

PIREPS 'R' US

(or) I Give Myself
Very Good Advice

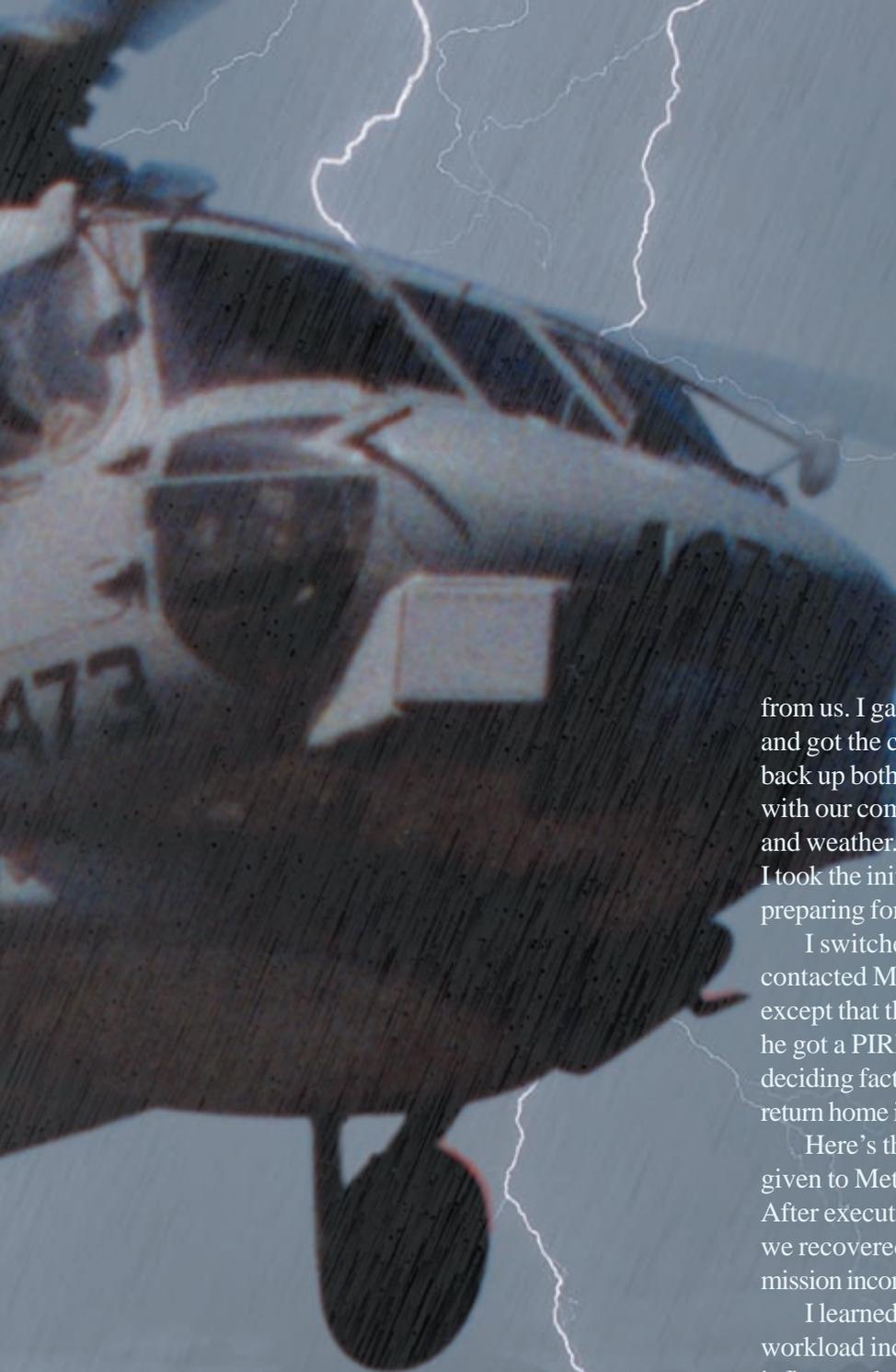
by Lt. Phil Webb

It was funny. Actually, as I sit here safe on deck several months after the event, it was downright hilarious. At the time, however, the situation in which the crew of Hellfire 03 found themselves revealed a serious breakdown of aircrew coordination.

The weather at first didn't seem too bad—a typical December evening in Japan, with low overcast at about a thousand feet, scattered rain showers and T-storms all about, freezing level at 3,000 feet, and lightning every-

where. Ops normal for the Kanto Plain. Our mission was to hone our USW skills by firing up our onboard training system (the Deployable Proficiency Trainer, or DPT) and prosecuting a USW problem.

We headed south and went feet wet over Sagami Wan Bay. It quickly became apparent that this area would be unworkable due to a huge storm cell hovering right off the coastline. Not to be denied our valuable training, we repositioned approximately 10 miles to the east over Tokyo



from us. I gave them a complete PIREP on our conditions and got the current weather at home field. When I came back up both radios, I found the HAC was still conversing with our compadres to the southwest about workable areas and weather. Then the HAC decided to call Metro himself. I took the initiative to get ATIS information and start preparing for our eventual return to Atsugi.

I switched off the radio the HAC was up as he contacted Metro. He got the same story I had received, except that the field had since gone IFR. And, of course, he got a PIREP for the local area, which proved to be the deciding factor in his decision to abort the mission and return home immediately.

Here's the amusing part: he got the PIREP I had just given to Metro, a fact neither of us realized at the time. After executing an actual PAR down to just above mins, we recovered no worse for wear, early, and with our mission incomplete.

I learned several lessons from this flight. When pilot workload increases and outside factors creep in and influence the flight, situational awareness can be easily lost. It is an all-hands, all-crew effort to maintain situational awareness in the cockpit. I should have remained up both radios and said something when we received *my* PIREP from Metro. Using clear, concise and precise radio and ICS calls, and having a good communications plan inside the aircraft, goes a long way toward keeping everyone well-informed. We knew what the weather was, but it took someone outside the aircraft to repeat it to us for our communications loop to become complete. This instance gave us a good chuckle in the debrief, but it could have easily been avoided. 🦅

Lt. Webb flies with HSL-51, and is a member of Detachment Four.

Bay. The weather wasn't as bad, but we continued to skirt low clouds and rain showers. We knew the prudent thing to do was to keep an eye on the weather and update home field conditions frequently. The USW problem proceeded according to plan, but about half way into the problem, the conditions at home field deteriorated rapidly. The situation inside the cockpit started to deteriorate as well.

We decided to break off training and tune up Metro for the complete picture at home field. The HAC tasked me to call Metro while he coordinated with one of our other helos also working the local area. We were now monitoring and talking on different frequencies. Metro requested a PIREP