



# grampaw pettibone

## Gramp's Mailbag

### Salute to VX-1 Sea King Savers

A malfunction occurred in the retrieval system of a VX-1 *Sea King's* sonobuoy data link antenna during a night mission in mid-September. A decision was made to attempt disconnect of the antenna while the helo maintained a hover.

The procedure required an extremely precise hover with detailed hovering instruction being passed to the pilots by the flight crewmen and safety observers.

Constant communication between the pilots, maintenance crew and safety observers was maintained via handheld survival radios. Efforts of the team were directed by the command duty officer while the two maintenance crewmen worked diligently underneath the hovering *Sea King* to



effect disconnect of the antenna. This was accomplished in less than 20 minutes, allowing the helo to land safely.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Hoverin' helos! The professional efforts and superb coordination of the individuals involved in this evolution prevented potentially severe damage, not to mention harm, to the crew. You won't find all the answers in the books, boys, and far too often departures from standard procedures result in disaster. However, these gents put their old noggins together, formed a well-thought-out plan, and safely executed same with the precision of a Swiss watchmaker. I firmly believe that sailors not only have more fun – they get more done! Three cheers, and a round for this crew on old Gramps!

### Fox Two – Wingy!

The mission brief called for two aircraft to fly a series of F-4J air



intercepts conducted under the control of the carrier's air intercept controllers. The first four runs were to be head-on attacks into a short range position for a simulated forward-quarter *Sparrow* (AIM-7E) shot. The final run was to be similar, except the "fighter" aircraft would, if fuel permitted, perform a re-attack for a stern quarter simulated *Sparrow* or *Sidewinder* (AIM-9) shot.

The flight leader's F-4J was loaded with one live *Sidewinder* outboard and one simulated *Sparrow* on the port fuselage station. Launch, rendezvous and tanking were normal. Combat checklists were performed as briefed following launch. After proceeding to station, four intercepts were completed with the fighter role being switched after two runs.

During the fifth and final run, vectors were given and a check-switches call was initiated by the lead fighter radar intercept officer (RIO) to his pilot. The pilot indicated over the intercom he had complied. With the simulated *Sparrow* selected, the pilot moved the missile arm/safe switch to arm, to check the ready light circuitry which was confirmed to be illuminated in both cockpits.

For whatever reason, the pilot did not return the arm/safe switch to safe. The ready light stayed on. The bogey aircraft was spotted at 3 to 4 miles, 40 degrees left of nose, 3 to 4 thousand feet low, and traveling in the opposite direction of the fighter aircraft. The lead pilot chose not to simulate the *Sparrow* shot because of the low probability of a successful hit. Instead, he executed a high-G barrel roll to re-attack from astern. During this maneuver the pilot de-selected the dummy *Sparrow* and selected the live *Sidewinder*.

The lead aircraft's RIO attempted to maintain visual contact with the bogey through most of the re-attack. His scan returned to the cockpit to



re-acquire radar lock for range information as the pilot established nose-to-tail bearing on the bogey. Although the pilot did not verbally tell the RIO he had selected the live missile, the RIO noted the illuminated heat light. The RIO did not notice the still-illuminated ready light which is located high and to the right, outside the periphery of his scan.

Range data was passed to the pilot as he maneuvered into final position. Aural tone, indicating that the missile was properly aimed and within launch parameters, was heard by both crewmen. The pilot did not perceive the ready light near the center of his visual field as he transmitted, "Fox Two," and squeezed the trigger.

The missile fired and tracked directly toward the bogey aircraft. The startled crew transmitted, "Break starboard, break starboard!" However, the missile struck and destroyed the wingman's aircraft before the crew could respond. Both crewmen ejected safely and were recovered in approximately 45 minutes.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great jumpin' Jehosaphat! If this don't inflate your wingy's dingy, nothing will! The pilot who fired this missile of misfortune was described as a most energetic, knowledgeable and professional aviator who is an expert in airborne weapon and tactics. How many times has Old Gramps heard this tune? Despite one's superior knowledge and demonstrated capabilities, overzealousness and inattention-to-detail can be downright disastrous in most *any* phase of this aviation business, and particularly so in weapons delivery. Old Gramps firmly believes in "realism" and the "train like you fight" philosophy but this is a little *too* real, gang! The mixing of live and training missiles on the same aircraft has always given Gramps the willies! Arming live missiles during ACM is just plain dumb! This one leaves me cold. But not knowing the aircraft configuration until aircraft man-up doesn't coat me with warm feelings either! A wise man learns from his mistakes; an even wiser chap learns from the mistakes of others.

"You can train like you fight, and score. But I'll be staying out of your site, evermore!" quoth the ravin' wingman, swimming ashore.