

Videos and Violations

In the course of duties which involved flying a T-34B, a Naval Aviator, against all regulations and without permission, transported a male civilian, to whom he was related, on two flights. A video camera was carried on these trips to film activities during the sorties.

On the day of the third flight, the pilot collected his relative at the latter's home and together they proceeded to the local airport, where they manned the *Mentor* and took off. The passenger filmed the majority of the flight sequences en route to a destination where the two had lunch with a relative and friend.

The T-34B launched again. On the way to the next stop the video camera was used to record flight over flat desert terrain at an altitude of about 50 feet. The flyers landed in midafternoon on an unattended, unprepared dirt airstrip. They then had dinner with other relatives before returning to the strip for a 1900 launch.

The *Mentor* proceeded north, then turned west, climbing to 1,500 feet. In the climb, the pilot asked for the camera and turned back toward the departure point. Completing the turn, the pilot began a shallow dive, gathering speed to perform a loop, which he initiated at 150 knots.

The loop was not completed. Instead the pilot executed an immelman, topping out at 1,200 feet above ground in a nose high attitude, with 65 knots air speed and 23 inches of manifold pressure. The pilot was apparently recording the maneuver with the camera which, at this point, fell to the cockpit floor.

The aircraft flew straight and level for two or so seconds, dropped off on the right wing, then entered a violent right-hand spin. After one revolution, the spin decreased into a right-hand spiral and the aircraft plummeted steeply toward the ground, striking the earth at about 160 knots. Both individuals were killed on impact. The tape was recovered and used in the subsequent mishap investigation.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Ya know, I sit here in the rocker, simmerin' and sighin' and wonderin' what drives a person to do what this young Naval Aviator did. That fella we see on TV a lot these days, Bill Cosby, does a comedy routine about his kids



and the "brain damage" that causes 'em to do crazy things. Things that drive mom and pop up the wall, down the wall and sideways. Well, brain damage ain't a funny matter. Cosby knows that and handles the subject in a way that listeners know he's not makin' fun of unfortunate folks who suffer from the real thing.

And I don't for a minute think this aviator or his relative had brain damage. But this episode sure boggles the brain cells. I can't figure why a fellow who had to have a lot on the ball to even earn a shot at gold wings (and who went through all the work and study that it takes to make the grade), goes up there, busts the rules — not once but several times — and wastes all the effort and determination it took to get into the cockpit in the first place.

In this case, it seems that the camera ain't at fault for jammin' the controls. The pilot just didn't have enough altitude to recover from what started as a loop and ended up somethin' else. Looks like he tried to film himself in action and fly at the same time. It cost him and his relative their lives.

I'm still simmerin' and sighin' and wonderin'. Are there others out there thinking along the same lines as this Naval Aviator? I sure hope not.

Final Fly-by

An SH-60B had completed underway manual deck handling tests aboard an FFG. The crew manned up for the return

hop to shore, pilot in command (PIC) in the left seat, pilot at controls (PAC) in the right, and aircrewman in the sensor operator's seat. The ship's C.O. asked an officer from the *Seahawk* det "if the aircrew would fly around the ship, so [the crew] could see the aircraft in flight." The officer replied, "We have a little show all planned."

The *Seahawk* climbed out ahead of the ship. "Standby, we're coming around for a low fly-by," radioed the PAC to the ship. The crew made a level turn back toward the FFG. Then, wings level, the *Seahawk* entered a dive, developing a high descent rate from about 1,000 feet altitude.

Approaching the water, the crew initiated a level off but the *Seahawk* struck the sea, approximately a quarter mile off the FFG's starboard bow, tail wheel first, followed instantly by the tail section. The helicopter climbed to 200 feet, yawing right. Anticipating another impact, the aircrewman jettisoned his window and braced himself. This time the SH-60B hit 100 feet from the ship, slightly forward of the bridge, in a near vertical descent, nose low, left wing down. The aircraft sank immediately. The two pilots were killed. The aircrewman egressed through his escape window at an unknown depth, made his way to the surface, grabbed ahold of some floating debris and inflated his life preserver. The ship's whale boat retrieved him within 10 minutes.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

My blood's still boilin' over this one! What a waste! Showtime on the high seas translated to tragedy.

The investigators learned that this same crew, five days earlier, while operating from the helicopter landing trainer (HLT), performed some other unrequired maneuvers: right sideward flight past the HLT at 75-100 feet, 20-25 knots; rearward flight within the same parameters; a high-speed, low-level pass followed by a second one which prompted a "knock it off" call from the HLT.

That evening, the dangers of low-level maneuvering flight were discussed with the pilots.

Didn't do much good. These flyers



Grampaw Pettibone says:

This one frazzles the mind. There's a beginning and a murky end to the story, but no middle. And I don't like mysteries when it comes to accidents, especially fatal ones.

It had been a long day for the crews and there was a holiday dinner event scheduled at home base. Get-home-itis comes to mind. So does crew fatigue. Also, the crew filed VFR into a known period of darkness and to a facility that required IFR clearance at night. Also, formation training was not included in the FRS or squadron syllabus, although the C-1A NATOPS lists it as optional. So, the crew had some things workin' against 'em.

In my dreams — nightmares, really — big black question marks hover over the spot in the sea where the planes went down. Did the C-1s collide? Did one have mechanical trouble and the other inadvertently impact the water trying to maintain visual contact? Did weather do them in? If so, why?

Saltin' the wound is the fact that, in the past three years, six other Navy aircraft and their crews have been lost — all but one over water — without a trace. Real enigmas. We can only speculate.

SecNav is lookin' deep into procuring recoverable flight incident recorders for many of our planes. These may solve some puzzles and ultimately save some planes and people. All I can tell ya for now is, do whatever you can — and that means flyin' by the book — to avoid becomin' one of the mysteries.



were talented and aggressive, but sound judgment and professionalism took a holiday. My shoulders are saggin' lower over that.

I'll sing the same song and hope he or she out there who may be otherwise inclined, resists the temptation: DO NOT FLAT HAT! EVER! NEVER! DON'T!

in the water about 160 miles from the C-1s' departure point along their planned course. The damage of various survival items from the rafts reflected severe impact or deep submerged overpressure. It was concluded that both C-1s had crashed. All aboard, including six crew members and a passenger, were lost.

Midair in the Med?

A pair of C-1 Traders, on a VFR flight plan, launched from one shore station in the Mediterranean to home base at another. They joined in loose trail and proceeded on course. Forecast weather included a partial layer of clouds below their 9,500-foot cruising altitude and broken layers above it. The horizon was occasionally obscured by clouds. All crew members were properly qualified for the flight but they had been on duty for more than 11 hours. The aircraft did not make it to the destination.

Degraded telephone communications between launch and departure points delayed confirmation that the aircraft had actually departed as filed. Ultimately, it was decided that the planes were overdue at home field and a search began.

Next morning, a P-3 Orion crew spotted two life rafts and some debris

