

by Lt. Daniel Mosiychuk

As a student ECMO, I participated in an FRS detachment to NAF El Centro. The detachments are held at El Centro during the winter months because the weather is better than in Whidbey Island, Wash. The pace is fast, compared to training at home: Students fly up to two sorties a day for two weeks. Compared to all the flights I completed, I learned the most from a flight that I never flew.

One morning, I was scheduled for my first form flight in the Prowler. I arrived early to set up the board for our brief. The pilot of Dash 2, also a student, walked into another briefing room and, to save time, copied down another

crew's takeoff and abort numbers and put them on our board. Absorbed in my own preparations, I didn't bother to check the numbers.

My pilot and I were lead, and Dash 2 was the student pilot with an instructor ECMO. We briefed a 10-second-go departure, meaning Dash 2 would line up on the runway with us but would begin their takeoff roll 10 seconds after our roll. If the lead was forced to abort, Dash 2 would abort as well. The lead aircraft would pass up the long-field arresting gear unless Dash 2 cleared us for it.

I called for takeoff, and both jets took the runway. When we were cleared for takeoff, we did our standard run-up and wipe-out. Everything looked good, so off we went. The

# Learning From That Never Flew



initial acceleration seemed slow, but since it was much hotter here in El Centro than what I was used to back home, I didn't give it further thought. My pilot commented, "Good line speed" when we passed our 2,000-foot acceleration check.

We passed 100 knots and entered the high-speed abort regime. At 125 to 130 knots, I remember the pilot said, "Seems a little slow, but we'll take it." As if on cue, there was an almost imperceptible chug from the left engine, and the pilot said, "Oh, wait." I scanned the instruments and noticed the tapes for the left engine were wavering up and down. We began our abort at 135 knots. The pilot brought the throttles to idle and extended the speed brakes. I called the tower, reached for the hook release

handle, and waited for the call from Dash 2 clearing us for the long-field gear. Passing through 80 knots, the pilot applied wheel brakes, and Dash 2 cleared us for the gear. I asked the pilot if he wanted me to pull the hook. He said, "No," and I took my hand away from the hook release. Almost immediately after he declined, the pilot reached up and pulled the hook, and we engaged the arresting gear.

We sat in the wire as the emergency vehicles approached. They checked our brakes, and we shut down the engines after the brakes cooled. We had fused both brakes and had blown both main mounts. Dash 2 had aborted at 100 knots, and the pilot was able to slow the aircraft enough to pull off the runway onto a taxiway. His price was two fused brakes and a blown main mount.

During the debrief we divided our lessons into the standard two columns, things we did that were good and those that were not good (or "others," as we call them). In the first column, my confirmation with the pilot prior to pulling the hook was good crew coordination; nosewheel steering would have engaged when I pulled the hook, surprising the pilot. The remaining two lessons fell into the "others" column. First, "Oh, wait," is not a very descriptive phrase. It did not convey to me or to the aft cockpit that the pilot had heard a chug, had seen some strange instrument readings, and had decided to abort for an impending engine failure. Although the mind races during an emergency situation, we all have important tasks to accomplish, so it is necessary to get the word out fast. Second, and most important, borrowing takeoff numbers is an unnecessary risk. I trusted my life and the life of my crew to takeoff numbers from a different flight. If I had spent a few minutes in the book prior to the brief, I would have realized during the takeoff roll that we had failed our line-speed check. We would have aborted at a relatively low speed, long before the chug notified us of our engine trouble.

It's interesting how much you can learn from a flight that never flew. 

Lt. Mosiychuk flies with VAQ-142.

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Photo by Senior Airman Stan Parker