

Did I Do That?

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VAW-113



You can see how attaching the engine sling forces the forklift driver to raise the forks. The operator of this lift is forever grateful those wires he caught are fiber-optic, not electrical.

A quality assurance representative told an AK1 that a work center needed a forklift driver to remove an engine from an aircraft. Since this AK1 was the only licensed forklift driver around, he was more than willing to help out the mechs and get the job done.

After the AK1 had picked up the key to 20K forklift, he started doing a pre-op inspection. During the inspection, he discovered that the fuel-gauge indicator was low, so he headed for a gas station on the way to the hangar. Suddenly, he heard a loud popping sound. He stepped on the brakes and immediately stopped. Still sitting in the seat, he looked up and saw what looked like a power cable hanging on the mast of the forklift. He thought he had hit an overhead power cable and was about to be electrocuted.

With his hands frozen on the steering wheel, he looked over his right shoulder and saw someone standing by a Mini-Mart. He yelled to that person to call 911. The AK1 remained seated on the forklift—motionless and fearful of being electrocuted by the power cable.

The base fire department, ambulance and medical crews, military police, and public works personnel arrived on the scene within five minutes. A firefighter asked the AK1 if he was OK, and he replied that he was fine. The base military police secured the road, placed barrier tapes and cones encircling the vicinity of the mishap, and diverted traffic.

The firefighter then told him not to touch any metal parts of the forklift and prepared him to jump away from it. The AK1 jumped and landed safely on his

feet. When public works personnel began looking over the situation, they found that the forklift had not hit a power cable. Instead, it had hit a fiber-optic line, which resembles a power cable. There was no serious damage to the line, and PWC people quickly repaired it.

What had caused the forklift to hit the line? During the pre-op inspection, workers had connected the engine-boom assembly to the forks. Then, they raised the forks to attach the engine-sling assembly onto the chain fall before the AK1 took it out on the road. Attaching the engine-sling assembly raised the height of the forklift mast to almost 19 feet. (Without the engine sling attached, the height of the 20k forklift is 12 to 13 feet.)

When the AK1 hit the fiber-optic line, it was because of the extended height of the forklift mast. (According to PWC, the height of the cable wire was about 18 feet.) The popping sound he heard was the one-quarter-inch-steel cable wire breaking. The cable wire was supporting the fiber-optic line from one post to another. When the line broke, the two posts swayed and other cables were strained, disrupting electrical power to three other buildings.

After this incident, the command determined that the engine sling will no longer be installed on the boom of the 20k forklift while somebody is driving it on the road. ■