

The Value of a Headset

By Charlie Mercer

Every once in a while something will go wrong, and have some humorous, or frightening, events (for some folks) evolve from it.

It was another week long, opportune cargo, cross country from Clinton County Air Force Base to where ever fate would take us. Once again it was just me (the flight mech) no loadmaster ...again, (more on that later) and two pilots, minimum crew for the C-119.



Things were going well and uneventful for the first couple days until we landed at Dover Delaware.



Next morning after arriving at the aircraft and while accomplishing the pre-flight inspection a leak was discovered on number two prop, so I depressurized the accumulator and checked the fluid level, of course it was low, but there wasn't much on the ground beneath the prop. Figured it wasn't bad enough to red x the old girl so

serviced the fluid, called ground control for permission to do a full power run-up at present location (on the ramp).

Permission denied, you'll have to taxi to the hammerhead, asked for assistance from transit maintenance. Soon a TA truck arrived, a young Ssgt got out, came over, asked " Need help with something?"

“Yeah, I need you to ride the co-pilots seat while I taxi out to the hammerhead for a run-up”. After start up, he got in and occupied the co-pilots seat, it was then I realized he didn’t have a headset, hell with it I thought, he doesn’t need one.



I taxied to the hammerhead, did the run-up, called for taxi to the ramp, ground informed me there were two C-133’s on the taxiway waiting for me to clear the hammerhead, so the taxiway was blocked. Told me to contact tower and use the active. Here’s where the value of a headset comes in.

Tower cleared me on the active down to the first turnoff, pulled out on the runway, looked over at the sarge, he was staring at me questioningly, his face was a little pale. About 100 feet along the runway tower called and said “Expedite we have an aircraft turning final”, pushed the throttles to full power, looked over at the sarge again, this time he was very pale, very tense, both hands gripping the seat arms tightly, staring at me, got up to about 80 knots, throttled back, went into reverse, and exited at the first turnoff, looked over at the sarge again, he was as limp as a rag in the seat, still staring at me.



After parked and shutdown he started jabbering something about he just knew I was gonna take off unauthorized and he was scared s-----s.! Explained to him the value of a headset, keeps one in the loop.

We made it back to CCAFB okay but the prop was still leaking so I put her on a red x for our guys to fix. Job security for my friends in the prop shop.

Just one little episode, of many, that linger in the back of one's memory, and occasionally comes fleeting to the front.

Oh yeah; almost forgot the remark about the loadmaster; seems that when I had a mission going Northeast it always fell in contradiction with the load's work week. But when I had one going Southwest by golly they were in abundance. Never could figure that out. Maybe they were just a little smarter than me.....

Not inviting any smart --- remarks from loadmasters you understand.....but why was it when we had a trip to El Paso we had at least three or four loads on the aircraft, and no cargo.....? Proof that flight mechanics were, (and are), mission essential.



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