

# Below in Headwork, Above in Luck

By Lt. Dave Davis

It was dark, 0100. I was wired, wide-awake and straight and level. I was in my rack as all Sea Sprite H2Ps should be. Lying there tossing and turning, I couldn't ignore the thought of my OinC complaining about how the HACs and H2Ps haven't submitted any safety articles. Yeah, I know that's not what a Sailor usually thinks about while in his rack. Nonetheless, it was on my mind, and I couldn't shake it. As my thoughts wandered through the million or so poor decisions I have made and how luck has bailed me out on so many occasions, I came across an incident that could have cost me my life and quite possibly the HAC his papers.

It was 10 years back when I was an AW2 in the mighty SH-2F, with 750 hours or so under my belt. You know I had plenty of luck just to be in the air that long in the Sea Sprite. We had been flying SSC missions in and out of the Arabian Gulf. One evening, we were tasked with the dusk patrol. Eventually, boredom overcame the whole crew. As we tried to decide how to liven up the monotony of the dull mission, the other crewman and I came up with the idea that it would be a great time to take a little swim. I said, "Great! I'll go first." As I undressed down to my boxers, I thought how cool it was going to be to tell everyone I had gone swimming hundreds of miles from land.

The pilots started the approach. As I sat in the door waiting for the crewman to give me the three taps for "Jump, jump, jump," I scanned the ocean for sharks. The crewman gave me the jump signal, but my sixth sense told me to wave it off. I told my partner to hold and give me a second to check one more time for sharks and those things you look for before you exit a perfectly good helicopter. Finally convinced this was

a good idea, I was ready. The pilots made another approach, and the crewman gave me two taps. I anticipated the third tap, but I didn't jump because at that moment the aircraft jerked hard left, then right. My partner quickly grabbed me by the waist and pulled me in the door before I could jump. As we climbed, I put on my flight gear and hooked up to the ICS to find out we had lost all hydraulic pressure to the flight controls. Yes, fortunately, the SH-2F could fly without hydraulic boost.

When landing back at the ship, we shut down and did our postflight inspection. There was hydraulic fluid all over the left side of the helicopter. We also found one of the main-hydraulic lines had ruptured. If I had jumped a second early or on the first pass, the hydraulic system would have failed with me in the water, and I would have had no way to get back onboard the helicopter because the hoist ran on hydraulic power. If the system had failed just as I was jumping, I might have been pitched overboard and injured.

Hmm...all for a chance to swim in bath water filled with sea snakes.

As I sit out here in the same part of the world, I am preparing for my HAC board and have to ask myself, "What would I do now if I was the HAC and my two AWs asked if they could do something brilliant like take a dip?"

I know what my answer would be. 🦅  
Lt. Davis flies with HSL-48.

