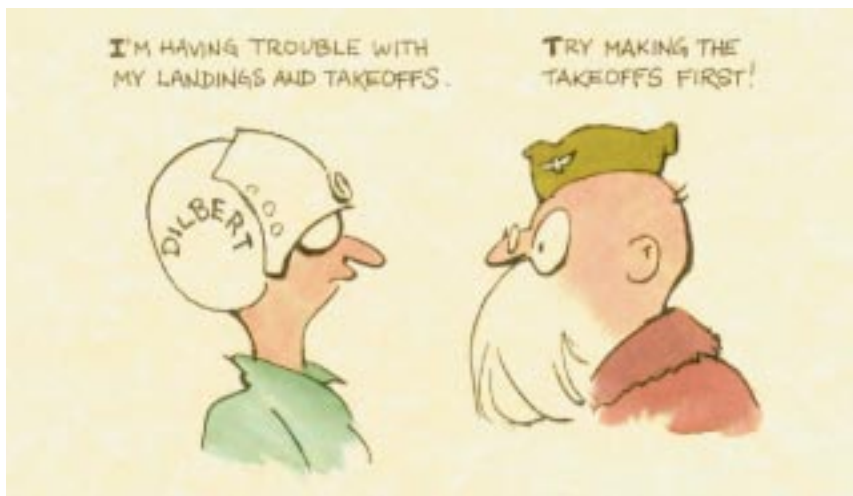


Illustrations by **Ted Wilbur**



Prowler Plummet

Two EA-6B *Prowlers* launched on an over-water, defensive tactics (DEFTAC) training flight to regain one of the pilots' DEFTAC aircrew currency. The electronic countermeasures officer (ECMO) 1, in the right front seat, was the instructor, and ECMOs 2 and 3 occupied the rear seats of the mishap aircraft.

After some routine maneuvering in the working area, the *Prowlers* separated to set up for a head-on engagement. The aircraft then turned toward each other and merged at 375 knots and 16,000 feet.

The pilot in training began a steep, descending left turn after the merge, with 100 degrees angle of bank, 15 degrees nose down. After 115 degrees of turn it appeared the pilot was experiencing either G-LOC—loss of consciousness due to G forces—or medical incapacitation. Angle of bank increased to 150 degrees and the nose dropped further, nearly 60 degrees.

The flight leader in the second *Prowler* radioed, "Watch the deck. Knock it off, deck." There was no acknowledgment.

Descending through 5,000 feet, the out-of-control EA-6B rolled wings level. Speed brakes remained retracted and the aircraft penetrated an undercast. Shortly thereafter, command ejection was initiated. ECMOs 2 and 3

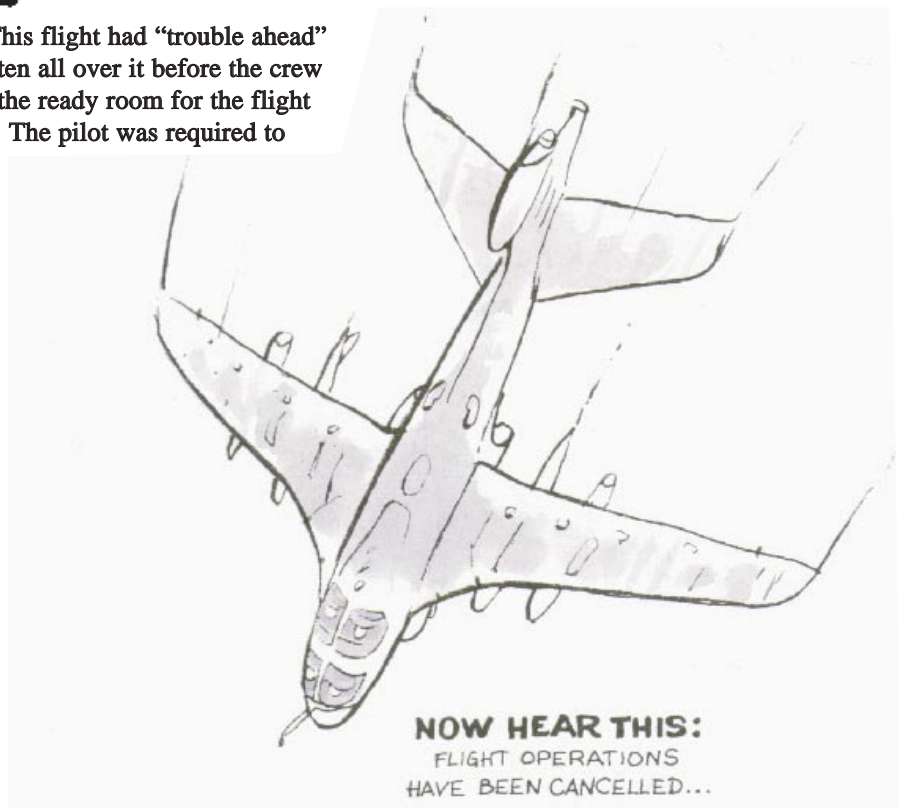
ejected successfully, although they sustained compression fractures and flail injuries due to the high speed of the aircraft and improper body positioning.

ECMO 1 ejected and achieved parachute deployment but was fatally injured when the left canopy release assembly slapped the left rear of his helmet. The pilot was lost at sea with the aircraft.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

This flight had "trouble ahead" written all over it before the crew left the ready room for the flight line. The pilot was required to



have an out-of-controlled-flight operational flight trainer period and an aerobatics flight within seven days of the DEFTAC, but received neither! Plus, ECMO 1's instructor qualification had lapsed six months earlier. We'll never know what actually immobilized the pilot.

Seems to Ole Gramps the crew just got complacent—and that led to delayed action in the sky. Can't do that in a high-performance jet. The squadron was slack, too, in lettin' the flight go in the first place.

I know our troops are workin' harder than ever out there. We're goin' through some tough times in Naval Air with the demanding operational tempo, among other things. But all the more reason to go by the book. We've got to avoid such horror shows as this!