



Navy photo by Matthew Thomas
photo composite by Yvonne Dawson

Stupid Is *As* Stupid Does

by Lt. Tim Kinsella

For those of us lucky enough to have deployed to the Persian Gulf, we all know how monotonous life becomes. Especially when your ship is “swinging from the hook,” waiting for the Marines to finish whatever exercise they happen to be doing on the beach that particular week. As SAR pilots on a gator, we always were looking for something to break the pattern or liven

things up: climbing to angels 10 to get some cool air, doing the odd medevac, throwing in an EOD Ex every now and again, or maybe even a VBSS if we felt like it. Whatever it was, we didn’t mind, just as long as it got us off the ship for a few hours every day.

While floating off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, we noticed an airstrip called Al Hamra on the beach. We decided we could

knock out some runway work, considering none of us had practiced single-engine or autorotation procedures since we'd left home guard three months earlier. We cleared it with TACRON, and the next day we were on our merry way to Al Hamra so we could take full advantage of this opportunity.

Off to the runway we went. It was very long, about 8,000 feet, had a control tower, and was literally in the middle of nowhere. No facilities, no hangars, no nothing, except a runway, the tower, and a little house. We began our adventure with simple stuff like running landings and precision approaches and soon moved on to emergency procedures. The HAC decided he wanted to practice engine failures while hovering out of ground effect, so we began to set up for the emergency.

The Gulf is always hot in the summertime, but apparently this was a banner year for the

decaying, and the HAC was yelling a string of expletives.

He tried to get Nr under control with little success. I threw the engine back into "fly," but still the helicopter and Nr continued to fall. In fact, Nr fell so low that the generators dropped off line, and I could actually watch the rotor blades go by, one by one. We dropped all the way down to 45 percent Nr, and I was sure the nosewheel strut was going to come crashing up through the center console when we hit the ground. I looked over at the HAC, who had the collective in his armpit and was doing his best to eliminate any drift so we wouldn't tip over when we landed. We hit the deck, with an almighty thump. The helicopter rattled a bit, the engine spooled back up, and Nr rapidly rose to 100 percent.

The crewman jumped out, inspected the aircraft and, amazingly, found no damage. We then debriefed what had happened and thanked our lucky stars that the H-46 is such a sturdy aircraft. Everybody knew why we had fallen to the ground like a rock: Because of the extreme heat, the power required exceeded the power available from one engine. More importantly, we had failed to recognize one of the key facets of ACT: situational awareness. We all knew the effect of heat on our performance, yet none of us acknowledged this fact before we began our maneuver. We had neglected to brief the practice emergency before starting it, and a near-catastrophe resulted. The HAC's ability to land the aircraft squarely and without drift helped us avoid bending or breaking the helo.

We could have done several things beforehand to control this practice EP. We could have tried single-engine-in-flight procedures to see if we actually were single-engine capable. We should have briefed this emergency before the flight, using our performance computation card. And we certainly should have used better headwork. 

Lt. Kinsella flies with HC-11.

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heat index. The flight deck was approaching 150 degrees Fahrenheit, and the outside-temperature gauge in the cockpit was off the scale. You soon will see that single-engine work was not a great idea.

The HAC pulled into a 75-foot hover, instructed me to pull back the No. 1 engine, and ran through the procedures. When we practice in the benign, 70-degree environment of San Diego, the technique is to pause for a moment with the collective to allow the rotor rpm to decay, simulating an engine failure. This is exactly what the HAC did. I could even hear him saying over the ICS, "OK, pausing with the collective." By the time he had finished saying "collective," we had plummeted about 40 feet, the rotor speed (Nr) was rapidly