

## Is This Trip Necessary?

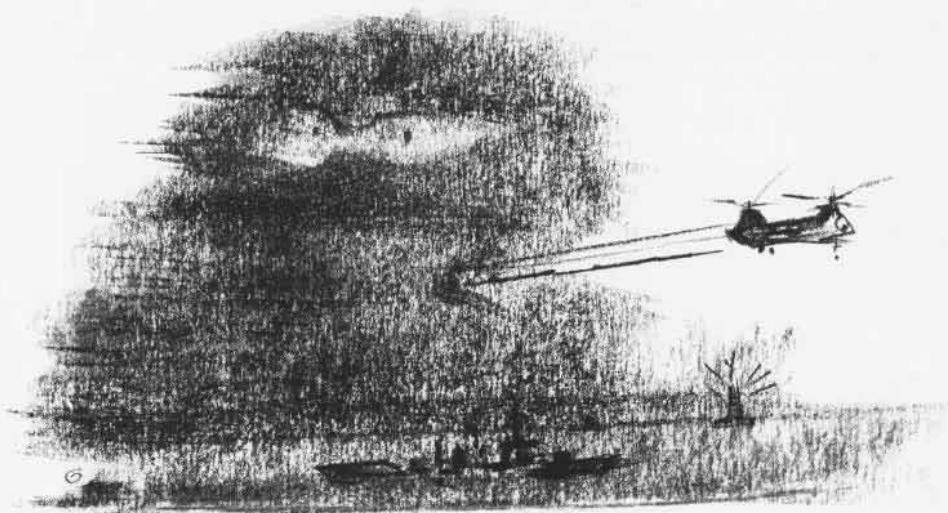
The aviator was summoned from bed aboard a "Gator" ship to fly a short-notice night mission in a CH-46. This was a combat situation in the Middle East and the pilot was to transport a key officer and his staff to another ship in preparation for anticipated hostilities the next day.

- Because of the urgency, the copilot and a "temporary" helicopter aircraft commander (HAC) had turned up the aircraft. The HAC took over and asked the copilot if he knew where they were to go. He didn't. Had the aircraft been preflighted? He didn't know that either, but it was assumed the crew chief had done so. The passengers came aboard and the pilots made an instrument takeoff after which they flipped down their night vision goggles (NVG) and headed for the designated ship. (The pilots, both first-tour aviators, had logged 50 hours of "goggle" time in recent months.) They could make out the lights of a distant city but the rest of the horizon was a very thin line.

The crew encountered radio difficulties on a secure network so the Combat Information Center passed nav data to them in the clear. Seven of the nine passengers, including the key of-



ficer, were to go to a destroyer 100 miles away, the other two to a cruiser about 75 miles from the destroyer. Unwritten squadron standard operating procedures precluded landing a CH-46 on a cruiser at night.



*It was a dark & stormy night!*

Because of the distance involved, the helo would have to take on fuel from the destroyer. The pilot discussed the matter with the key officer who, though not an aviator, had a good understanding of the HAC's concern and concurred that the leg to the cruiser should be aborted since the most important "operational necessity" was to get the officer and his staffers to the destroyer. The helo returned to home ship and landed on a spot which had been divided in half to increase the number of helicopters which could take off and land at one time. This had been approved due to contingency operations. The two passengers disembarked, the CH-46 was topped off with fuel, the crew received updated nav information, and they launched again.

Although the secure network was still inoperative, the pilot decided it was essential to get the key officer in place because of the next day's anticipated encounter. All exterior lights were turned off and the CH-46 proceeded over the sea at low altitude. Fifteen minutes later the *Sea Knight* was challenged by an "allied" ship, altered heading at its request for a few minutes, then resumed course.

Unsure of his position and unable to verify it because Navy ships had secured their TACANs (tactical air navigation) in deference to impending hostilities, the pilot conferred with the copilot and crew chief. They decided to continue because offshore oil rigs, which they had marked on nav charts, were sufficiently illuminated to use as checkpoints. As they neared one of the platforms, however, the CH-46 was "painted" by target acquisition radar. The pilot executed an immediate turn away and the threat dissipated.

Anxious to fix his position, the pilot risked a ultra-high frequency broadcast in the clear to request that the destination destroyer activate its TACAN. There was no answer. He tried home plate. No answer. Finally, he transmitted on GUARD and two minutes later the destroyer responded. A heading correction was made using the destroyer's TACAN and the CH-46 proceeded toward it and landed.

The passengers disembarked, the

Sea Knight was refueled, and the crew flew uneventfully back to their ship.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Shouldn't happen! It was important that the officer get to the tin can, because he was a major player in "callin' the shots" in the next day's fighting (which, incidentally, turned out to be a success).

The haste that allows aircrews to leap into the air without a preflight and complete operational mission brief has got to be seriously questioned. Would the few minutes saved been worth the cost of a helo in the drink or this key officer and his staff taking refresher swimming lessons, if they survived at all?

Where were the people in command? Why didn't they better prepare this crew and provide them information and guidance? Sure the pressure was on, but somebody at the top let these people down and put them out there on a string.

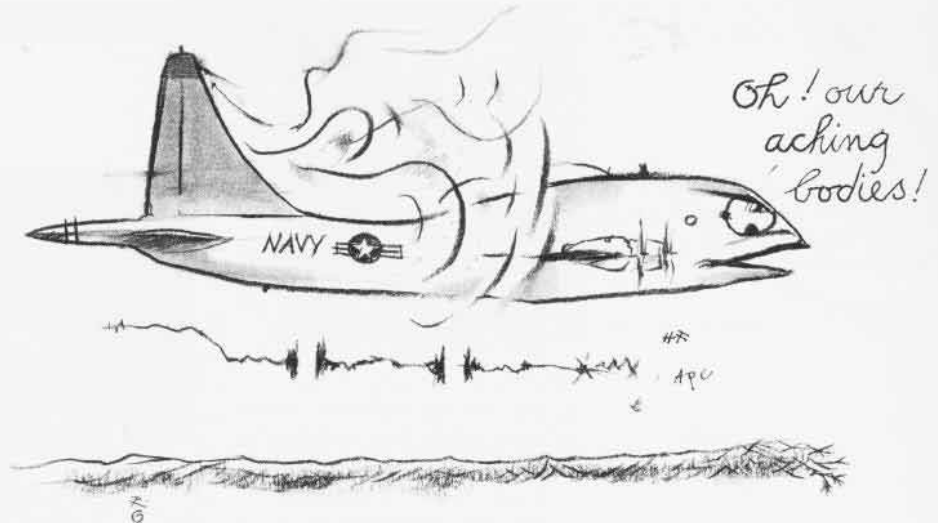
There are gonna be days – and nights – like this, but not very often, I hope. We train our aviators to be tigers. But, they've gotta be well-informed tigers!

## Bird to Paradise

The P-3 crew was to fly from NAS East Coast to NAS West Islands for a professional conference. They planned the journey thoroughly. A week prior to departure, the maintenance officer told the pilot he would be flying an *Orion* fresh from SDLM (scheduled depot level maintenance). The maintenance officer wanted the crew, which included three patrol plane commanders to wring out all the systems. "Bring back a stack of gripes on this aircraft," the pilot was told.

Just before takeoff, the number three engine disconnect pressure low light came on. The P-3 returned to the line. Repairs were made and the *Orion* launched.

The P-3 landed at NAS West Coast. Prior to shutdown the pilot directed a recheck of high-frequency (HF) radios,



radar, inertials, etc. – systems that would be essential for the next day's over-ocean leg. All checked 4.0.

Next morning the airfield was shrouded in fog. On preflight, none of the gear that checked OK the previous day was operative. Both HF radios and the radar were hard down. The local NAS had depot level maintenance available, and several hours later the aircraft was mission capable once again. The fog had lifted and the *Orion* took off for the islands.

During the descent into the destination field, the starboard aft observer cautioned the pilots that the HF wire antenna on his side had separated from the vertical stabilizer and was slapping against the side of the aircraft.

Although there was no structural damage observed after shutdown at NAS West Islands, the P-3's brand-new paint job was scarred.

After the conference the P-3 crew was about to take off for the return trip east. The auxiliary power unit door would not close, however, and the *Orion* taxied back for repairs.

The exhaust door actuator had failed in the fully open position and a supply system check revealed none available on station. The pilot decided the best alternative was to bolt the door closed. It took a search of several squadrons to obtain the correct part.

Those repairs made, the P-3 finally launched. But on climbing out, both HF radios and the radar quit. The pilot decided to hold 100 miles east of the departure point and burn down to landing weight. It was about midnight and the P-3 was in a solid overcast at 15,000 feet. Icing was so severe that

constant wing deicers were required to keep the wings clean.

The crew descended below the overcast, dumped fuel, and returned to the base for more repairs.

Taxiing in to the line, both HF's and the radar mysteriously fixed themselves and began working. The crew reevaluated the situation, checked the time remaining with respect to crew rest requirements, and decided to continue the nonstop flight to NAS East Coast. They topped off with fuel and took off.

For the first two hours of the hop, the equipment worked. Then the P-3 lost HF communications with the air traffic control center. The crew raised an overhead Pan Am airliner and passed position reports through it until reaching the mainland. Ultimately, they landed at NAS East Coast, just under the maximum "crew day" with just over minimum "on top" fuel.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Ole Gramps ain't so sure its positive thinkin' tellin' the aviators to "bring back a stack of gripes" on the aircraft. And I can't tell what they did with that antenna wire, from the report I got. Sometimes those high-frequency radios worked and sometimes they didn't.

But I do know this. It's best to have a dress rehearsal before opening night. A thorough, local test hop woulda saved a lotta grief for this crew. And for the metalsmiths. I wouldna wanted be around when they saw the scraped paint and that bolt in the exhaust door!