

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by *Ted Wilbur*



Button Blunder

After accepting their aircraft from the alert crew without a preflight inspection, an SH-60F Seahawk crew launched from the carrier 25 minutes earlier than briefed. Once safely airborne, the helicopter assumed duties as the secondary plane guard asset working outside of a five-mile bubble around the boat. After conducting search and rescue and dip-to-dip nav training for a time, the crew made a call to their squadronmates working primary plane guard and asked if they wanted to swap roles. The other H-60 elected to remain the primary.

Some time later the secondary crew was in a coupled hover with the automatic flight control system (AFCS) engaged at 150 feet, 13 miles out, on an outbound heading. Departure made a call for the aircraft to proceed inbound and Charlie on arrival without delay. The copilot rogered the instructions and reported their helo had approximately three more hours of flight time available.

The aircraft started a right turn and increased speed while maintaining an altitude of 150 feet. Departure told the crew to set 130 knots once inbound, and the copilot acknowledged the command. Departure followed with a call for the Seahawk to fly a heading of 350 and climb to 500 feet. The pilot didn't react. As the copilot attempted to hit the ICS call button on the cyclic to ask the pilot if he'd heard Departure's instructions, he inadvertently depressed the adjacent AFCS release button. Both the pilot and copilot, assuming that the AFCS was working, failed to scan their instruments in

time to recognize the aircraft had started a slight climb followed by a rapid descent.

The H-60 impacted the water. Both pilots egressed with minor injuries, but the two enlisted aircrewmembers in the back were trapped and lost at sea with the aircraft.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Why did those egghead helicopter designers put two seats in the aircraft if neither brownshoe is going to bother looking at the instruments, especially at night? And Gramps is here to tell you that putting your faith in gee-whiz systems like these boys did is the road to damnation! That there AFCS or whatever they call it may make a pilot's life easier, sure, but it's equal parts the devil's work, I tell you! I'll take a good scan over gadgets any day.

That the ICS button was right next to the AFCS release was one of those "gotchas," no doubt, but that's no excuse to tie the record for low flight over water at night. Every aircraft has got its quirks. Good pilots keep them from biting where the harness straps shouldn't go.

And I'm sure I don't have to tell you that the loss of two good enlisted crewmembers through no fault of their own is the kind of ache that won't ever leave the surviving pilots. Trust me, I've seen the hollow look in their eyes. Livin' ain't livin' with that sort of mistake kicking around your kettle.

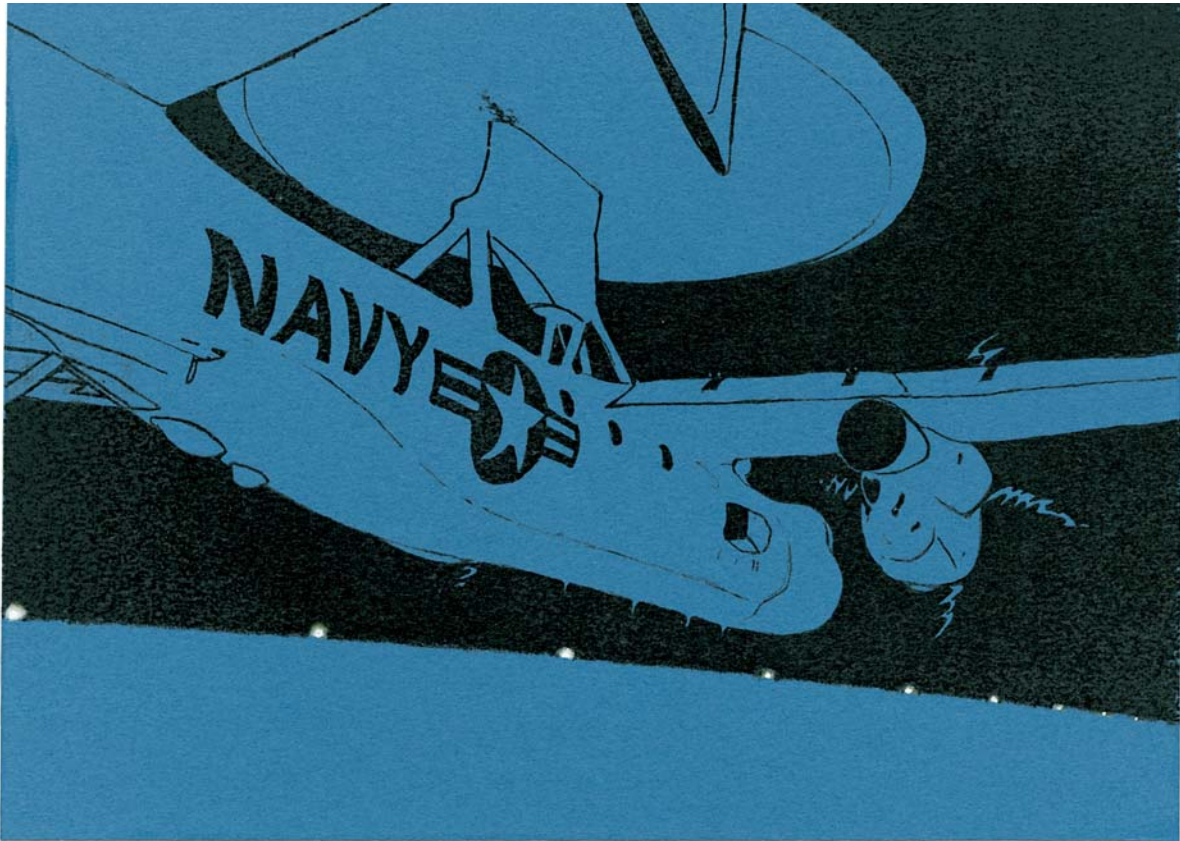
Gramps from Yesteryear

Night Belly Whopper

A lieutenant commander instructor pilot and his ensign replacement pilot (RP) briefed for the new pilot's first night training flight in an E-2 Hawkeye. A complete brief was conducted, the aircraft was signed for, and preflight performed. The Hawkeye launched from home plate and proceeded to a nearby airfield. The RP was in the left seat, the instructor in the right.

Nearing the vicinity of the airfield, a tactical air navigation approach was conducted. Following the





Thing that goes bump in the night

approach, the E-2 was cleared into the night visual flight rules landing pattern. Eleven approaches were flown with various flap configurations: full, two-thirds, one-third, and none. Of these, eight were terminated with touch-and-go landings.

Approximately one hour after takeoff and still in the pattern, the aircraft reported the abeam position with three down and locked for a touch-and-go, with the port engine simulated out. This pass was completed as a simulated single-engine landing with a takeoff using power on both engines.

Following this approach another single-engine approach was flown to a touch-and-go landing. Liftoff was accomplished with one engine simulated feathered to emulate a single-engine bolter. (The procedures for a single-engine waveoff or bolter are identical.) After performing the proper procedures, a single-engine climb was accomplished and the E-2 commenced a turn downwind for another simulated single-engine approach. Abeam the runway, the E-2 reported, "Three down and locked, touch-and-go."

During the approach, a jet in the pattern, also conducting touch-and-go operations, distracted both pilots. The single-engine approach was flown fast and the instructor noted the aircraft tended to float in close. As the Hawkeye neared the touchdown point, the instructor added power to the starboard engine (simulated feathered) and told the RP, "Take both engines and let's go."

Immediately an explosion was noted in the starboard engine. The RP reacted by reducing power in order to keep the aircraft on the runway. The starboard propeller contacted the runway, followed immediately by the port propeller. The aircraft had landed gear up on the centerline, approximately 2,500 feet down the runway, and departed it to the left.

The plane came to a stop left of the runway, a little past midfield. The starboard side of the E-2 was in flames as the pilots exited via the overhead hatch. The aircraft sustained substantial damage. The instructor was not wearing flight gloves and suffered minor burns on his hands.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

My achin' ulcers! With all the emphasis on safety and NATOPS in this day and age, we still have those few drivers who don't listen. There are a multitude of old excuses (I was distracted by the jet, etc.) but no new ones.

Would you believe we had a wheels watch posted in this case? He was worse than the pilots. He saw the machine with its wheels up but never fired his flare gun.

I've said it at least a thousand times in the past: Use a checklist! It proves an "aircraft-back guarantee." And it's free!