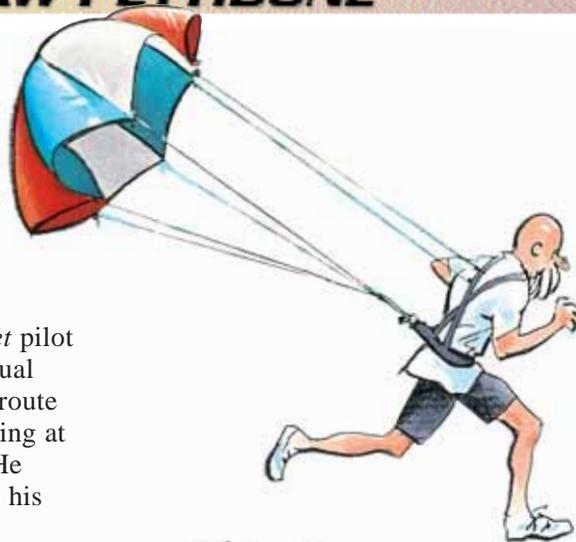


Illustrations by *Ted Wilbur*

Spheres of Influence

An F/A-18C *Hornet* pilot was on his second visual flight rules low-level route of the day after refueling at an en route air base. He sighted a valley off to his right and performed a gentle, right-hand slice turn to enter it for the purpose of terrain masking. Once there, he aligned the aircraft in the center of the valley.

After a time he became momentarily preoccupied with something in the cockpit. When he looked up he saw two sets of line-

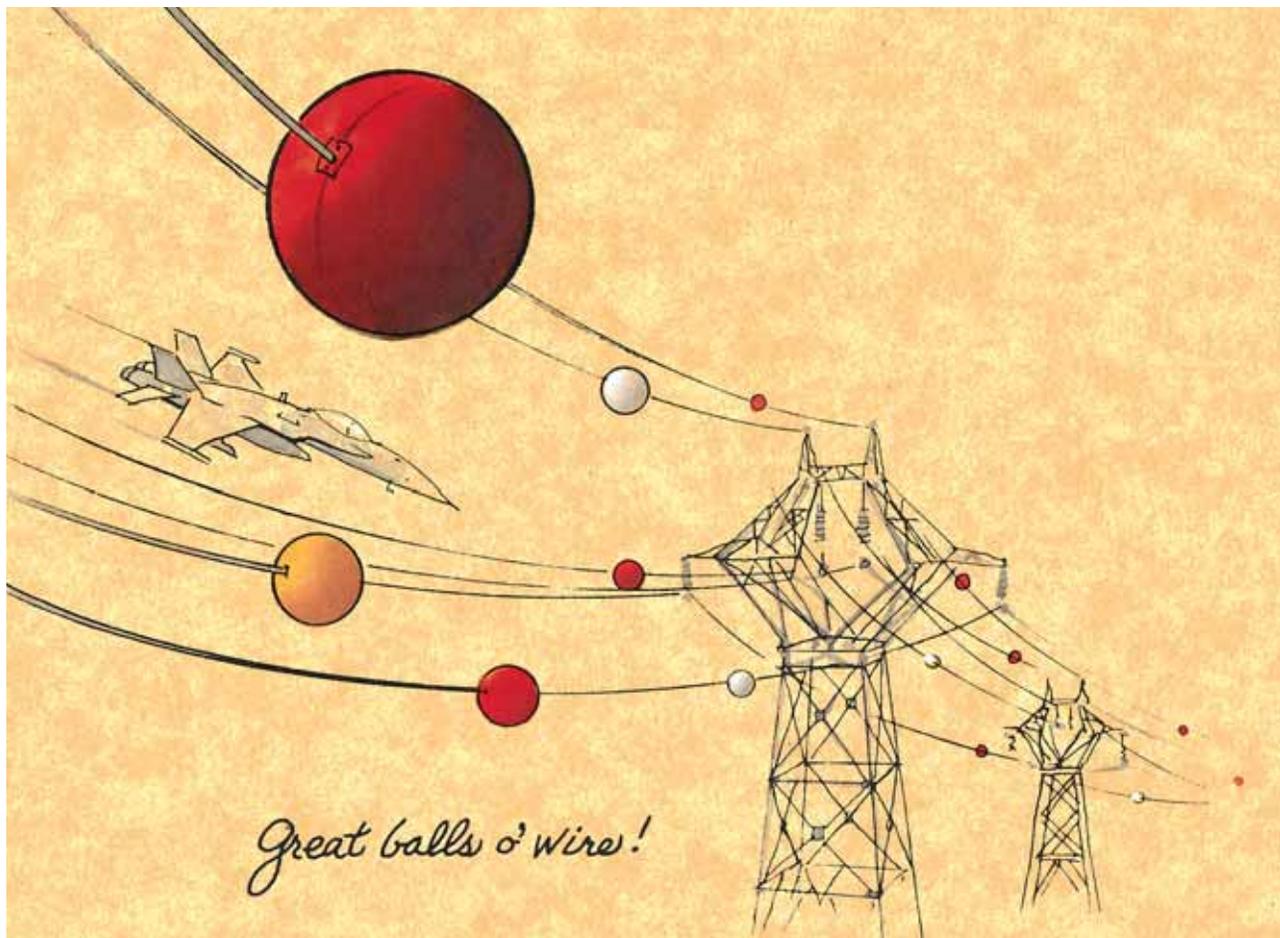


July forth

marking spheres, one set at eye level, the other slightly above eye level. Perceiving that he was rapidly closing on the spheres, he pushed forward on the control

stick while in a right angle of bank in an attempt to avoid the high-tension cables on which the spheres were mounted.

He heard a series of thumps as he passed under the first set of spheres. The pilot then leveled his wings and started a climb. The starboard engine began to lose power and the pilot noted loud popping noises coming from it. After receiving several aural warning tones, the pilot reduced starboard throttle to idle and secured the engine. He then had second thoughts about shutting the engine down and immediately placed the starboard



throttle back to idle, which successfully air-started the engine.

The pilot turned toward his destination airfield, continuing to climb. He declared an emergency and leveled at 17,000 feet. When he reached the airfield he lowered the landing gear, extended flaps to the half position and conducted a slow flight controllability check with no adverse effects. He lowered the tail hook for a short field arrestment but experienced a hook-skip on the first try and took off. His second attempt was successful. The aircraft's damaged areas included the leading edge wing flaps, the starboard engine, which was fodded, and the vertical tail.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! This aviator left the approved low-level route, managed to find high-tension wires and damaged a perfectly good airplane—luckily, only the plane. It's the same old simple story. You can get into real trouble when flying fast and close to mother earth. Keep that scan moving and remember, especially when down low, you've got to eyeball the outside world as if it were a danger zone.

Friendly Flak

Two F/A-18C *Hornets* were on a missile shooting exercise, the wingman armed with an AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile. The target was a BQM-74 drone. In his attack run, the wingman approached the target from the rear quarter at minimum range. The pilot fired the missile and it ran true, striking the BQM-74 and shattering it. The *Hornet* maintained its track a few seconds longer toward what had



been the target and flew through the metal fragmentation pattern that resulted from the accurate missile hit. The starboard trailing edge flap, starboard horizontal stabilizer and both engines sustained damage, but the aircraft was flyable.

The wingman informed the leader of his situation and shut down the port engine due to an aural warning tone. The flight proceeded to home base where the wingman executed a successful straight-in approach to landing with a short field arrestment.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Target fixation has bedeviled fliers ever since the first bomb was heaved from an open

cockpit. More than one pilot has scored a personal—and final—bull's-eye because pull-up was executed a precious second or two late, particularly against ground targets.

There is danger in air-to-air work, as this *Hornet* driver learned. Nowadays, the task loading is greater than way back when. This pilot had much to do—setting up the AIM-120 for the shoot, scanning the head-up display, etc.—while traveling at a very fast clip, then firing from minimum range. To avoid friendly flak, or worse, keep that scan going, and pull up and away in a timely manner.