



Tomcat in the Break, Seahawk on Final

by *LCdr. Scott Wolfe*

I was a typical jaygee—confident and always ready to fly. We were in the Puerto Rico op area doing workups. Our Aegis cruiser was on the Vieques gun range, so we took the opportunity to get away from the ship and get some unit training. I was in the left seat, while the HAC (my OinC) was in the right seat. He let me fly because we weren't doing any tactical events, and I needed to get some precision approaches under my belt before my upcoming instrument check.

Our radar controller was doing a good job. Although the weather was CAVU, I kept my head down to simulate IMC as best I could. In the meantime, a carrier air wing was returning to Roosevelt Roads after an exercise. As I was about two miles from touchdown, doing 90 knots, my HAC surprised me with, "Up, up!"

I looked over to try to see what he was telling me, and I saw the nose of an F-14 coming straight for us, about 500 feet away, level with us at our 3 o'clock. His gear was down and he looked to be in a right turn. (Actually, he was at the 90 for the VFR pattern.)

My OinC grabbed the controls and yanked the stick back. The F-14 nosed over slightly as we started to climb over him. As

the Tomcat flew below us, I saw the pilot's helmet, then the RIO's helmet, then a lot of gray F-14 fill my chin bubble.

The pilot must have cut power to get below us, and he must have also leveled his wings because he overshot the runway and looked like he was going to run into the mountain to the left of the runway. I waited for two chutes, but the fighter cleared the mountain and landed.

We had a nice chat with the controller and the tower about why they hadn't told us about the traffic and why the F-14 had been cleared in the first place when we were on final. They swore it would never happen again and were sorry. It would have been too late if my alert pilot hadn't kept his head on a swivel.

Later that night, I talked to one of the F-14 crewmen at the club. He had been Dash 3 on the flight. Apparently, the CAG had been in Dash 1, with the squadron XO in Dash 2. CAG had wanted to make a high-speed break, so, with tower's clearance, they had come in at 400 knots. Dash 2 was the crew that had nearly merged with our SH-60B.

During the flight debrief, the XO had told the lieutenant pilot in Dash 3 that it really hadn't been that close. I wonder if he really saw us. After they cleared us, we called our ATACO and asked him to look out for us as well. That lesson has helped keep me out of trouble more than a few times now.

VFR or IFR, we need to rely on our own eyes to stay alive. 

LCdr. Wolfe flies with HSL-48.