Ã¢â‚¬Å“US Bloodied in IraqÃ¢â‚¬Â•

Description

What a wonderfully deceptive headline to greet you the day after a helicopter crashes in Iraqi killing 30 Marines and one Sailor. It was on the front of the Tampa Tribune in the driveway this morning.

The article is about the crash, not some ambush, or firefight casualty situation. There is no indication of hostile action, but it seems the press wonÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t pass up an opportunity to blame commonplace accidents on what they believe is a failed geo-political policy of the President they love to hate.

Amazingly enough, just a few weeks back, there was no similar story when the NavyÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s SEAHAWK crashed in Indonesia while coming in to land and deliver aid to the tsunami victims. Based on the reporting this morning, IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢m sure they could have somehow linked the SH-60s problem to the stinginess of the United States, but thankfully, they didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t.

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An unfortunate, yet well understood fact by just about anyone with any understanding of aircraft, is that helicopters are incredibly complex marvels of modern engineering. In simplistic terms, itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s thousands of vibrating parts, all trying to head one way under the direction of a human pilot. In addition to this degree of complexity, add the complexity of the human mind, then add some bad flying conditions. Yes, there it is, a recipe for disaster. More often than not, the helo pilots carry the day and achieve success, but sometimes, they are on the other end of the statistics and become the subject of the next aviation safety report.

I really wanted to fly, and while my idea of flying was to have been the real life pilot that they used to model the character of Maverick in Ã¢â‚¬Å“Top Gun,Ã¢â‚¬Â• I did grab stick time whenever I could. I managed to actually get about an hour at the controls of a CH-46 SEA KNIGHT, which is a large aircraft, with two main rotors, so I have a little idea about what itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s like to fly one of those. I have more time in the pilotÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s seat of fixed wing stuff, from Cessnas to TA-4 SKYHAWKs, so I can compare and contrast the fixed versus rotary wing experience. In addition to actual control time, I spent a few hours sitting between the pilot and co-pilot of CH-46s, while they practiced vertical replenishment (VERTREP) work at sea. On top of all of that, I have hundreds of rides in Army and Navy helicopters as a passenger behind me, many of which I only rode up in them, then took care of the landing myself. I hung around with the Ã¢â‚¬Å“zoomiesÃ¢â‚¬Â• at every chance I got.

What I know about flight is this: There isnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t any such thing as a Ã¢â‚¬Å“perfectly good airplane.Ã¢â‚¬Â• Stop anyone on the street with any life experience and they will have to admit they have heard news reports of those Ã¢â‚¬Å“perfectly good airplanesÃ¢â‚¬Â• falling out of the sky with little or no notice to the flight crew. HereÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s the salient point: Aviation accidents happen. Lives are lost and property is damaged and lawyers make lots of money as a result.

What I know about flying helicopters is this: ItÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s hard and dangerous work. This is not to say flying fixed wing stuff isnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t dangerous, but when you do that hover thing, itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s an incredible load on the pilots mental capacity. IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢m sure itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s right up there with night carrier landings. IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ve not had the opportunity to land aboard an aircraft carrier at night, but from

all accounts, thatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s the most intense flying experience in the world, as pretty much any pilot will attest to. For some Ã¢â‚¬Å“I was thereÃ¢â‚¬Â• material on this subject, Neptunus Lex has written about it on his blog. Regardless as to how much fun it was to give the embarked helicopter pilots a hard time during my shipboard assignments, I have a tremendous amount of respect for them. I worked as a fight deck tower officer and landing signal officer on several ships, which was where I got my flight time in. It was especially eye opening to ride during VERTEP practice, and being able to listen to the flight crew coordinating the pick up and dropping off of externally slung loads over the deck of a moving ship. The pilot had three people talking to him, feeding him information, as he had his eyes locked on the ship, so he could gauge how to fly sideways and maintain a zero relative motion condition for extended periods.

Based on the life experience I have and with the comments above, I submit the cause of the crash may well have been just a flight accident; it may have been a mechanical or electrical/electronic problem, or it may have been pilot error. It could have been enemy action, but the initial reports donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t provide any indication of that. Trust me, as with accident of this nature, a very through investigation will follow, with the thrust of it to ascertain the cause, so that any problems found can be corrected before there is another case such as this. That process of accident investigation is highly refined and a seriously undertaken task, as much for preventing the loss of expensive equipment, as it is to prevent the loss of life. Both are of the utmost importance to the investigative team.

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I wish the MSM would get on with real reporting, and quit playing the same Ã¢â‚¬Å“I should have wonÃ¢â‚¬Â• cards that are the staple of Senators Kerry and Boxer. That attitude wonÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t restore any life, but it sure can raise the anxiety level for no logical reason.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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