

# We'll Give It a Stab!

By AM3 Joshua Schoelen

While moving our detachment's UH-3H from the squadron's hangar to NAF Atsugi's paint hangar, I learned a tough lesson. We just had finished two months of mechanical and cosmetic work on our new VIP helicopter and were preparing it for some finish work. Our success would be a proud moment, and this helo soon would enter service with the 7th Fleet. That's when I discovered that a minor change in routine can turn a good deal into a dangerous dilemma.

To prepare for the quarter-mile move, I surveyed the route, checked out the destination, and participated in a crew brief. I wasn't the senior plane captain in our detachment, but I had been putting in a lot of hours on aircraft moves in recent weeks. I made a point to inspect the intended parking area and noted that it was too small, especially with a Hawkeye parked in the same hangar.

AIMD cleared us to take our bird to another hangar—one with more room to maneuver. The crew director was an experienced PO1, and he

briefed the crew on the route, obstacles, signals, and other safety-related items. We had the required number of people: a director, a brake rider, two wing-walkers, a tractor driver, and a tail-walker. The move to the paint hangar went well, and we parked the Sea King next to

a Hornet, with plenty of room to spare. Everything appeared OK, but minor changes soon would cascade into bigger problems because we didn't adjust to those changes.

While we wrapped up the move, an AIMD maintainer asked us to move the aircraft closer to the hangar door, so he could fit a third aircraft between ours and the Hornet. Our can-do spirit led us to agree to his request, and we got the helo ready to move. We hooked up the tractor to the tail wheel, and, with the move

director behind me, we pushed out the aircraft from its spot. We stopped the aircraft and then tried to "arc" the H-3 closer to the inside wall of the hangar.

At that very moment, an FA-18 near the hangar began a high-power turn, and its deafening roar reduced our ability to communicate. As I eased the aircraft into the hangar, my attention was focused on the director behind me. I felt a slight bump and immediately hit the brakes and set the emergency brake, following standard procedures. I could see the director blowing his whistle but could not hear anything because of the jet noise.

After a quick peek toward the supervisor, I looked at the aircraft and instantly was sickened. We had driven the horizontal stabilizer on the right side of our newly reworked VIP aircraft into the hangar door, turning the stab into scrap metal! The only good news: No one was hurt.

In hindsight, we learned several important lessons and were given ample time to "discuss" them with the maintenance master chief. We could have ignored AIMD's request, keeping the extra room of our original parking spot. Even though space was available, the route to get into that space made this move very dicey. We also could have used a little more ORM. This slightly out-of-the-ordinary change to our plan should have forced us to do a thorough rebrief. This step would have made us review our responsibilities: Who would watch for problems? What parts of the aircraft might be a hazardous area? When would we use whistles and hand signals?

I now know that regardless of rank or experience, each person on a move crew has the authority, ability and responsibility to keep mistakes like this one from happening.

 Petty Officer Schoelen works in the line division at HSL-51.



# BRAVO ZULU

**AT3 Daniel Collins, AD2 Alex Cardenas, and AO1 Zebbie Perkins**

## HSL-47

During the launch of Saberhawk 72 for fleet-battle-experiment Juliet, Petty Officers Cardenas and Collins shared fireguard responsibilities. They noticed smoke coming from the No. 2 engine of the SH-60B and quickly notified the plane captain, Petty Officer Perkins, who immediately signaled the pilots to shut down the aircraft.

A closer look at the No. 2 engine revealed a loose B-sump check valve. That valve was replaced in time for Saberhawk 72 to meet operational requirements for the experiment. These maintainers acted quickly and decisively, averting a potential engine fire.



**AEAN Laura Nelson, AD1 Gerald Laclair, AD1 David Cragun, and AD3 Tammy Bookout**

## VFA-37

AEAN Nelson noticed a metallic piece of FOD on the flight line. She called over AD1 Laclair, AD1 Cragun, and AD3 Bookout, and they all searched the area around the aircraft, finding more pieces. Petty Officer Laclair and Cragun immediately recognized the metallic pieces as parts from a turbine blade on the GE F404-402 jet engine.

They immediately notified maintenance control and tried to determine the origin of the FOD. They quickly narrowed the search to two aircraft, and both were downed. After a thorough look at both aircraft, they found Ragin' 304 had suffered an internal FOD of the starboard engine. The third-stage turbine blades had suffered catastrophic damage.



**AD2(NAC) Carl Taylor**

## VC-8

While washing Redtail 213, a wash team had on protective gear: splash-proof goggles, gloves, and cranials with cinched chinstraps. ADAN Richardson had climbed up a 15-foot ladder to pass a bucket of aircraft soap mixed with water to a shipmate. He unexpectedly hit the horizontal stabilizer, and the potent mix spilled onto his forehead. Some of the soap seeped under his goggle's foam seal, blinding him.

Petty Officer Taylor witnessed the accident, immediately helped Airman Richardson down from the ladder, and escorted him to an eyewash station. That eyewash quickly eased ADAN Richardson's discomfort, and, after 15 minutes of flushing, he was ready for transport to medical.

