GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by Ted Wilbur

A Deadly Stew

An F/A-18 *Hornet* pilot was the leader of a night, two-plane, close air support (CAS) flight using night vision goggles. The flight was under the control of a ground-based forward air controller (FAC) and was considered a precursor to the start of a structured training regimen.

During the briefing, the FAC offered the flight a preplanned CAS mission with a hard time on target, which was accepted. The flight launched, entered the target area and made two orbits to familiarize themselves with the range before proceeding to the initial point.

The leader was behind on his timeline to make the assigned time on target and was traveling at 520 knots indicated airspeed vice the prebriefed 300. He climbed through the 9,000-foot altitude restriction outside the target complex in an effort to attain the apex of his pop-up maneuver. Still behind the timeline, the flight reached an apex 1,200 feet below the required altitude and 120 knots too fast.

The target was a tank in the live impact area, denoted by the FAC using an infrared marking device. The leader was cleared but did not drop. He had not set proper altitude warning cues and passed the release altitude in a steep dive. He designated the target and initiated a normal pullout. Approximately three seconds later he was seen to execute a maximum performance G-limiter pull to attempt recovery. The aircraft cleared the target and was in a nose-up attitude and climbing when the *Hornet* struck a small ridge northeast of the tank. There was no attempt at ejection. The pilot and the aircraft were lost.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Loss of situational awareness, target fixation, hurrying to catch up—that's an awful mix in anyone's stew. There are times when tryin' too hard spells disaster. The pilot didn't fly the briefed pattern, didn't set the proper altitude warning cues, and pressed on when an abort mighta been the better option. Also seems like the seniors in the chain accepted the CAS mission tasking too early in the training deployment. Terrible loss.

Tail-First Touchdown

A UH-60A crew was on a familiarization flight to regain currency in the *Seahawk* for the pilot in command (PIC). The pilot at the controls (PAC) was qualified and current in type. In the local operating area the PAC completed a series of maneuvers at altitude, then transitioned to a local outlying field for landing and takeoff pattern work. The aircrew completed a series of approaches and landings without incident.

After the final landing, the PAC performed an informal automatic flight control system (AFCS) "heading hold" evaluation without preflight planning, research or a flight clearance. During this evaluation a nonstandard maneuver was flown with the intent of determining the AFCS response-to-heading offset while heading hold was engaged.

On the third attempt of a nonstandard maneuver, the *Seahawk* rapidly diverged in yaw, driving the AFCS into an acceleration control mode vice the normal rate control mode. As the aircraft yaw rate exceeded 75 degrees per second, the flight path stabilization disconnected, leaving the left rudder pedal fully depressed. The PAC, believing a failure had occurred driving the aircraft out of control, lowered the collective to place the aircraft on the ground. The aircraft tail struck the ground first, shearing the tail wheel. The remaining

tail wheel mount then dug into the runway and brought the aircraft to a rapid halt. The sudden stop broke the tail rotor gear box free and caused significant structural damage. There were no injuries.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

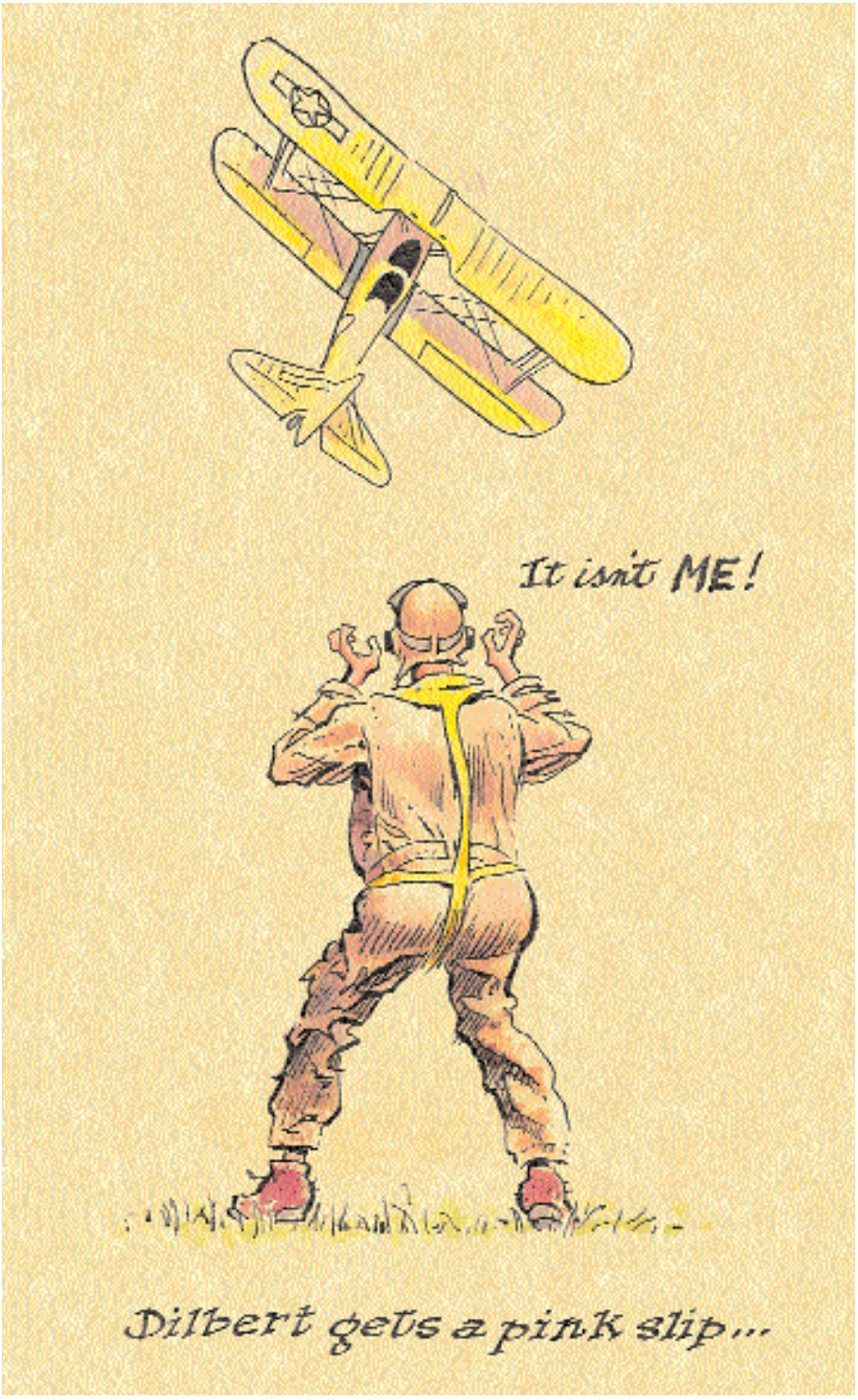
Unauthorized procedures caused a no-win situation during this sortie. Why didn't the PIC put a stop to the maneuvers in the first place? If the PAC had recognized the left rudder problem, he could have countered with right rudder and slowed the left hover turn. Unauthorized means "don't do it." 'Nuff said.

The following is a Grampaw Pettibone tale from yesteryear. Flight students beware!

Unsafe for Solo

A cadet pilot landed at an outlying field, retarded the throttle, set the parking brakes and left his N2S-4 *Kaydet* unattended, with the engine running, while he walked over to chat with two other pilots. The little yellow plane took in the situation and considered the time opportune to make a dash for freedom. Its throttle began to creep forward, the brakes became disengaged and the plane began to move. The cadet, observing the motion, ran to his plane and grabbed a wing, but by this time speed had increased so that he was unable to do more than just hang on, causing the plane to commence a series of widening circles. Speed continued to build up and the cadet lost his hold, admitting defeat by turning tail and scampering over a fence to safety.

Two other students got back in their planes and taxied out of danger. By this time the renegade N2S was pretty mad, digging a wing into the ground now and then just to show its temper. At last the little "fighter" apparently became weary of the sport and decided to spread its wings. Speed was sufficient so that when coming into the wind the last time, the plane straightened out, took off, climbed to 50 feet, began a steep turn, stalled and dove into the ground.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Wasn't that funny? I smiled too . . . until I realized the pilot deliberately disobeyed orders, leaving his plane like that. Also, the aircraft cost $10,000, but money won't replace the loss of the critical material and labor involved.