple job into an ugly one.

As usual, our line division’s mid-check shift was tasked to move an aircraft from the wash rack, through the hangar, and out to the line. This operation would have been simple, except we had a lax attitude and the job had become too routine. A qualified plane captain was a move director in training. He grabbed all the required people to fill the move billets: a 30A-tractor driver, a brake rider, and three wing walkers. The PC completed the crew brief, following the divisional aircraft-move checklist, and he assumed everyone was qualified, since this was such a routine task.

The tow-tractor driver did not do his job completely. He did not pre-op the 30A because he assumed it already had been done. The tractor had not even been checked at shift change, like it was supposed to be. That driver was not even qualified to operate the tractor. He had attended, but the maintenance officer



the driver didn’t know about its bad brakes. Despite a hard push on the brakes, the tractor driver couldn’t get the tug to stop for another five feet.

One assumption in this business is too many, but six is a recipe for disaster. The PC failed to make sure the doors were open, and he didn’t make sure his crew was certified. The driver should not have been driving without a license, and the wing walker should have acted immediately when he noticed the clearance was so tight.

Not Quite Wide Enough

had not signed his license. The driver assumed the license had been signed. The rule is the license should be in your possession.

The move director started the move without fully opening the hangar door. He assumed the opening was wide enough.

As the aircraft approached the door, the wing walker on the right side walked inside the rotor arc, since he knew it was going to be a tight fit. He also assumed the doors were opened enough. When the rotor blade was about one or two feet from the door, he realized it wouldn’t fit, so he blew his whistle. The tractor driver did not hear the signal to stop.

The PC on the left side was giving the director signals but held the whistle in his hand. The director was not in position to see how close the blade was to the door. As the wing walker brought the whistle to his mouth, the tractor driver assumed he needed to stop. The missed pre-op became a big issue because

We lost only a blade-tip cap, but this simple task easily could have caused the loss of a major component or, even worse, a shipmate. 

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