

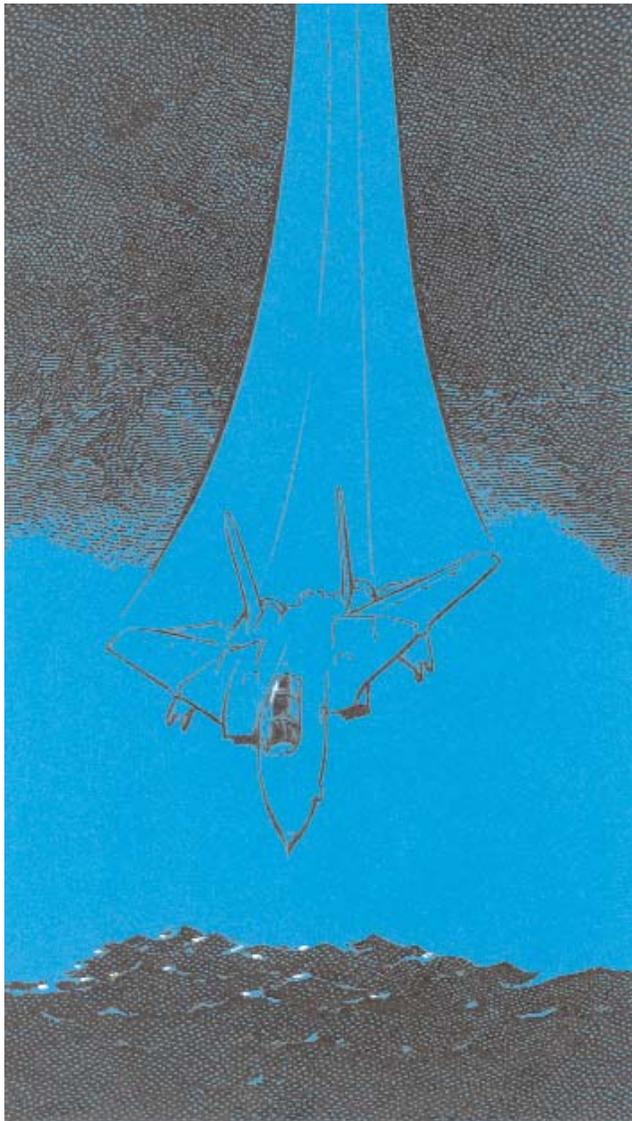
GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by *Ted Wilbur*

Night Dive

After a thorough brief that included all necessary safety of flight coordination and emphasized the requirement that all defensive maneuvers be level turns in assigned altitude blocks, three of four scheduled F-14 Tomcats launched at night from the carrier to assume the blue air role against four red air Hornets. All crews were wearing night vision devices (NVDs) during the tactical portions of the mission. During the first two intercepts, the Dash-3 Tomcat was operating as a “light section” (single aircraft).

In the middle of the second run, the Dash-3 pilot ignored the briefed maneuvering mandate and reefed the



APRIL FOOL



Tomcat into an aggressive, nose-low vertical dive starting from 29,000 feet. Due to the violent nature of the maneuver and the prevailing atmospheric (scattered clouds and no moon illumination), the crew lost situational awareness somewhere during the dive, yet they continued with the tactical scenario, assuming that their altitude would afford them plenty of time to recover.

As the F-14 passed through 7,000 feet, the pilot started what appeared to be a mild dive recovery. At 5,000 feet the airplane was still in a 45-degree dive, airspeed in excess of 600 knots. The Tomcat continued a shallow recovery until it hit the water. No wreckage was found during the search and rescue effort, nor was there any evidence of an attempted ejection. Both aircrew were lost at sea.

During the mishap investigation, several squadron radio intercept officers stated that the mishap pilot had done a similar maneuver when flying with them, but none had debriefed him on their concerns or mentioned anything to squadron leadership.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Now Gramps has heard every type of arm-waving rant regarding how safety-of-flight rules artificially bind crews during training and keep aviators from being ready for the real thing, and to that I say what I've always said when doused with such vinegar: “Bunk!” Sure, we need aggressive brownshoes, but no amount of Type-A is going to counter King Neptune's pond or Mother Earth, whether there's shooting going on or not. Let Gramps—a veteran of a brushfire or two—tell you that the rules don't change once the bubble goes up; in fact, they get tougher. No flight discipline, no victory. Plain and simple.

And Gramps don't have much use for those who come slinking out of the woodwork gripped by the guilts after the fact, either. Last I checked, flying air

machines wasn't a popularity contest. Now I ain't talking about bilging a shipmate, confound it! I'm telling you shipmates don't let shipmates break the rules. And speaking of rules: with this mishap you can add some more blood to what writes them.

Head Jam

An AH-1W Super Cobra launched as Dash-4 in a division of Cobras for a daytime electronic warfare and "battle drills" mission in the local warning area. After several simulated engagements, the Dash-4 helicopter commander in the front seat transferred controls to the copilot in the rear seat. The helicopter commander then passed a "heads down" over the intercom and proceeded to focus on the forward-looking infrared display in an attempt to find the Dash-3 aircraft.

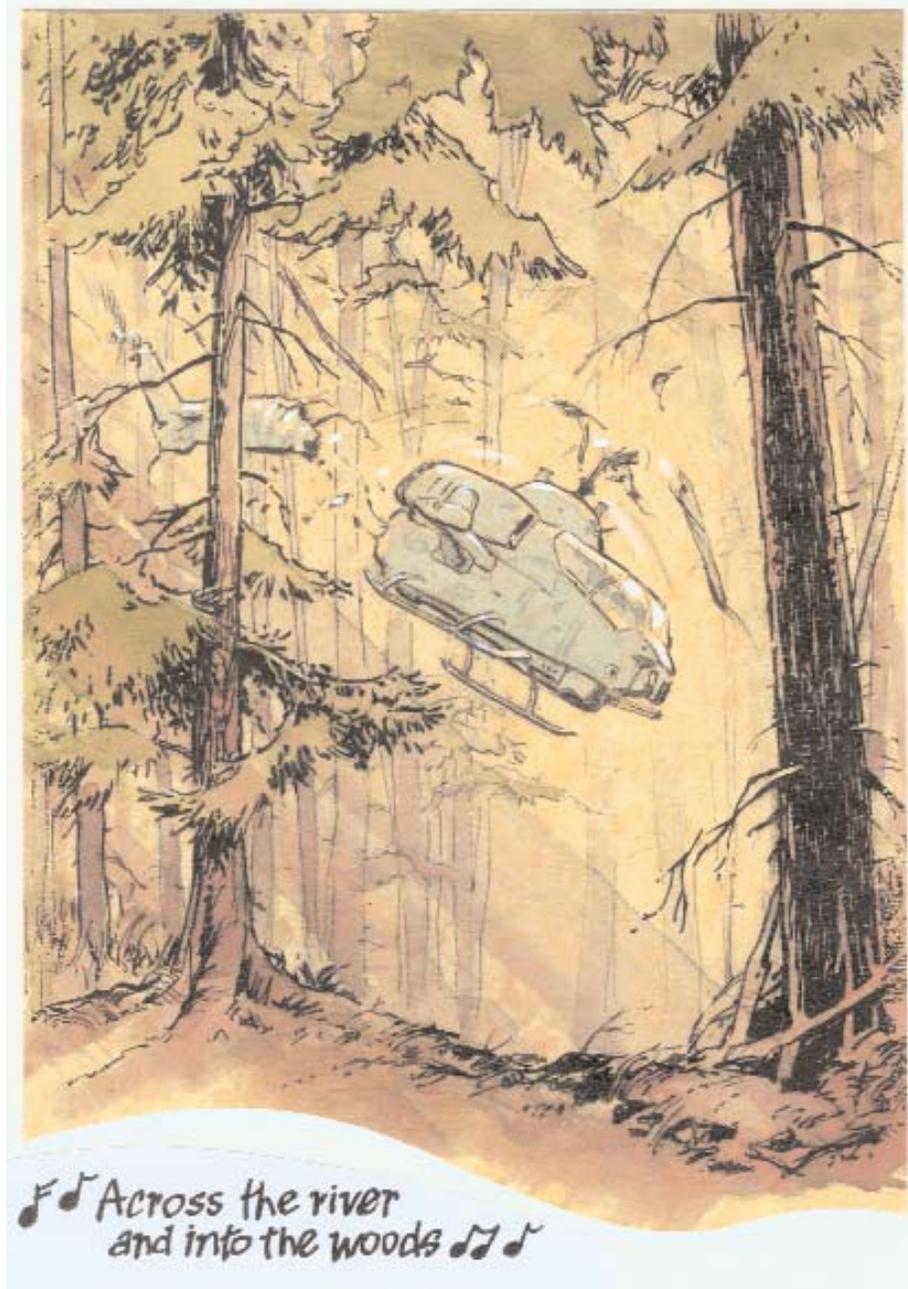
A minute later, 300 feet over the trees, the copilot yanked the Cobra into a hard right-hand turn in response to a simulated air threat called over the radio by the division leader. In the middle of the turn, the copilot looked up and left to reacquire his section lead, and as he did, his head became pinned against the canopy. Unable to reference either his instruments or the ground, the copilot said, "My head's stuck," over the intercom and nothing else. The helicopter commander heard the call but thought nothing of it. He remained focused on the FLIR presentation until he saw trees in his peripheral vision, then joined the copilot in an attempt to maintain control of the helicopter. The Cobra hit the trees and lost the tail boom before coming to rest on its right side. During the crash, the helicopter commander broke his arm and ankle, and the copilot sustained severe back injuries.

The copilot was able to egress only after pulling his head out of the stuck helmet, and he then helped the helicopter commander out of the cockpit. The base search and rescue helo picked them up some time later.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Now I know it's a tight fit in this particular type of chopper, but what kind of sideshow contortions did



this guy have to go through to make his melon stick like that? Keeping sight of your wingman is one thing, but if you've got to torque around like a hoot owl to do it, chances are you're out of position.

But never mind the glued noggin; the real issue here is bad crew coordination. Once the copilot realized he was in trouble there was only one call to make over the intercom: "Take the controls." And if somebody tells me, "My head's stuck," as I'm cruising 300 feet above the forest, I might be inclined to stop watching television and start thinking about aviating. In any case, these fellahs were lucky they were able to walk—or, rather, limp—away from this one.