



Who's on First?

Three CH-46 helos were en route, overwater at night, from one island air station to another. During the post takeoff join-up, number three was closing on number two with the leader some distance ahead. The Lead had reported he was maintaining 80 knots in a climb to 1,500 feet. Two and three increased airspeed to expedite the rendezvous. There were numerous lights evident from ships below as well as other aircraft in the sky.

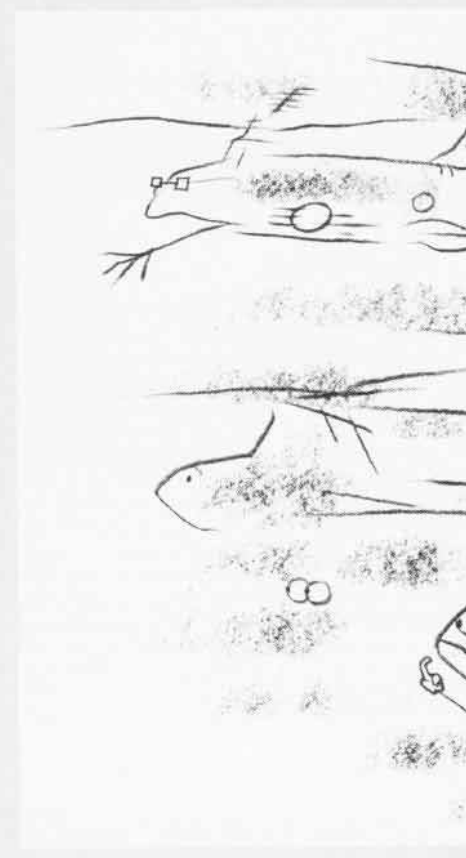
Lead was level at 1,500 feet, 80 knots, when number three reported his altitude as 2,500 feet, and that Lead seemed to be level and ahead of him and number two. Lead's crew chief reported that two and three were passing above and to the right of Lead. Lead spotted his wingmen and commenced a climb to join them. At Lead's request, two and three turned on their searchlights to confirm their position. Two and three became confused when they realized Lead was behind them and that they had apparently been following another aircraft.

Lead told number two to take the lead and that he would join as dash-three. Number two declined because he had no TACAN and then passed through a layer of scattered clouds.

Lead lost sight of two and announced he had the lights of their destination island in sight, and that he was turning right and descending in order to stay VMC (visual meteorological conditions).

Lead requested that number three join him as dash-two and that number two become dash-three. Number three declined due to the darkness and high terrain in the vicinity. Lead then said the line-up would be number three as dash-one, Lead as dash-two and number two as dash-three. Number two acknowledged Lead's join-up call. Lead's copilot observed number two (who was to have been dash three) at Lead's nine o'clock high position.

Number two was apparently confused about who was leading whom but, when his crew chief spotted the two wingmen starboard, he advised the pilots who commenced a right turn. The crew chief turned on cabin lights in order to secure some equipment but was directed by the pilot to extinguish the lights. The crew chief did so, then sat down aft of the starboard gun mount and attached his gunner's belt. Shortly after this, there was a violent impact with the water. The *Sea Knight* had crashed. The

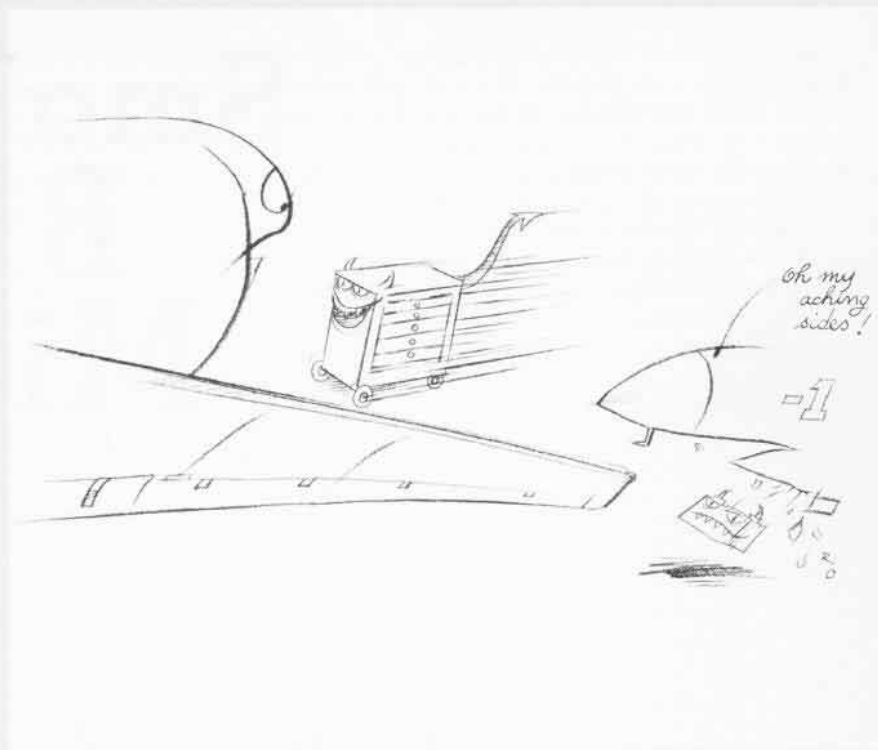
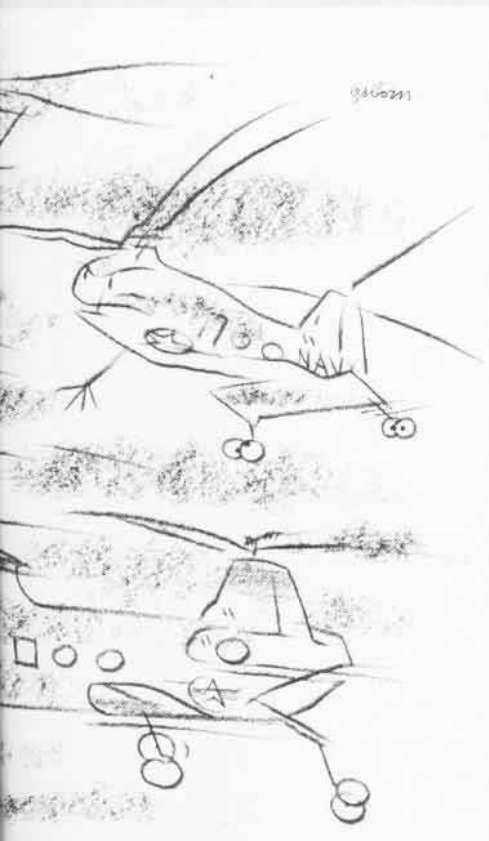


crew chief recalled being underwater before inflating his LPA and floating to the surface. The two pilots were not recovered.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

It's hard to hang the words "pilot error" on any mishap, especially when lives are lost and, true enough, we'll never know for certain why number two flew into the water. Nevertheless, the signs tell me these aviators got themselves disoriented. Sure, there were moving lights below and above. Sure, there was some question as to who and where the leader was. Sure, number two's pilots lacked recent night formation time. Sure, Lead's anti-collision lights weren't working properly. And sure, the aircraft were not equipped with the radar altimeter aural warning system. But there's an everlastin' truth that we who wear the Golden Wings have been taught and must remember: When your mind gets tangled up with distractions like those on this confusing and ultimately tragic night, untangle your mind, rid it of other thoughts, get on the gauges, and fly the aircraft. Above all, fly the aircraft!



Hold that Critter Down, Boys!

Two boobos for thought! Maintenance troops positioned a sizable, roll-around tool cabinet — two by three by four feet — adjacent to and inboard of a *Hawkeye's* port main mount, unchocked. A C-2 *Greyhound* parked next to the E-2 taxied out and flooded the *Hawkeye* with prop wash. The cabinet got under way and struck the fuselage near the LF antenna, causing a six-inch tear in the skin.

Elsewhere, a T-2C was flown on a CQ mission that included multiple passes, one arrestment and a single catapult shot. Fiberglass particles were seen coming from the nosewheel well. The pilot was diverted ashore and during landing rollout a battery fell through the nosewheel well onto the runway, creating FOD which damaged both engines to the tune of over \$40,000.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

In blunder number one, somebody figured the nosewheel and strut would shield the cabinet, permitting it to remain in place. Tell that to the metal-smiths who had to mend the six-inch tear. Ladies and gents, chock or tie

down objects on the flight line. As sure as the sun sets in the west, you know that sooner or later it's gonna get windy out there. And wind, natural or man-made, makes things move.

The second boobo puts the wrong kind of acid in my battery! The sight of a Navy jet spewing stuff out of the nose on rollout ain't my idea of professionalism. Save that scene for biplanes and movies like *It's a Mad Mad Mad World*.

A spare battery had been secured in the *Buckeye's* baggage compartment for a logistics flight to home base. Next day, however, the bird was needed for boat work and "pre-carrierized." (The report writer's word, not mine. It ain't in the dictionary but makes the point.) But maintenance forgot to "pre-carrier" the battery, that is, remove it. All that action on the flattop gave the power box a wall-to-wall workout until, like an angry animal, it broke through the bulkhead and spilt to the deck. Fortunately, the pilot was able to extend (but not retract) the nosewheel. I wonder how many batteries Uncle Sam could buy with \$40 grand.