

# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by *Ted Wilbur*

## Tomcat Tussle Trouble

After briefing a postmaintenance check flight, a Tomcat crew made arrangements with another crew to rendezvous and wait for three additional F-14s to join them for a 5-plane carrier break at the end of the cycle. After completing their Pro “C,” which included dealing with pitch and roll stability augmentation failures that appeared to clear during the profile, the two Tomcats proceeded toward each other, “comm out,” as briefed. In spite of not briefing any ACM rules of engagement before the flight, once he had the other fighter in sight, the first Tomcat pilot executed a slightly nose high right turn followed by a roll to a 120-degree overbank, nose low slice turn. The turn quickly became a vertical nose-low pull into his de facto wingman. The wing Tomcat took a cue from the other and aggressively countermaneuvered, creating “2-circle flow” between the two jets.

The first Tomcat pilot selected full afterburner and worked to align his fuselage with the other airplane’s. As he increased his pull, the F-14 suddenly started an uncommanded roll left and then right. The pilot eased his stick pressure and the jet began to yaw. At that point the pilot noticed two stability augmentation lights were illuminated and that the turn needle was pegged. He booted full left rudder and pulled the throttles to idle. The RIO noted the spin arrow on his display and passed, “Neutralize,” over the intercom.

The yaw rate rapidly increased. The crew noted the airspeed was near zero and altitude was just less than 14,000 feet. The RIO said, “I’ve got a right spin arrow,” and the pilot put the stick forward and right. The RIO confirmed the right spoilers were up.

The pilot quickly decided that the spin had developed to the point he needed to attempt the alternate recovery procedures. He reached for the roll stability augmentation switch and found that both the roll and pitch switches were off. He switched both back on and put the stick right and aft in accordance with the alternate recovery procedures.

During the departure the RIO tried to communicate with the pilot but heard no response. The pilot could hear the RIO but could not respond because his mask was hanging off of his face due to the high G forces. The pilot saw that the angle of attack gauge was full white, which indicated 30 units, and that his airspeed was below 100 knots. He sensed the nose pitch up and then down,



as if the aircraft was about to recover. The yaw rate seemed to be slowing. The pilot put the stick forward and right in an attempt to fully arrest the spin.

The RIO also noted that the yaw rate decreased to 90 degrees per second but then stayed there. As the Tomcat descended through 7,500 feet, the RIO said, “We’re out of here,” jettisoned the canopy, and initiated command eject. The RIO’s seat fired but the pilot’s did not. The pilot initiated his own ejection on the second attempt at an altitude of less than 3,000 feet. He was in a poor ejection position because of the effort required to reach the lower handle and sustained minor injuries as a result. The stricken aircraft rolled out and actually pitched up before water impact. Both crewmen were rescued by the carrier’s SAR helo.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**What in tarnation was these boys thinkin’, putting the fangs out like this on a post-maintenance check flight, not to mention one that gave the crew a hint the aircraft might not be 100 percent in terms of handling ability? And I’m not even gonna mention the fact—well, dang it, yes I am gonna mention it: Flying without briefing, especially when something as high-risk as ACM is involved, is just plain unprofessional. No wait: That don’t get it. It’s more than unprofessional; it’s foolish.**

WELL, IF IT'S GOING  
TO BE LIKE **THAT**,  
I'M OUTA HERE!

☛ GURK

