

# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by *Ted Wilbur*

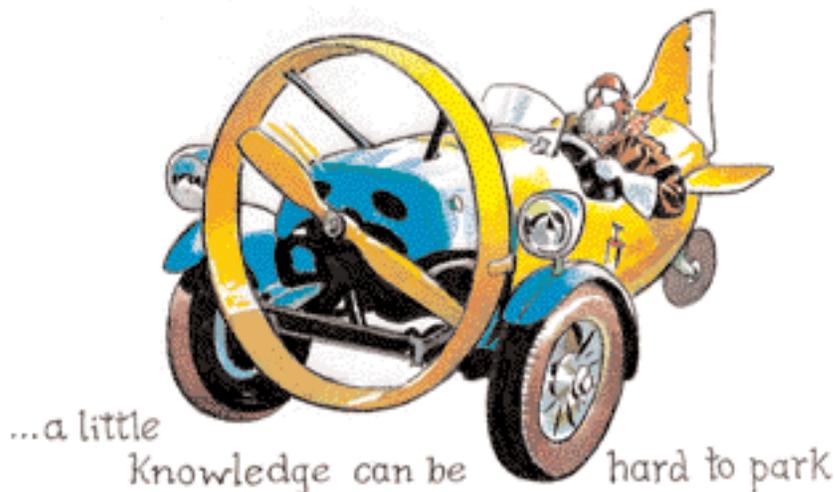
## Cross-country Chaos

The replacement pilot only managed five hours of sleep the night before the second day of cross-country training in a two-seat AV-8 Harrier. After only eating a bagel for breakfast, he became airsick during the first tactical formation flight of the day. The instructor pilot terminated the flight and cancelled a second sortie they had planned on flying.

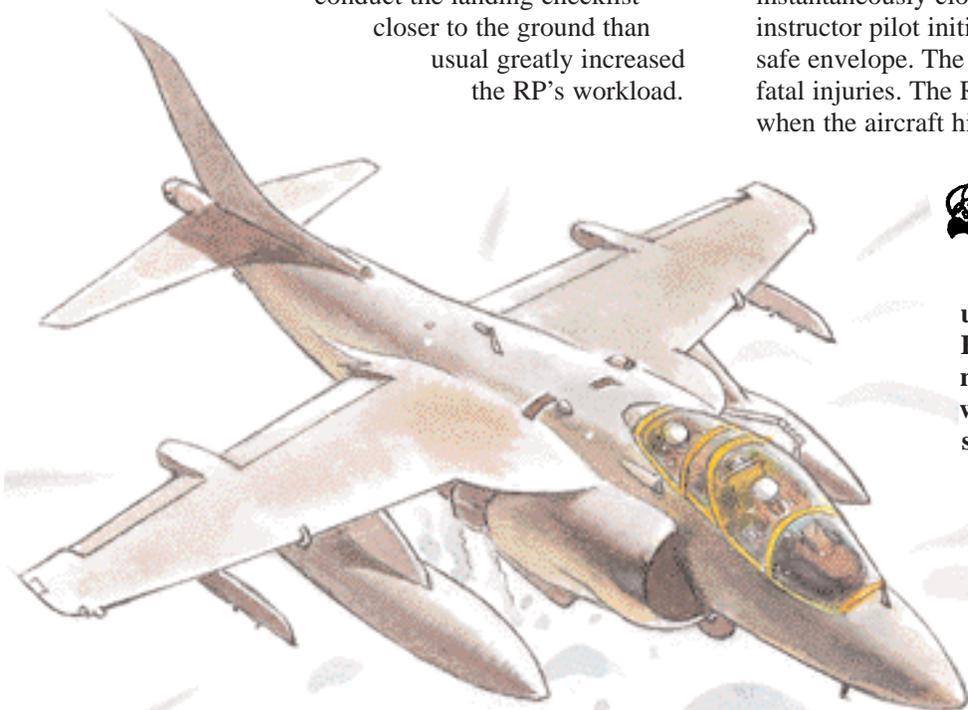
During the debrief the RP said he felt better and was willing to fly again. The instructor thought he looked fine and decided to add an instrument round robin to the schedule.

The replacement pilot flew the Harrier through multiple practice approaches to three different airfields. After the first precision approach at the third field, the student requested a practice minimum fuel PAR, which the controller granted. The replacement pilot deviated from the normal procedure and delayed gear extension in an attempt to save some gas, which, in turn, caused the Harrier to develop a faster-than-normal approach speed.

The fast approach speed and requirement to conduct the landing checklist closer to the ground than usual greatly increased the RP's workload.

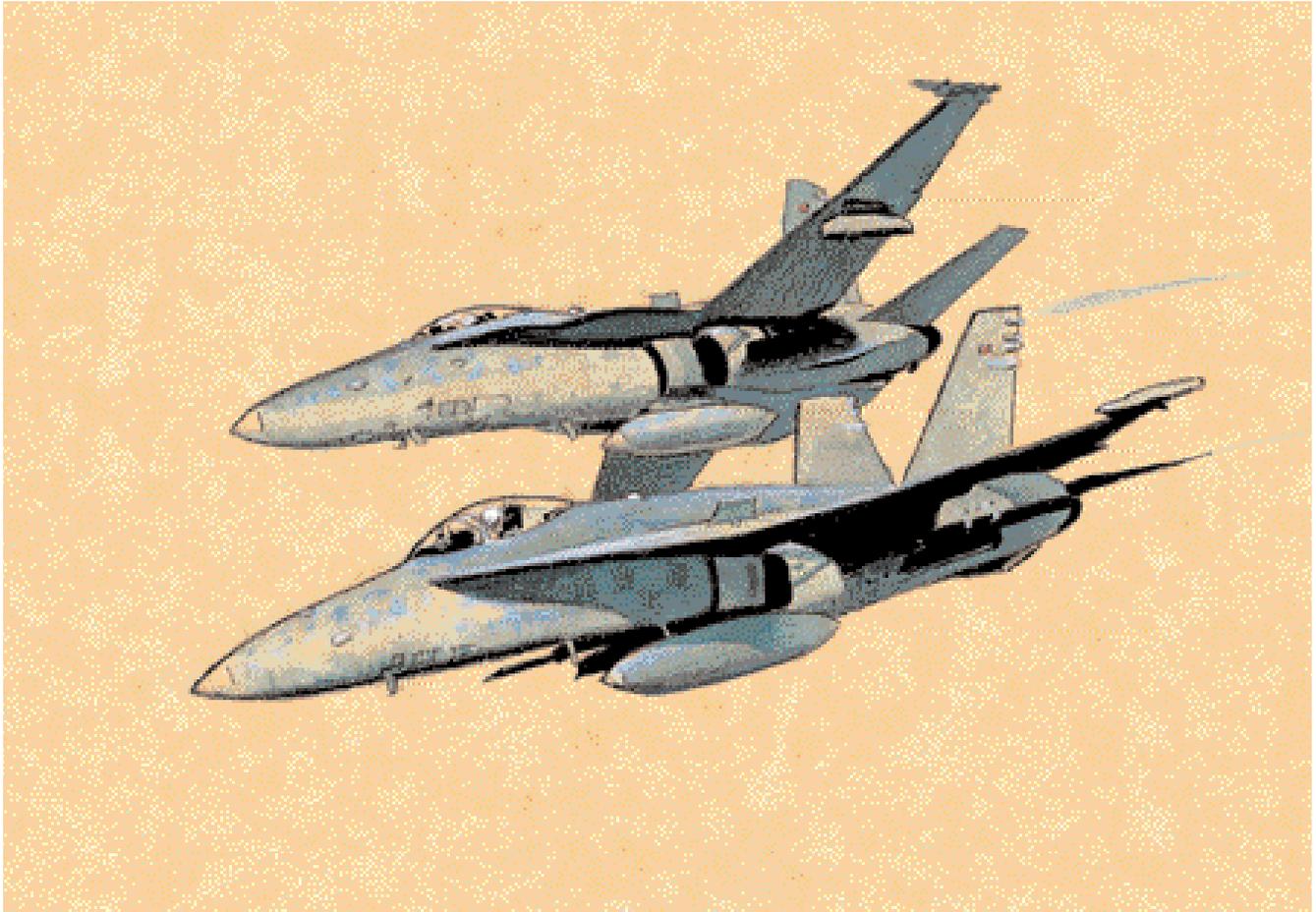


As the Harrier slowed below 165 knots, the flaps programmed down and the ailerons drooped, as normal. Because a light-loaded training-variant Harrier's center of gravity shifts forward, the aircraft pitched nose down. The RP countered the pitch with aft stick but the aircraft didn't respond because the power was at 35 percent and there was not enough pitch authority to counter the nose down pitch rate. As the nozzles were selected to 60 degrees, tail plane effectiveness was further degraded. In a final attempt to get the aircraft under control, the RP commanded the throttles to one degree, which instantaneously closed the ejection envelope. The instructor pilot initiated command ejection outside of the safe envelope. The IP cleared the aircraft but sustained fatal injuries. The RP's ejection sequence was interrupted when the aircraft hit the ground and exploded.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

I'm reminded of something we used to ask each other during W.W. Big One: "Is this mission really necessary?" A tired student made worse by filling an airsick bag shouldn't be back in an airplane until he's had proper rest, regardless of what kind of good face he puts on. And while an instrument round robin might be less physically taxing than a tactical formation flight, there's no such thing as a flight that doesn't require the crew to be at 100 percent.



## Hitting Hornets

Two F/A-18s were part of a three-plane wall going against a section of Tomcats on an air combat training hop. The Dash-1 Hornet was on the left side of the formation, and Dash-2 was in the middle. Just inside 10 miles from the merge, the Range Training Officer informed the Dash-1 and Dash-3 Hornets that they were simulated kills.

Dash-1 continued to the merge in accordance with Top Gun adversary training rules, while Dash-3 did the same on the other side of the formation. At five miles from the merge, both bandit aircraft did aileron rolls to acknowledge that they were kills.

Dash-2 saw Dash-1 complete the rolls and shifted his lookout forward in an attempt to find the F-14s. Dash-2 started a left turn to put the opposing fighters within his missile's field of view, assuming that because Dash-1 had acknowledged the kill he would not maneuver approaching the merge. Dash-2 did not maintain a visual on Dash-1 and figured he would pass well below Dash-1.

Meanwhile, Dash-1 got a tally on the two Tomcats and continued straight ahead, ensuring a left-to-left pass with his opponents. At just under three miles from the merge, Dash-1 started more aileron rolls to ensure the F-14s knew he was out of the fight, a maneuver that

caused the lead Hornet to lose 1,300 feet of altitude. Unaware that Dash-1 was descending toward him, Dash-2 continued his turn for a weapon solution.

Just short of the merge, Dash-2 noticed Dash-1 was closing on him. He tried to avoid the collision but the two Hornets hit. (Dash-1 never saw Dash-2 before impact.) Miraculously, despite extensive damage to both aircraft, both pilots managed to coax their jets back to home base for emergency landings.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Fighter guys have an old saying: “Lost sight, lost fight.” That was true in the biggest way here. Once he was called dead, Dash-1 had an obligation to remain predictable (and not descend 1,300 feet). Meanwhile, Dash-2—like everyone else in the event—had an obligation to be aware of where everyone was before maneuvering.**

**Once again the “big sky, little airplane” theory fails. Fortunately they made it back, which is as much a testimony to how much plastic jets can bend as it is to the skill of these two pilots.**