

Illustrations by Ted Wilbur

Up and At 'Em

An AV-8B *Harrier* was engaged in practice close air support operations. On a previous flight that day, the pilot completed the bombing exercise without any sign of bird activity in the area. However, as he was pulling up off target after a run on the second flight, he observed a bird dead ahead of his aircraft, seemingly destined to impact his windscreen. The pilot instantly increased his



Gourmet Disappointment

climb and the bird struck the radome instead of the windscreen. The pilot continued his climb,

leveled off, turned directly toward the nearby air station and declared an emergency with approach control. Feeling vibrations in the aircraft, the pilot reduced power and signaled his wingman to check over his *Harrier*. The wingman reported damage to the radome and the right intake. This caused the vibrations but engine instruments were normal and the aircraft was flyable.

The pilot selected a fixed-power setting and successfully performed a fixed-throttle, variable-nozzle



Harrier harrier



landing at the air station.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

David versus Goliath. But in this case Goliath won, even though David left his mark. Amazing what one of our feathered fliers can do to a big, heavy machine.

The pilot did everything right, and it sure helped that his maneuver pitted the bird primarily against the radome rather than the windscreen.

Danger Zone

A CH-53D *Sea Stallion* was conducting practice landings at confined-area landing sites. As a demonstration, the helicopter aircraft commander (HAC) would make the first landing at each of a succession of different sites, after which the copilot would take over and make two landings at each site.

One of the locations had an upward sloping landing zone when approached on a southerly heading and was 150 feet in diameter with trees around the perimeter. The HAC made his demonstration approach and landing to the upper portion of the site on a southerly heading. The aircraft experienced an unexplained loss of lift on short final. The HAC initiated a moderate flare and power application to arrest the sudden rate of descent, and landed uneventfully. On deck, the HAC transferred the controls to the copilot who took off and established a downwind pattern 400 feet above the ground at 80 knots.

The copilot then began a descending, decelerating turn onto the final approach to the site at 60 knots. All was normal until the final portion of the approach when the helo seemed to lose lift just prior to commencing a hover on short final.

The aircraft settled and the rotor blades struck the trees, damaging the CH-53D. The tail rotor drive system was severed between the #4 and #5 drive shafts, producing uncontrolled right yaw as the helo landed.

Although the *Sea Stallion* had been on a southerly heading, when it struck the ground it had come around to 300 degrees. There were no injuries.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Methinks the copilot was placed in a situation beyond his experience and abilities. Me also

thinks the HAC failed to keep pace with what was goin' on. The HAC may have looked danger in the face on his approach to the landing zone and survived, but he failed to recognize a repeat occurrence. Remember the old, simple and enduring axiom: stay ahead of the aircraft, not the other way around.



Hidden Dragon