

Tale of the Tiger

A two-plane section of F-5E *Tiger IIs* was opposing a two-plane section of F/A-18 *Hornets* on a dissimilar air combat maneuvering training flight. Immediately following the initial pass between the adversary fighters (F-5s) and the F/A-18s, the F-5 leader lost sight of his wingman. As the F-5 leader continued his turning pursuit of the *Hornets*, he did not transmit he was “blind,” that is, he had no visual contact on his wingman.

As he tracked toward the *Hornets*, the F-5 leader radioed his wingman, “Can you switch?”

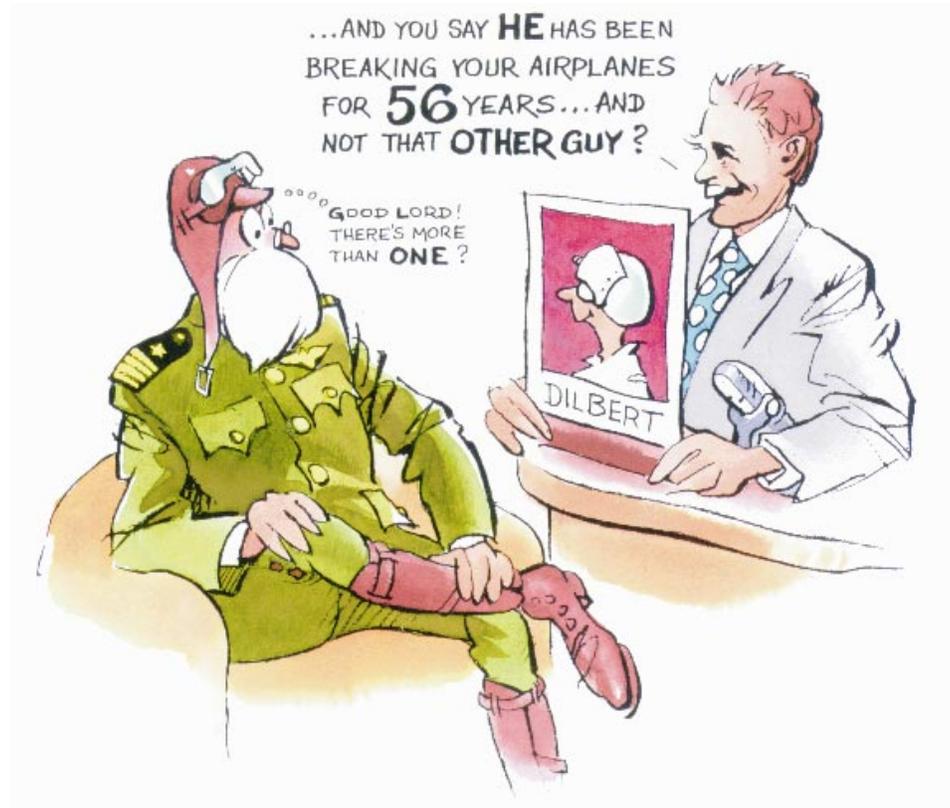
“Roger, tally high *Hornet*,” responded the wingman, shifting his pursuit from the *Hornet* he was after to the second F/A-18. However, the F-5 leader did not hear this transmission. The F-5 wingman, turning hard left into the F-5 lead from one-mile distance, now saw both F/A-18s.

The F-5 leader radioed again, “Can you switch?” His wingman answered, “Roger, tally visual, I’m high,” while continuing a left turn into the leader. At this point, the wingman anticipated a close pass

over the leader and suspected the leader was blind to him. The wingman broadcast again, “I’m high,” still in the left turn toward the F-5 leader. A third time he broadcast, “I’m high.”

The wingman, now blind himself, went over the top of his leader.

Sensing he was too close, he shut his eyes and braced for impact. An instant later, however, he believed he was clear of the leader and rolled right, expecting the F-5 leader to appear out the right front of his windscreen. At this point, the two aircraft collided.



The leader's canopy shattered, with shards of Plexiglas hitting him in the face. He ejected immediately and parachuted safely to earth where he was rescued. The wingman's canopy departed the aircraft, which suffered some other damage but was flyable. A third F-5 joined on the wingman for a visual inspection and noted damage to the right side of the wingman's *Tiger II* and slight damage to the nose. After a controllability check, the wingman made a straight-in approach to home field and landed safely.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Gol dang it! When you lose sight of one another while mixin' it up on an air-to-air mission, say so! All along, the wingman believed the leader knew where he was, when he didn't. The leader was so absorbed with the *Hornets* that he made no calls to indicate he had lost sight of number two. To make matters worse, he used nonstandard terminology when he transmitted "Can you switch?" That's a phrase subject to interpretation. And when you're engaged in high-speed, steep-turnin' flight, there ain't much time to interpret.

The leader should have "knocked it off" when he didn't get the proper response from his wingman. And in this case, it took two to tango! Why didn't the wingman yell "uncle" as he watched this situation develop? No reason I can come up with!

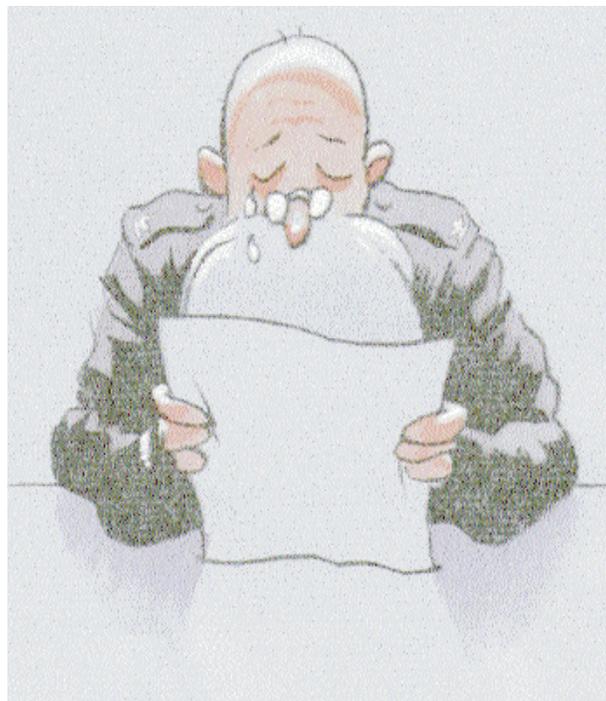
After the collision, the leader quickly ejected. Under the circumstances, it's hard to fault him for this. However, it was noted that the *Tiger II* continued to fly for some time in what appeared to be controlled flight before finally impacting the ground.

Bein' aggressive is good. Bein' aggressive and knowin' where all the players are is better—and

mandatory.

Sea Knight Nightmare

An HH-46D *Sea Knight* launched from an air station on a night vision goggle (NVG) amphibious search-and-rescue support mission. The helo landed aboard an amphibious assault ship (LPH) for refueling. The ship's air boss tasked the helo with investigating a civilian surface vessel six miles away. The HH-46D took off and because it was nighttime the crew donned their NVGs en route. The LPH had not switched lighting



for NVG operations because another helo was conducting "unaided" night deck landing qualifications.

The *Sea Knight* located the surface vessel and began a 60-foot doppler hover to facilitate investigation. Upon completion of its low-hover surveillance, the HH-46D commenced a climbout from the doppler hover. The helo circled over the surface ship and was then cleared by Helicopter Direction Control to return to the LPH.

During the short return, the crew had to "degoggle," reconfig-

ure the cockpit's lighting for unaided flight, and complete the post-doppler and the landing checklists. At 4.5 miles, the pilots were told to switch to the tower frequency. This command was acknowledged. But, shortly thereafter, several attempts were made by Helicopter Direction Control and the air boss to communicate with the *Sea Knight*, without result.

The air boss launched a helicopter to search the HH-46D's last known position. This helo discovered wreckage and debris in the water. The *Sea Knight* crew had apparently become disoriented and crashed into the sea. All four personnel on board were killed.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sufferin' *Sea Knights!* A deadly mix: too much tasking and not enough prep.

The crew was NOT CURRENT for NVG operations, night ship landings or night doppler over-water approaches. How about that! Yet, there they were, out there tryin' to complete the mission. There was no sign of aircraft trouble. Evidence indicated the copilot was at the controls at the time of impact, and had initiated full aft cycle just before slammin' into the sea. Therefore, the pilot in command was probably workin' the landing checklist and other items, too occupied to caution the copilot that big trouble was ahead.

Why do we have training requirements if we don't abide by 'em? Too much of the "can do, will do" spirit, maybe! Looks like the crew was "task saturated" and lost situational awareness down low—without maneuvering room. The price for that was four precious lives and an aircraft.