

HOT?

I didn't think it was that hot!

By Maj Scott Hannan, Whiteman AFB, Mo.

It was a typical August late afternoon at NAS Whiting Field in the Florida Panhandle. The puddles from the recent thunderstorm probably would evaporate in about 3 months and the temperature was way beyond Africa hot as the sun had reappeared immediately after the storm blew through. I was briefing with one of my on-wings for a 1600 takeoff. The mission would be a familiarization ride in the mighty T-34C TurboMentor and would be the stud's last ride with me prior to his pre-solo checkride. I was looking forward to this ride because he was pretty sharp and had been performing consistently above average throughout the program. I also really wanted to fly because if we didn't go that day the student would be in the warm-up window and might require an extra flight before moving on. A recent Hurr-evac and the subsequent gaggle home had pushed everyone's schedule to the

right. Plus, in the race to meet our Annual Training Requirement (ATR), the Squadron had designated my on-wing as a potential counter towards the final tally. In other words, we needed to get him finished by the end of the fiscal year. Getting the X would help everyone concerned.

After briefing up, we stepped outside the shack into the heat. I sent the stud on out to the plane while I went to sign it out. He had all his equipment on and fastened as he headed out to pre-flight. I'd already worked up a good sweat just walking the hundred yards to maintenance. I signed for the airplane and went out to the parking spot. The stud was just finishing up the walk-around, so I quickly double-checked everything and then we manned up. Unfortunately, you start the mighty TurboWeenie with the canopies closed. It was hellishly hot! We started the engine and continued

with the checks (most importantly getting the AC on). The prop was only turning a minute or two when the radio died. We troubleshot with maintenance, but the thunderstorm had dumped over 2 inches of rain on Whiting and the Weenie's canopy really leaked! Water had dripped onto and into the radio and shorted it out. That aircraft was done for the period. Maintenance told me the tail number and parking for the spare, so I told the stud to carry our stuff over and start pre-flying that aircraft while I got a ride to the shack to sign out the new plane.

I went in, wrote up the old plane, and signed for the new one. Then I walked back out to the parking spot. As I approached, I noticed that my student seemed fascinated by the engine cowling. He was standing motionless, holding onto the handgrips that open the cowling, just staring at the plane. He had



Photo by MSgt Dave Nolan

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opened the latch, but otherwise was doing nothing else. I asked what was wrong and he said it wouldn't open. I tried it, and it opened easily without any jiggling or sticking. I told him to try again. Now he was just staring at me without responding. I almost started to question his shoe color preference when I realized his eyes were glassy, his face was flushed, and he seemed distracted. Then I noticed he wasn't sweating at all and I knew he/we had a real problem. I asked him how he felt and he said he felt a little woozy. Because I paid attention to the Flight Surgeon's portion of the Fly Safe meeting (sort of), I knew he had some kind of heat stress.

I had him sit under the wing while I flagged down one of the

maintainers driving around the flightline in a golf cart. I also told him to drink whatever water he had on him and I gave him my bottle as well. We got a ride over to the maintenance shack and went inside into the air conditioning. I made him fill his water bottle and drink it all twice. Plus I had him stand in front of the vent. After about 15 minutes, he was demonstrably recovering. He looked normal, was alert, and seemed no worse for the wear.

This is where my advanced degree in doctoring really helped out. I figured since he looked fine, he must be fine. He certainly didn't object when I asked if he felt ready to go fly (imagine that). So off we went. As you might expect, he did terrible! I ended up calling it a warm-up flight anyway.

Then I went to explain to my Ops Officer why I took a stud flying whom just 15 minutes before had me thinking about calling an ambulance! As soon as I realized he was suffering from heat stress, I obviously should have cancelled the sortie and sent him to the flight clinic. I'd let my desire to advance my on-wing's training and help the squadron meet ATR get the better of my judgment.

Allowing the student a break and directing him to drink some water between consecutive pre-flights could've prevented this incident. Stay hydrated, keep an eye out for heat stress symptoms in your buddies, and don't let your desire to complete the mission endanger yourself or your crewmates. ▶

Editor's Note: Maj Hannan flew with VT-3 at NAS Whiting Field from '94-'97. Courtesy Naval Safety Center.



Photo by Robert Lawson, USN (ret)



Photo by JOC Kirby Harrison