

the crewman and the helo pilot, the “Ford” pilot was safely hoisted and returned to the CVA he had left a few long minutes ago. The zero-delay lanyard he had demanded on preflight had definitely saved his life.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Singe my old gray whiskers, 'cause this lad had a real close one! 'Course the only reason he's a livin,' breathin,' kickin' and complainin' aviator today is because he knew his survival equipment and its capabilities. When the chips were down, he went through the whole routine just as though he was in an old rockin' chair, instead of riding an about-to-blow bomb. Cool!

It takes a real pro to send your plane captain off for the missing piece of gear you want and may need when the flight deck crew is hollerin' at you to “get on with it.”

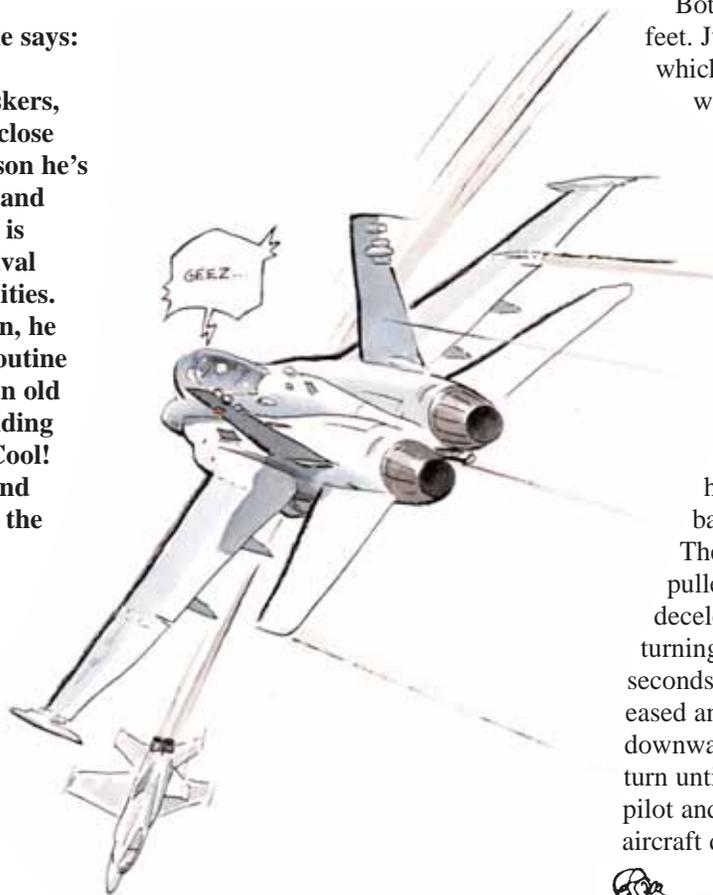
Every piece of survival equipment was born after great travail and much bloodshed. Use it! Remember, the life you save will be your own!

Final Descent

An F/A-18D pilot, a certified air combat tactics instructor, and his weapon systems operator (WSO), an experienced aviator but relatively new to the Hornet community, were scheduled for a multiflight, multiday cross country with another F/A-18 that included instrument and one-versus-one training hops to help regain proficiency. In the month prior, the two fliers had been away from the cockpit for more than three weeks and had also missed a two-week, intensive air-to-air training exercise. However, they flew the required sorties the week before the cross

country to reestablish currency minimums.

On the first day, they flew an instrument flight only, due to adverse weather. On the second day, two flights were flown: an instrument flight and a two-versus-



two air intercept flight the crew arranged with F/A-18s from another squadron. There were no adverse high-G effects during this air intercept mission despite the lengthy layoff from high-G flight by the pilot and WSO.

On the third day, the crew was to fly a two-versus-two air intercept flight but mechanical problems prompted a change to a one-versus-one sortie. The aircraft flew the briefed mandatory G warm-up maneuver, pulling about four to six Gs, before commencing the one-versus-one mission. The flight leader elected to omit the first two, more benign set-ups of the one-versus-one mission. They then set up for the more aggressive maneuvers. The

aircraft were positioned 1.5 miles from each other, line abreast. Airspeed was 400 knots, altitude 18,000 feet. The Hornets turned 30 degrees away from each other, then turned back after achieving five miles of separation.

Both aircraft descended 6,000 feet. Just prior to the merge, which began at 12,000 feet, the wingman pilot transmitted, “Left to left,” to indicate the type of merge pass he expected. This was the last transmission from the aircraft. At this point, both aircraft were traveling toward each other at 500 knots with the wingman slightly higher. At the merge, the wingman commenced a hard 135-degree angle of bank descending left turn.

The pilot of the lead aircraft pulled up into a steep climb and decelerated to achieve a better turning airspeed. After six seconds, the wingman's hard turn eased and the aircraft continued downward in a slight left banking turn until it struck the water. The pilot and WSO were killed, the aircraft destroyed.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

A sad, sad spiral into the deep. Gramps can only conclude the aviators' G tolerance wasn't up to par for this maneuvering engagement. High-G flight comes with the territory for strike fighter aircrews, and these fliers most likely suffered loss of consciousness due to high Gs (GLOC). With the easing of the steep turn, the F/A-18D continued a final plunge into the sea, absent of any evidence of an attempt to recover from the dive. The accident board believed the G tolerance of the pilot and WSO was impaired due to little recent high-G exposure, rendering them more susceptible to GLOC. This is a serious point to ponder.