

Our pilots conducted day and night field-carrier-landing practices (FCLPs) to get ready for COMPTUEX. It had been a nice afternoon, and I had signed as the plane commander for Black Eagle 603 for a formation flight. We would flow into the FCLP pattern at NBVC Point Mugu.

The formation flight got exciting as I coached the junior pilot through several maneuvers. The port engine started making audible rpm fluctuations. I remembered this problem from a functional-check flight a few days before and told the pilot to go to standby on the propeller syn-

coming to a full stop on runway 27 for the crew switch.

During the last hop, I noticed we were low on fuel—approaching our SOP minimum-landing-fuel state of 2,000 pounds. I called for a full stop on runway 27 on our last approach and reviewed the landing checklist.

Everything seemed fine as the junior pilot flew the “ball” to touchdown. As he brought the power levers out of flight idle into ground idle and then maximum reverse, I noticed the plane started veering to the left side of the runway. I was about to tell the pilot to use the rudders to bring the aircraft to centerline when he said he couldn’t keep the aircraft straight.

I told him to come out of reverse and to go

Mr. Toad's Will

chrophaser and mechanical on the governing mode. The engine stabilized, and we continued the formation training.

We flew back to Point Mugu as Dash 2 and entered the break for runway 27, which is used for FCLPs because it’s where the LSO shack is located. The quartering tailwind was not favorable for the landing runway, but it was nothing we hadn’t dealt with before.

After the junior pilot completed the standard six landings, we swapped seats for my landing practice. When I finished my six landings, we did a full stop on runway 27, the shorter runway, to expedite taxiing back to the hold short for the next pilot switch. I then flew copilot for the two other pilots, assisting with their landings and, each time,

By Lt. Tim Fahey



back into ground idle. By now, we were tracking along the left edge of the runway, in danger of hitting the runway lights. I started to feed in right rudder to straighten the aircraft. In my haste, I tapped the brakes too hard, causing the right mainmount tire to burst.

As we tracked back toward centerline, my next thoughts were to put down the arresting hook and to grab the long-field-arresting gear. I quickly called tower, telling them we were trying the long-field gear. As we passed over the gear, I did not feel the expected deceleration—we had missed the gear. I immediately slammed on the brakes and pulled the fluid-cutoff pull handles to shut down both engines and prevent FOD damage. The plane came to a stop in the overrun

area, about 75 feet short of the marshy wetlands beyond the runway.

As we climbed out of the plane, I saw just the right tire had blown. The maintenance folks did a terrific job of getting a temporary wheel on the right side and towing the aircraft from the soft overrun area back to the hangar. There they fixed the mainmount and arresting hook and did a full inspection of the landing gear. A high-power-engine test on 603 was completed the next day.

The pilot reported that during the reverse checks, the starboard engine pitchlocked: The blade angle on the propeller remained fixed. In my incident the day before, a pitchlock made sense, because a pitchlocked starboard engine

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on touchdown still would be producing thrust while the port engine produced reverse thrust, pushing the aircraft to the left.

I should have glanced at the engine instruments during touchdown to see what they were doing when we went to maximum reverse. Fortunately, no one was hurt, and the aircraft flew a couple of days later.

Now, during every landing, I focus on not jamming the power levers to maximum reverse. I also make sure the engine instruments operate properly. The squadron has adopted a policy of doing all full-stop landings during FCLPs on the longer runway at Point Mugu. 

Lt. Fahey flies with VAW-113.



Photo by Matthew J. Thomas