

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by *Ted Wilbur*

Media Mayhem

In the middle of a period of high operational tempo, a cruiser's light airborne multipurpose detachment was tasked to fly a Navy cameraman and a civilian reporter so they could capture a maritime interdiction operation against a civilian ship that the cruiser's SEALs were conducting. After flying for most of the night and operating on very little sleep, the H-60 Seahawk crew launched at sunrise with the cameraman and the ship's public affairs officer instead of the reporter. When the reporter elected not to go flying, the PAO unilaterally decided he would take his place, and the helo crew didn't think to question his decision.

The helicopter aircraft commander (HAC) discussed plans for filming the operation with the cameraman, including the best way to capture the small boat operations. The cameraman wore an ICS-capable helmet and a gunner's belt. The Hellfire missiles, M-60 machine gun, ammunition, and other tactical gear from the previous night's missions were not removed from the aircraft. The crew chief strapped the PAO into the sensor operator's (SENSO) seat.

Following takeoff, the cameraman positioned himself in the cabin door and coordinated aircraft positioning with the HAC, who was also the pilot at the controls. The H-60 hovered at 100 feet abeam the port side of the cruiser so the cameraman could shoot the small boat being lowered into the water. The HAC's mental plot positioned the civilian vessel a half-mile behind them, and neither the copilot nor the crew chief scanned outside to ensure clearance.

The H-60 hovered abeam the cruiser until the small boat began to head aft to pick up the boarding team. By this time, what the pilot believed to be over a mile of separation between his aircraft and the civilian vessel was actually less than 100 feet. As the HAC maneuvered the H-60 aft to follow the small boat as it steamed for the civilian vessel, the helo's tail rotor struck the civilian vessel's forward mast and the aircraft began spinning



violently. The centrifugal forces kept the pilot from reaching the power control levers as called for in the NATOPS emergency procedures for "loss of tail rotor drive." The cameraman was thrown out of the aircraft, still attached by the gunner's belt.

After spinning a couple of times, the H-60 hit the side of the civilian ship and dove nose-down into the water. After impact, the helicopter rolled left and immediately filled with water. Each pilot egressed through his door while the crew chief went through the cabin door. After fighting with the five-point harness, the PAO exited by the SENSO's door, which had come off

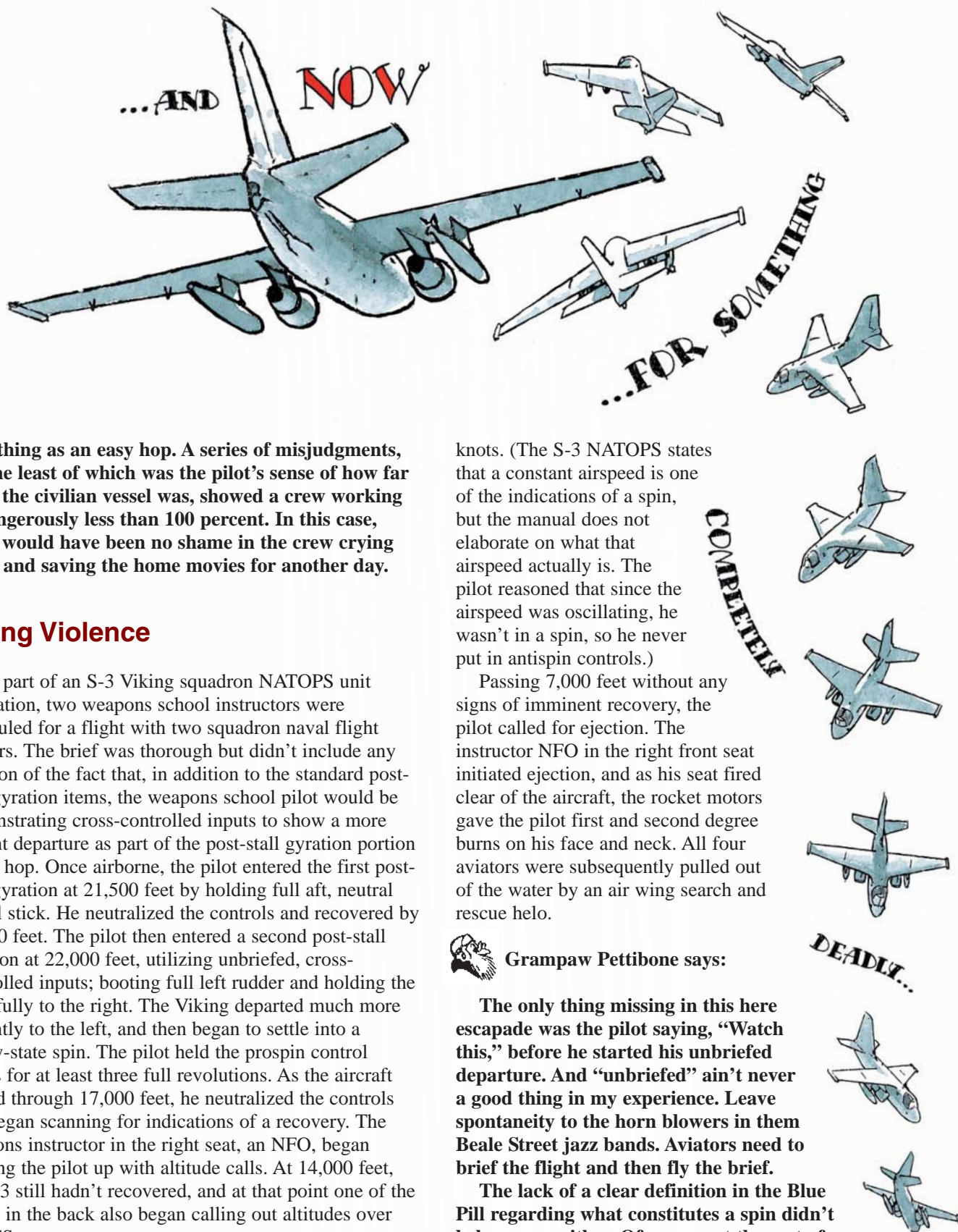
during the crash. The cameraman was found floating on the surface, unresponsive, and was declared dead by the ship's doctor once brought back aboard.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Now Gramps likes to see himself on the silver screen as much as the next guy, but was this mission really necessary considering how long this crew had been operating without any real sack time? Of course, no aviator wants to get stuck with the "non-hacker" label, but these guys proved once again that there's no





such thing as an easy hop. A series of misjudgments, not the least of which was the pilot's sense of how far away the civilian vessel was, showed a crew working at dangerously less than 100 percent. In this case, there would have been no shame in the crew crying uncle and saving the home movies for another day.

Viking Violence

As part of an S-3 Viking squadron NATOPS unit evaluation, two weapons school instructors were scheduled for a flight with two squadron naval flight officers. The brief was thorough but didn't include any mention of the fact that, in addition to the standard post-stall gyration items, the weapons school pilot would be demonstrating cross-controlled inputs to show a more violent departure as part of the post-stall gyration portion of the hop. Once airborne, the pilot entered the first post-stall gyration at 21,500 feet by holding full aft, neutral lateral stick. He neutralized the controls and recovered by 14,000 feet. The pilot then entered a second post-stall gyration at 22,000 feet, utilizing unbriefed, cross-controlled inputs; booting full left rudder and holding the stick fully to the right. The Viking departed much more violently to the left, and then began to settle into a steady-state spin. The pilot held the prospin control inputs for at least three full revolutions. As the aircraft passed through 17,000 feet, he neutralized the controls and began scanning for indications of a recovery. The weapons instructor in the right seat, an NFO, began backing the pilot up with altitude calls. At 14,000 feet, the S-3 still hadn't recovered, and at that point one of the NFOs in the back also began calling out altitudes over the ICS.

The pilot continued to hold the controls neutral for a short time before shoving the stick full forward. At 10,000 feet—the hard altitude for ejection if the aircraft still isn't showing any indications of recovery—the angle of attack was pegged high, the turn needle was full left, and the airspeed was oscillating between zero and 70

knots. (The S-3 NATOPS states that a constant airspeed is one of the indications of a spin, but the manual does not elaborate on what that airspeed actually is. The pilot reasoned that since the airspeed was oscillating, he wasn't in a spin, so he never put in antispin controls.)

Passing 7,000 feet without any signs of imminent recovery, the pilot called for ejection. The instructor NFO in the right front seat initiated ejection, and as his seat fired clear of the aircraft, the rocket motors gave the pilot first and second degree burns on his face and neck. All four aviators were subsequently pulled out of the water by an air wing search and rescue helo.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

The only thing missing in this here escapade was the pilot saying, "Watch this," before he started his unbriefed departure. And "unbriefed" ain't never a good thing in my experience. Leave spontaneity to the horn blowers in them Beale Street jazz bands. Aviators need to brief the flight and then fly the brief.

The lack of a clear definition in the Blue Pill regarding what constitutes a spin didn't help none, neither. Of course, at the cost of a sub-hunting tanker, the NATOPS reads a little more clearly now. All Gramps can say about that is it's a helluva way to run a railroad.