



“Fuck you  
Majuro.....  
.....fuck you”

*FreddyD*

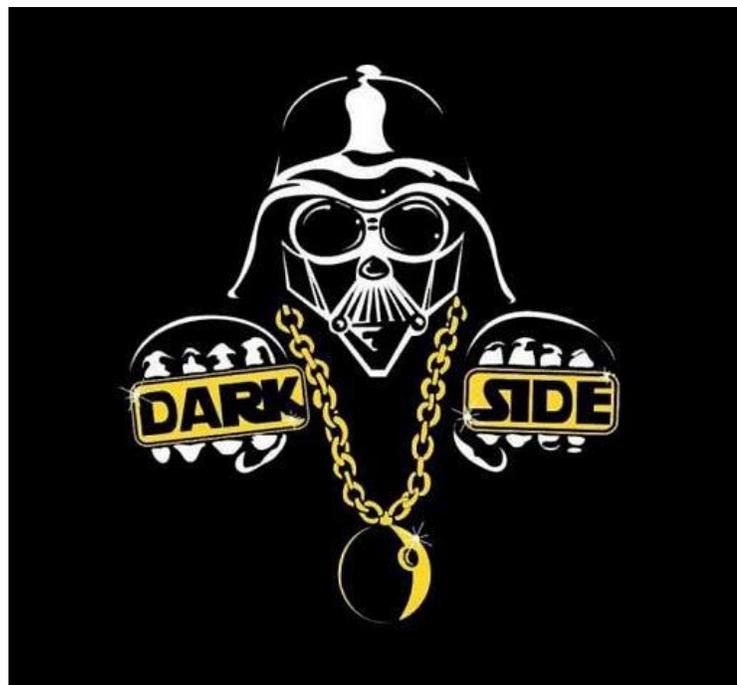
# THE DONKEY GUIDE

By BlondeBomber

So you've contacted Hansen Helicopters, talked to Rufus, and might have told a white lie when you answered his question about "less than ideal living conditions." You've read the blogs, undoubtedly have heard a reference to "Moggy" aka Francis Meyrick, you've heard the horror stories, the rumors, the firsthand account from a third-hand set of ears, and you still want to go through it. That's fine. Good for you. I've written this little booklet mainly to enlighten you about the world you are just now entering. It is full of experiences: the good, the bad, the rabidly insane, and one of the best times of your life living on the fringes of civilization and intelligence.

Note: Never quote or reference Moggy; Moggy is full of shit for the most part, and if you have had the unfortunate presence of mind to mention him to Rufus...good luck...Moggy is full of shit.

Alas, let me be the first to welcome you to the Dark Side



## The Ten Tuna Commandments

Before we get started on the details of what this wonderful world consists and what you need to bring to the table to survive with your sanity intact, we need to lay down some rules.

1. ***DON'T CRASH THE DAMN THING***
  - Know your limits; just because the 500 is a pilot's dream machine, does not mean you have the skills or talent of a dream pilot.
2. ***DO NOT JUMP SHIP AND QUIT. IT WILL BURN A BRIDGE THAT YOU MAY NOT BE ABLE TO AFFORD TO BURN***
3. You are, for all intents and purposes, the **god** of the helideck.
  - If you don't think that a \$5 bill would be enough money for a bet to take off, land, or do what your fish master or spotter is asking of you, don't do it. Simple.
4. When in port do not, under any circumstances, intervene with a local fight or fight with a local
  - You'll lose, best case you go to jail for a night or get arrested; the worst but more probable outcome is that you get stabbed. Hooray.
5. If one of the other pilots buys a round of drinks, and then another does the same, followed suit by yet another, and you choose to imbibe on each round, you better damn well buy a round yourself. Otherwise, you will not be welcome to join in any of the many drunken bar hops later down the road; you will be shut out, earn a reputation and you will spend the next 12 months trying to reverse that. **Buy a round.**
6. Wear a condom, you idiot. If you sleep with a snaggletooth'd local, chances are that she is disease laden. This also goes with the American school teachers on Majuro. These girls are sluts. There is no Star Trek opening mantra with these loose skirted floozies. Dollars to donuts that you will end up being a milk brother with some other pilot. Wrap it buddy.
7. Zero posting of pictures or videos of you flying in an excessive way to the **Facebook or YouTube**. You are an idiot if you do, and it could haunt you later on down the line. If you are going to post a picture of someone or a group of people and then tag them, **ASK THEM FIRST**. Some guys, myself included, do not appreciate unbecoming pictures of ourselves splattered across internets, where the FAA (and JAA, CASA, CAA, etc.) paperwork trolls lurk, lumber, and revoke **licenses**. Say no to Facebook, say no to YouTube.
8. Never, ever, ever say that you are the best pilot out here or that you were the best pilot in your school. No one cares, it will piss off the guys and you will be well on your way to bad reputation and becoming an outcast. Ask Rufus or Turner about Captain Rattlehead.
9. ***DON'T CRASH THE DAMN THING***
10. **Have fun out here**, there is no other place in this industry like it. Come into it with an open-ish mind, and just have some fun and revel in the misery.

So now that we have that taken care of, let us go over what to pack. I, for one, packed way, way, way too much gear. Further, bring two checked bags, that way you don't charged \$200 for overweight luggage. Some will argue that you can never pack enough to make your life easier. While this may have some light of truth to it, a lot of things you can get easily enough in Majuro, Pohnpei or Honiara. For now, however, let's set that aside and get down to it

## **Clothes**

### **1. Shirts**

- I would pack about a week's worth. You aren't going to impress anyone with your sense of style out here, so you might as well invest in some cheap Hane's 4 packs. You can keep maybe a couple nice shirts for port, but for the most part your shirts are going to get sun bleached after a couple months; there is really no reason to ruin a nice \$70 Lacoste shirt gentlemen. I would also recommend that you pick up a long sleeve shirt or two when you are in Guam from Hansen; they are great for colder, rainy and overcast mornings. Believe it or not, but after a couple months, 70 degrees Fahrenheit gets a bit chilly, and the extra length of shirt helps a lot.

### **2. Underwear**

- With these I would pack about 10. Some days (on free school sets especially) are hotter than hell and you just sweat through everything. It's nice to change after a flight and not have to sit or lay down in your rack and swim around in your ball's soup.

### **3. Socks**

- Maybe a couple pairs for when you are in Guam at the hangar, but otherwise, you aren't going to be wearing shoes very much out here; it's too damn hot and your feet will start to sweat. If you plan on exercising on the boat jump roping, pushups, sit ups, etc., then feel free to pack more than a couple. However, for the most part you are going to be rolling in sandals.

### **4. Shorts**

- Here is where some guys differ again, I packed two pairs of athletic shorts, and three pairs of normal shorts. I like to wear a different pair of shorts for flying and another for lounging around in the room. That way you aren't sitting in sweat on your bunk. If you want to bring some board shorts along for swimming, go ahead, though after the first couple months you may get tired of the water.

### **5. Shoes**

- Refer to above at socks. Yet, I would suggest that you bring a pair of sturdier or higher quality pair of sandals; further, get a pair of Kleen or Merrel sandal shoes, they keep your feet aired out and are a little more comfortable to fly in.

# Gear

## 1. Computers

- Guys, buy a quality laptop; spend a little extra now before you come out. Get a nice MacBook Pro, or Asus or MSI gaming laptop; those cheap BestBuy specials do not last long out here. You get what you pay for.

## 2. Headsets/Helmets

- Either one you choose is going to develop problems being exposed to so much heat, humidity and salt spray. Your leather ear muffs are going to start shredding or perhaps your boom mike will lose its flexibility. Some guys roll with helmet, others with a headset. It's your choice, but just know that something on them is going to fail. Further, if you have ANR and need batteries, buy an eight pack of **RECHARGEABLE** batteries and requisite charger. Don't go cheap on this. The cheaper batteries will lose their capacity to hold a charge after a couple months of constant use.

## 3. Gaming Systems

- I know some guys who bought a TV in port and brought in their own PS3/4 or Xbox. I myself use the gaming laptop; but, for games, get something that has multiple play through settings or is fairly expansive, i.e. Skyrim, GT5, FORZA, Borderlands series, MassEffect series, or GTA. Movies and TV shows are going to wear thin fairly quickly, and your brain will feel as if it is losing its edge

## 4. Hard Drives

- There is no such thing as too many of these little beauties. You will be astounded at the amount of movies, TV shows, porn, GoPro footage and pictures you will acquire. Bring at least 6 gigs worth of removable hard drive space.

## 5. iPad/iPod/Kindle

- If you are a big reader like I am, then download iBooks for the iPad from the app store then download/sync up as many book series as you think you could handle in five years' time (by download, I mean use torrents; tons of collected series or thousand book packages in any genre). You will blow through them. I have had bad weather days without any flight time and have polished off a 350+ book in a day. Now, with the iPod you can go one or two ways, you can go like I did and go old school back to the older model scroll wheel ones, or you can just use your iPhone, Samsung or whatever, but the point is this: you are going to want music to listen to out here while flying. Bring **extra** charging cables.

## 6. Sunglasses

- Don't be a cheap ass or dolt and buy non polarized glasses. Also bring multiple pairs, because the chances are that you are going to break a pair in the middle of a trip. Perhaps your spotter will sit on them, or you will be looking over the edge of the deck and they will slip off, who knows what can happen, only that it will probably happen anyway.'

## 7. inReach or IridiumGo:

- GET ONE! These little gems are lifesavers when you are out on a trip. They give you the ability to talk to family members, friends, loved ones, etc., back home; they also allow you to talk to your fellow pilots. That last bit about talking to fellow pilots is a key point to maintaining your sanity out here; you are going to be doing the same thing day in and day out, everyone back home will not be able to really comprehend this.

## 8. GoPro, Nflightcam, Contour

- Everyone and their dog makes a video out here. It kills a lot of boring hours sitting in your rack. Plus, you will see a lot of things you will not be able to see anywhere else in the world, to include: flying with dolphins, huge manta rays, sea turtles, and manta rays dogfighting each other in the water.

## 9. Earphones/Earbuds/Earplugs

- There are two ways about this for listening to music while flying. The first is to go quality and buy a nice set of in-ear Bose earbuds; however, in my experience the rubber surrounding the wires wears down very quickly and can short out, making your volume go from zero to ear bleeding decibels in an instant. . . .while flying. It's a magical experience. The second and preferable option is buy cheap earbuds that do not stick out too much. These generally have plastic covered wires and are not subject dry rot, and if they do go out, you are only out \$10-\$15 instead of \$120. If you do decide to go the cheap way (suggested), bring about 3-5 pairs, and you can also get cheap ones in Pohnpei, Honiara, and Majuro.
- You will want to bring a set of over the ear headphones; these are much more comfortable to wear when you are watching a movie or reading a book between flights.
- Also, bring a small bundle of ear plugs. Some of these rooms are outside and are bolted, more or less, on to the mid deck, and unfortunately, they also happen to sit right next to the hydraulic pumps and those bastards can scream. The earplugs will help to keep your hearing from getting raped and from getting tinnitus. For those of you who do not know what tinnitus is, here you go: you know when you get a ringing in your ear from a loud bang? Take that ringing and put it on repeat. . . . . for the rest of your life. It sucks. Mine was from a different occupation, but the point remains.

## Hygiene

### 1. Contact Solution

- I wear contacts, and you need solution for those babies, and if you don't, well you have to sleep in them and stand a good chance of getting an eye infection after a prolonged period of constant wear. You can't find any solution on these island nations, so I suggest that you pack 4-5 bottles. When you get down to the last two bottles, order another couple bottles through Hansen or have a loved one/family member send you a care package.

### 2. Dental Stuff

- Bring as much as you want really, it doesn't weigh all that much and doesn't take up too much space in your checked bag. If you use a special type of tooth paste like Sensodyne or something of that nature, **stock up!** You will not be able to find it out here. There is a fair selection of tooth brushes out here, but again if you have an expensive one, yeah, the island stores are not going to have it.

### 3. Soap/Shampoo

- Just bring enough for two weeks while you cool your heels in Guam. You can get the rest in port and it's not very expensive.

### 4. Deodorant

- Just bring a fresh one to Guam and you can get more in port.

## Vices

### 1. Nicotine

- Whether you are a smoker or a guys who chews tobacco, you will want to pack a bunch of it; especially if you have a preference to a particular brand. While smoking is worldwide, chewing tobacco is not. The cost is inflated, and the choices extremely limited. So when you are in Guam, buy as much as you think you would need for say 2 months. When this supply runs out, put an order through Hansen at Guam and they will ship it out to you and deduct the cost from your next paycheck.

That about sums up what you need pack. We will cover over what to buy in port later on, and more or less what to expect when trying to find specialty items.

So now you have met Rufus, have passed muster, and are on your way for a fun little puddle jumping plane ride with multiple stops to Majuro, Pohnpei, or Honiara. Enjoy the smell of the islanders; they do not readily know the benefits of showering it seems. Now, you have arrived at the place where you soon will call home, for the 12 months at least, and where it will be making its port of call. You are going to be a little lost, and shell shocked when you first drive through whatever port you get into. However, let's talk about the boat now; here are the **STEPS**.

You and the pilot will go out to the boat together, and he will introduce to all the nice boat people (ha), show you around and sort of get you settled in to place.

## **Smell**

It is the first thing that is going to hit you as soon as get on the deck. It is either going to smell like piss and rotting garbage, or if they are discharging their catch, it is going to smell so damn fishy that it will almost physically knock you off your feet. I, personally, hate the ocean, the heat and the smell of the shorelines, but when you are out at sea, that rotting seaweed smell fades. It is the worst when you are discharging fish, but you will, more than likely, not be on the boat when this happens anyway. You will be in a bar, getting drunk, and catching up with the other pilots after a trip.

## **The Room**

Now this is a big variable between the boats. Some have a chicken coop sized rooms, others have a medium sized room, others have a nice big room with room for a couple stools and table. It all depends on which boat you get assigned. It will be a shell shock, and believe me, you will want to run for the airport as swiftly as you can. Don't. It will become a place of sanctuary for you after a time. It's not too bad at all.

Some rooms will have a bathroom big enough for a washing machine, others do not. The ones that do not, usually have a washer outside in the breezeway to the bridge, and again others do not, so you may have to hand wash clothes. Here is a little horror though, sooner or later these boats will get infested with bed bugs, and if they get in to your mattress, there is no hope left of defeating them. If the previous pilot tells you that they have had bed bugs for a couple months, toss that mattress in to the rubbish pile. Tell Hansen that you need a new mattress, so does your mechanic (if you have them, so does he, and if you don't toss both, they will keep nibbling at your body) immediately. Then have your boat spray the hell out of your room with bed bug and brain cell killing spray. If Hansen buys it for you, don't worry they just charge it to the boat. Do not, do not try ordering a mattress through the boat, they will fuck that up, go cheap, and give you some damn mat that is not even worthy of being called a camping bed roll.

More often than not, these rooms feature a tiny fridge; the one that you would see in any dorm or college room, one that is suited purely for 2 cases of beer. If you have enough room for a full sized fridge, I would try to get one put in; if you cannot have one installed, see if you can get a small box freezer installed in the breezeway. If they balk at this, then simply tell them that you will be storing your food down below in the walk in freezers or the fish master's freezer. It may or may not work, but it's worth a shot.

## **Eats**

Another big variable between boats. Some boats have a reasonably reliable cook whom, more or less, knows what they are doing. Of course, they will use liberal amounts of MSG laden oil, and drenching the food in it. On the other hand, some boats have a subpar-retard level IQ-mouth-breathing cook, a being who can turn tuna in to a brick tasting vaguely of soap. It is a crap shoot

## **The Helideck**

Heh. It will look a lot smaller than you thought when you were riding up to the boat. Again, you will wonder what the hell you just got yourself into for a year, and will want to break contact and jet off. Give it time, it will get to the point where you can land on it as easy as breathing.

## **People**

Ok, most of these crews are nice enough, but do not trust them at all. They all have sticky fingers, so never leave your door unlocked in port. In my experience and incidences from other pilots, the Vietnamese guys are the worst, so never let them in your room; if you do, you can just see their eyes go wide like it is a thief's Christmas. When you meet the fish master (FM), he will probably look at you and just kind of dismiss you. **DO NOT GIVE THIS GUY AN INCH.** This guy will ask you to do stupid shit, and tell your spotter to do something that could get you fired. Do not trust him. Ever. Same goes with your spotter.

## **Shower/Shitter**

It's pretty simple. It's tiny, generally just enough for you to turn around in and maybe shuffle a step or two. The toilet will be situated in such a fashion that if you are long of leg and/or a monster tard, you are going to have sit a bit sideways. Ha. Yeup. Enjoy.

The water heater for the shower will work in some boats and not on others; if you want a hot shower and your inline water heater is kaput, make sure they replace it before you depart, otherwise it is going to be nice cold-ish showers for you.

That is basically the boat at a first glance. Up next we are going to talk about what to buy before you leave port on your first trip out.

## Buyin' Stuff in Port

What to buy, what to buy, that is a bit of a complicated question, and it really depends on who was before you and what boat you are on. **Check out your boat before you buy anything!** The boats with the smaller rooms make it a bit hard to buy a lot of things because the clutter just builds very rapidly. However, now that you have had a look at your room, you have rough idea of what appliances to buy, that is, if you need any. Anyway, here is quick list of must have items to make life better on the boat.

1. **Coffee Maker:** Just buy a little 4 cup one, they are reasonably cheap and brew up within 3-4 minutes of hitting the switch.
2. **Microwave:** obvious reasons
3. **Toaster/Toaster Oven:** obvious reasons
4. **Small Personal Fan:** Some of these boats have crap AC units in the room. It will help to keep the air moving over and to help keep the midday heat at bay
5. **Power Strips/Extension Cords:** As many as you think you will need. Also, buy one of those white extension cords that has a head with three plug in spots
6. **Skillet/Convection Plate:** If your food is going to be shit and you will be cooking a lot, buy one of these. They are a bit more expensive, but well worth the dime.
7. **Electric Kettle:** If you are into tea, you need one of these. Most pilots have one already, but again, after a while, everything breaks down.
8. **Butane Power Grill:** These are awesome for frying up Mahi Mahi for lunch after a morning set. The gas is cheap as chips, and the grill itself is only around \$35.
9. **Earbuds!!!**
10. **Fridge/Freezer:** Refer to my previous comments about the size of fridge you will have. It may be expensive to personally buy one and a hassle to get it out to the boat, but if you want some pizzas, bread, frozen veggies, ice cream, or any other frozen food, it is well worth the money. Remember, you will be spending the next 12 months of your life on that boat, so take any advantage you can to make your stay slightly less miserable
11. **Pillows/Blankets/Sheets:** You can pick these up at any of the major port of calls. One pillow is good enough for just sleeping, but you will be spending a lot of time in your rack so buy a couple full length and normal sized pillows and create a sort of couch set up in your bunk. It is nice to be able to sit up and play games or drink a beer while in your rack.
12. **Camping Chairs:** Buy one of these immediately. One of my favorite things to do is sit out on a morning raft set, drink my coffee, kick my feet up and text friends and family back home. They are also relatively cheap (roughly \$15) and resilient; as long as you don't leave it out in a rainstorm, it should last your entire contract.
13. **Coffee Mug/Water Bottle:** Make sure you buy a sealable coffee mug. These are amazing things to have during your first morning flight. Hell, you are flying, getting paid, watching the sun rise, rocking out to music and drinking coffee; does it get any better than that?!? Pretty sure it does not. Also, bring a reusable water bottle for those hotter midday and evening flights; it will help keep you cool and prevent dehydration headaches.

That's about it for appliances, but for food.....that is entirely up to you. For the most part, I just buy canned tuna (oh, the *irony*), drink mix, coffee and booze. It is nice to have a pour of something or a beer after a long day

## **Boat Life**

### **Hobbies and Exercising**

Some days are going to be tremendously boring, whether it is because the boat is running to another area for fish, bad weather days, or the FM is being nice and giving the crew a day off. It is a good idea to have a hobby, or have something that you can immerse yourself into and make the days go by quicker while maintaining a bit of sanity.

One of the pilots I knew built (to scale mind you) model houses out of balsa wood and bamboo strips. You can also use toothpicks and superglue to build some sort of creation or whatnot. Maybe, you have a good sketching hand, so buy some supplies and keep a portfolio of your sketches. You can also pick up some driftwood on the shore when in port and take to whittling the driftwood into whatever takes your fancy.

The amount of deck space on these boats is small, so you are not really able to stretch your legs, but it makes for great pacing. If you keep yourself cooped up in the room you will so go stir crazy, causing the days to slowly roll by. However, the deck has more than enough room to exercise on, whether that be doing your standard pushup and sit-up regimen, jumping rope, workout bands or using a TRX.

It is really up to you how you are going to bide your time out here. So pick something that you enjoy and will not readily tire of.

### **Daily Flights**

There really isn't any set schedule that will repeat itself day to day. During FAD season your boat will more than likely do a morning set, and then proceed to fly you afterwards, but this is not always so. This is more or less the standard pattern most FMs choose to follow:

- The first flight of the morning generally takes place somewhere between 0615-0630 when the boat does not make a morning set. You can either get up before this or wait for them to wake you up. Either way, just try to be in the helicopter within 5-7 minutes of being told to fly. Bring coffee.
- The second and third flights will generally fall before and after lunch.
- The last flight of the day will usually be around 1600 local time and will be 2 hours. This is, generally, the time that you will see the most foamers and breezers, yet the glare of the sun will make it really easy to lose FADs when you start circling down towards them.

## Landing and Taking Off

There are many ways to skin a cat, and the same can go as far as your takeoff and landing style. Everyone's deck is different, they may yet be the same model, but the decks are all different. So you always have to adapt your style to where you are landing or taking off from.

### Taking Off

There are two standard ways of doing this. The first being the normal take off that you would do off any runway or helipad, but faster as far as getting forward airspeed and away from the deck (the longer you hover over the deck the greater the chances are that it will go horribly wrong) The second is the "the dive." You weren't able to really do this in Guam on the tuna trainer building because of all the trees and powerlines. The name basically says it all. You pull enough power to get away from the deck, maybe 2-4 feet of clearance over the edge of the deck and then nose it over and dive, gathering up speed, leveling and climbing out. There have been debates about which one is the best, and the pro and cons of either. That doesn't matter. Whatever makes you feel comfortable, do that. Experiment with different variances of each, and you will soon find your style. My personal style is more of a nose low launch/dive. I pull my power in, go light on the skids and bring the helicopter on to its toes, and then really pull in my power. Essentially launching the helicopter off the deck, if you will. I keep this nose low launch profile till I am clear of the boat, the boat of my tail and let the helicopter dive a bit. I then level about 10 feet off the water, keep my power up, settle into 60-70 kts and climb on out. Again, you will just have to experiment to really find your own style.

### Landing

Slow is smooth, smooth is fast; by this little saying, I mean that you should not go out on your first trip and expect to land on the boat in rough seas, hallowing winds, and the boat clipping along at a steady 12 kts, pitching and rolling, from the get go. Take your time building up to that, there is no need to rush and try to be a super uber tuna pilot. Have the boat stop, and turn in to the wind if you need it to, and if the spotter doesn't tell the fish master this, go and hover off the port side of the boat, eye level with the windows, getting as close as you feel comfortable with. Now, when the fish master comes over to the window, give him the sign to stop, which is to say, cross your forearms over each other in an **X**.

If he doesn't stop the damn boat:

- While circling around the boat at low level start screaming over the radio "**stop stop stop stop stop**" till he does it
- Keep hovering off the boat and screaming "**stop stop stop stop stop**" till he does.

However, one thing that seems to be consistent with all the pilots is how fast they close the gap between the edge of the deck and helicopter. By and by, the slower you do this last little dog leg onto the deck, the more control inputs you will have to do. The faster (**don't scream in and flare five feet from the deck!**), or more briskly you do this last bit seems to smooth out the ride and offers you more control over the helicopter.

I know that you are used to doing final approaches that stretch a couple hundred yards long; quit that. It's pointless; you are only give yourself a longer chance to make a mistake. Keep everything neat and tidy by hugging the boat when you approach from the stern. Keep somewhere between 10-15 (from the rotor disc) off the hull of the boat and then as you pull up next to the deck, simply add left pedal and right cyclic and plop the helicopter down on the deck. This may seem a bit confusing now, but once you get out to sea, everything will fall in to place and you'll get it.

Now, you might hear from different people about trying to time the waves and land on a low or high point. Personally, I think that's a bunch of rubbish. Landing on the boat when it is moving has very little difference from going straight from a forward hover to your landing spot without ever pausing and landing vertically. Don't worry about what the waves are doing, your muscle memory and subconscious will take care of all the altitude adjustments; you just have to keep track of the distance to you spot and lateral distance to the nearest obstacle. You will have some rougher landings either way you choose; it is just going to happen.

When you are out here flying every day for weeks on end, you will get a series of days where you cannot land the damn thing in a smooth fashion. Don't focus on this or think about it too much. You are on a year-long grind, racking in more hours in one month than most pilots in three months; you ARE going to have days where you just cannot make a nice smooth touchdown. Don't crash land the helicopter, but don't let it get to you either; every single pilot who has ever been out here has had those days.

Finally, the point is to build up to full speed landings, figure out your style, where your limits are, etc. There is nothing wrong with doing lots and lots of go arounds your first 1-2 weeks. Better safe than in the drink.

## **Types of Flights**

You will be doing two types of flights: raft (FAD)/school spotting flights and free school sets. The latter being the better one, since you really get to whip it around. These helicopters have roughly 2.5 hrs of usable fuel, and company policy states that you do not go over 2.0 hrs per flight.

During these flights I prefer to set my power using a bit of friction (enough so it does not move, but not enough so that I cannot slam the collective down in the event of an engine failure), and adjust my KIAS as needed to keep from ascending/descending. This has the added benefit of keeping your burn rate constant. After a trip or two you will be able to know how much time you have left just by glancing at the fuel gauge. You can also do the flight school method of flying and adjust power as needed to maintain a certain speed. However, it will give you a fluctuating burn rate, and not as easy to predict the amount of time remaining in your tank.

As far as raft/school spotting flights go.... these will make up 95% of your hours burned out here. There will be a lot of boredom involved. Your mind will wander and venture forth on strange paths of thought. Essentially what you are doing in is in the name. You go out for 2 hrs at a time and just do a big search square or an arc of a circle that elongates as the boat continues traveling. It will be a lot of "oh, look more blue ocean, more blue sky, more clouds.....oh, look the ocean is still blue, the sky is still blue and oh, look a unicorn cloud." Depending on the fish master, you may do 4 flights of 2 hrs every day for two weeks, or the fish master may only fly you once or twice a day. Just depends.

When either raft spotting or school spotting, prepare to do lots and lots of circles, to the point where a left hand turn seems like a moment to be cherished. You will keep circling, at whatever altitude your spotter wants, keep circling, keep circling, and trying to keep the raft or school in the center of your orbit, despite wind, rain, or the eagerness for a left turn. Some of these spotters like to look through the binoculars to look down at the fish and may have you do tighter and tighter circles. They also have this annoying habit of doing hand motions for higher, lower, wider or narrower with their right hands, hidden from view by their body, which you cannot see. Then when you don't see said motion for a bit and keep doing what you were doing, they can and/or will throw a temper tantrum. You have to nip this behavior in the bud, right then and there, otherwise it will grow in to a most bitter fruit. It **WILL** get worse on free school sets.

## FADs

These rafts vary quite a bit, mainly depending which nationality of boat dropped them. Some look like big propane tanks or a pallet with net covering and a section of net going down 50 feet in to the water, while others are just a bunch of cork buoys wrapped up with netting and with more net going 50 feet down in the water. At times you will drop your buoy on a free floating tree or log; you would be surprised at the amount you see out here, quite astonishing really. Other logs that you will see have one of those cork buoy rolls tied to it. This last style of FAD seems to work the best. The fish master or translator will tell you always to look for them, spot them, but you really don't have to if you don't want to. It's your choice.



### Droppin' Them Buoys

So, in the last section we talked about dropping buoys on FADs, and this is not exactly the most accurate description of what happens when you find a FAD. Now that you have done the Daytona 500 backwards in a 500, you have to spiral down to that FAD. You can either turn left and drop down to it or you can continue turning right and rapidly descend down to it. Turning left has its advantages: it feels more natural and it is easier to maintain visual contact. However, turning left at the wrong time, when the glare of the sun is at its greatest (evening), you can easily lose visual contact when you roll out of your right hand turn and into your descending left spiral. I have lost a few FADs, especially thin logs and net wrapped cork buoy FADs, for a minute or two and have to circle around a bit more before I can spot it again. This is really not a big deal in truth and it gives your spotter time to get his grapple hooks or weights ready and tied to the GPS buoy you are dropping off. Where on the other hand, turning right maybe a little more tedious and less natural, you very rarely, if ever, lose visual contact with the FAD.

So after you have spiraled down and are about ready to come to a hover, it would probably be a smart move to know where the wind is coming from. Some of these FADs have a trailing line that is connected to another boat's (the one who dropped the FAD) GPS buoy. This trailing buoy line will be pulled away from the FAD by the wind and will indicate its direction. Yet, this is not always so, especially when you are dealing a regular ripped up log that has no trailing line. The wind will be indicated by any white cap, and for the most part, the wind will never change direction during the whole day (good thing to always check and log it in the back of your mind before you take off on smooth as glass sea days). When the white cap forms and then dissipates it will leave a foamy stretch of water; from where the foam starts (back) and to where it ends (front) is where the wind coming from. The wind is going from back to front. Granted, this only out on the open sea and does not pertain to any wake caused by the boat. Below is a little diagram of a pallet FAD with GPS intact trailing line.

Now, when you pull up to this FAD, depending on what you use to secure your own GPS buoy to the raft, you are coming to come along side it, and your spotter is going to hop out on to the floats. The first time this happens you are not going to be ready for it, even if you are expecting it. If you have a bigger spotter (mine was 225 lbs easy) keep that guy in the helicopter and make sure you use weights only. No grapple hooks.

However, if you happen have a light spotter and he uses the hooks, he will stand on the float without touching the skin/frame of the helicopter, and then will underhand throw the grapple hooks at the pallet itself (hope he does not miss, otherwise you are going to do a bit of chasing). Now for the fun part: as soon as he thinks the hook might have lodged in the net, he is going tug hard on the grapple line and push down with his feet. This is a bit unnerving the first time it happens since the helicopter will dip down his side and you have to adjust quickly and accordingly. He then will do it with the second hook, and then will reach into the helicopter, grab the buoy, and drop it in to the water. **DO NOT LET THEM TOSS IT UP NO MATTER HOW SHALLOW THE ARC IS!!** If that buoy hits blades, say good bye to home and hello to the sharks swimming around the FAD. Your first couple of times doing this may be a bit rough; it seems simple enough, but with wind, a spotter on the floats, and the floats themselves shaking (oh, how they shake with a bit of crosswind in a hover) it takes a bit of getting used to and not over correcting while keeping the FAD in sight.

**Note:** Now, this only happened to me once, and only once: the spotter may decide to throw a tantrum on the float; I shit you not, a full on temper tantrum. Not quite jumping up and down, but definitely pushing up and down the float and swinging his arms at you in pissed off gestures. Here is a quick and simple cure: they don't have rodeos in gookland, enlighten him to what a rodeo entails while he is standing there on the float. Then shake your head and/or wag a finger at him in a very parental and condescending fashion. Hey, it worked for me. Remember that part where I mentioned threat of violence and how it is the only thing they understand? Case in point.

After you have dropped off the buoy, they will make hurrying gestures for you to get up and airborne. Ignore them. Check your spotting mirror, then slowly back up till you have a visual on the FAD, trailing line, and your own GPS buoy; only then proceed to take back up into the air. Once you get up to around 700 feet the spotter will hop on the radio and have you circle around the FAD while he relays the position info and buoy number back to the boat. Then continue on your merry way.

The only difference between the hooks and the grapple hooks is with weights the spotter just tosses them over the trailing line and then drops the buoy. If you can, break them of that habit of hopping out on the float. They can bloody well do it from inside the helicopter and it takes less than five seconds to drop both weights and buoy. Much simpler, less chances of issues, and less time spent by or the raft. The last bit is especially sinister. If you hover for more than 10 seconds, the force of your down wash will push that raft all over the place; now you have to reset and do this thing all over again. Use weights, keep it stupid simple.

If you are dropping off a buoy on log or raft that has no trailing line, it may be a little more difficult to judge the distance between the floats and the log or raft. You, generally speaking, have to get closer to the FAD so that your spotter can drop the weights over either side. Here, as mentioned above, is where it becomes a bit of trial in patience: when you are that close on a smaller log or raft, it falls right in to the blind spot created by your float. The spotting mirror can help a little bit, but this not always so. What is going to happen next can either work for you, scare the piss out of you, and flip you over. Be careful.

In order to keep that close distance and move with the lineless FAD, you are going to have to focus on it with a lot of attention. **DO NOT GET TUNNEL VISIONED!** Keep your head on swivel, always checking for the distance between your floats and the waves. **DO NOT LOOK STRAIGHT OVER**

**AND DOWN TO YOUR SIDE.** If you look over and down at bottom of a swell, you can very well decide you have enough room to descend a little bit. Meanwhile the crest of the next wave crashes over the tops of the float. It could end up being a sad panda day for you. So instead of looking over down to your side, look out and at a angle. This will allow you still keep your spotter in your peripheral vision and spot the oncoming cresting wave and choose your height accordingly. You can do this to either the left or right side of the helicopter. I personally do both; it's just a habit I picked up from a previous occupation. Unfortunately, while thusly splitting your attention, you can spend a bit of time chasing FAD around, getting frustrated, and your spotter might start getting uppity or pissed. Breathe, just breathe, and back off the FAD, do a mental reset and go back in. Chances will be that you get it on the first try.

### **Retrieving Buoys**

By now you know, by threat of termination and litigation, that you are not allowed to pick up buoys. The fish masters know this, the captains know this, everyone damn well knows this. It is not a new trend set forth by Hansen on the eve of yesterday; this has been around for a couple years. This, unfortunately, will not stop the fish masters from trying to get you to do it. You will tell them no, and two weeks later they will have the translator ask again. It will be a game you will play, a sort of dance or ritual. However, if you tire of this game, simply tell the translator you need it in writing that he will cover the cost of replacing a crashed helicopter, your airfare home, and \$10,000 cash upfront so that you can pay back Hansen when you get fired. The look on their faces is priceless, but usually the game ends right there. Yet, this does not stop the fish master from telling the spotter to pick up a buoy without telling you, and since you are not fluent in silverware-falling-down-stairs speak, you are none the wiser until it happens. It happened to freddyD out here. Immediately inform Rufus, and all should be groovy.

### **Free School Sets**

Free school sets are when the fish master drops the net, on the fly, on a moving school of fish and not on a FAD. Some fish masters are actual masters at this, but by and large, they fail and blame the helicopter.

When you are spotting for schools you are doing so the same type of flying as with the FADs, except for a small difference. The damn fish masters always, always, always use the bird radar on the boat. You will end up chasing your tail half the time. They will have you go east this many miles, then due north, oh wait, back south, never mind, go west, no wait back east, hold on there is birds 35 miles away from you on the opposite side of the boat, fly that way. It's very annoying, but hey, you're flying and getting paid, so roll with it.

There are two identifiers that gives lie to the presence of tuna. The first and simplest is called a foamer, and it is where the tuna are chasing the bait fish through the water and lunge upwards and out of the water, or are jumping out of the water to avoid sharks as well. Now multiply that splash by a couple thousand, and from even ten miles away, it looks as though the sea is literally foaming.



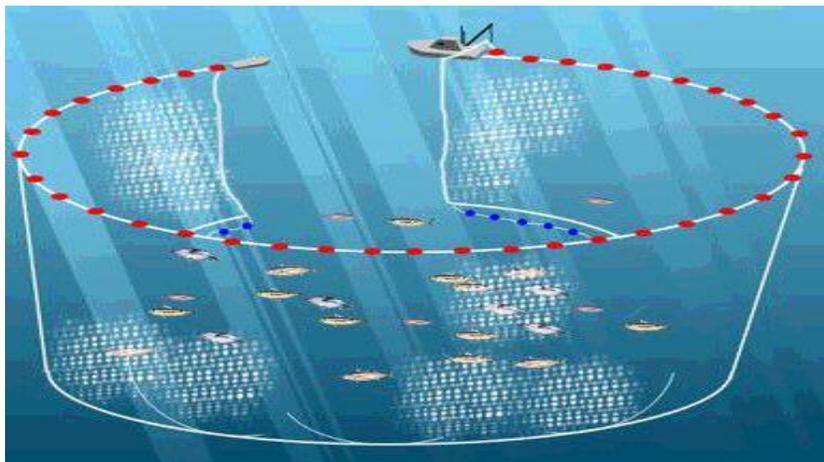
The second identifier is called a “breezer.” Breezers are when the tuna are chasing the bait fish under the water but not jumping out of it. You probably know how to read the direction of the wind off a lake or pond by now, and these breezers have the same sort of texture where the slack water meets the windblown water just off the shore line. You can just see a texture difference between the breezer and sea around it; there is also a bit of a color difference too. The breezer will be darker than the surrounding water, and this is really noticeable on cloudless, glass sea days. These breezers are the hardest to see on a partly cloudy day with a bit of wind. The clouds cast their shadow on to the water, making it seem darker, and when the wind is up, say under 15 kts, the texture of sea becomes a bit.... looks like coarse sandpaper. When the wind meets the shadow it looks almost exactly like breezer. The more months and trips you put under your belt, the easier it will be to spot these.

Your spotter will be constantly chattering away on the radio talking to the FM about the school or getting coordinates for something he wants the helicopter to go check out. Their spoken language is grating on the psyche, so feel free to crank down your headset volume and jam out to music. There are three radios on your center console/stack. Two boat radios and your standard air-to-air radio, and on this air-to-air radio you can chat with the other pilots on 123.45. It is rather nice to chat with other pilots after a couple weeks of talking to no one but yourself (...it'll happen...). It is also essential to have on when you are flying around a bunch of boats with multiple helicopters pattering around. If and when you are near a conflagration of boats, **DO NOT LET YOUR SPOTTER TURN THE RADIO DOWN.** He may gesture that the volume is too loud or that he can't hear the FM. This is not your damn problem, he can get over it; that radio lets you know where everyone is and keeps you from blindsiding another pilot. However, in the event he does try to kill the VHF radio to other helicopters, slap his hand away. If he continues to try and turn down/cut off of the radio, land the helicopter and tell your translator that the spotter is never to touch that radio and if he tries again, he will never set foot back in the helicopter.

## Herding

First, you need to understand what a purse seiner vessel is and how it ensnares the fish. Imagine a giant, 50 feet deep wire mesh strainer that you use in the kitchen for straining green bean fresh from a boiling pot. Now replace said wire mesh with net, and on the top imagine basketball size yellow cork buoys keep it afloat. When the boat drops the it is in a constant turn, making a complete circle, to complete the giant mesh strainer imagery. When we say “dropping the skiff,” we are being literal. There is a rather squat, and tug looking boat (the skiff) attached at an angle and resting on the stern of the fishing vessel. This skiff is attached to end of the net and when it slides back of the fishing vessel, it more or less keeps tension on the net line so that the net can roll off back of the fishing vessel and not be dragged along behind the purse seiner. Confused yet? Wonderful.

Below are a couple pictures of the net set up of a purse seiner.



While the boat is doing its constant turn (counter clockwise) and completing the circle, the fish master is trying to keep the, always on the move, school of tuna in the center of his net (rarely ever happens this way). This is where you, the uber super tuna pilot, come in. You are to try and attempt to herd the fish away from the remaining gap between the skiff and the boat. Depending on the species of the fish you are trying to herd, the amount of bait, the cloud cover and wave conditions it may or may not work. There is really no way to explain the exact movements of what you will be doing. However, suffice it to say, it is the time to really let loose and have some fun.

The spotter will give you instructions and if he is new to spotting or a grumpy, surly sonuvabitch, you may have some issues that you need to rectify quickly and hard. In their exuberance they may throw their whole body towards you and almost slap you in the face with their hand; essentially blinding you. Give them a couple warning shots, and I mean a couple, not three, just two. Slap their hands away the first two times and if he continues be a complete asshole, slap the sonuvabitch. I mean really slap him, a full arm back hand that leaves a white handprint outlined in red. This should break him of his exuberance and firmly establish that you are his superior; in more ways than one.

Now, on the off chance he decides to slap you or slug your shoulder (my first spotter quickly regretted this action), land the helicopter immediately no matter how much vehemence he is throwing your way or the screams from the FM. When you land, keep him in the helicopter, **do not let him out!** Threaten another slap if needs be that. Shut down the helicopter, walk around to his side, motion for him to get out and while he is regaining his footing, firmly grab his shirt at collar right below the neck. Then without preamble, drag him over the edge of the deck and toss his ass over. Trust me, a punch in the face on the deck may cow these guys for a while, but being thrown abruptly from thirty feet into the water with no time to prep a landing will stay that asshole's attitude for the rest of his time with you. They will wonder that if they get uppity with you again you will simply shake them off the floats into the water and then fly away. This really, really works; last resort and all that, but damn, it fucking works. Again, that whole violence spiel.

However, let us assume you don't have any of these problems and your spotter is a right good cunt. He will give you hand signals where to go, and when to stop. This stopping part really doesn't get through to them very well; they assume that the helicopter can go from 70-90 kts (due to their frantic pointing to the opposite side of the net) to full stop right then and there. There are two ways to do this. Slow down and come back to the original point till he motions stop again. Or you can do the always enjoyable option: a nice little tight ag turn or hammerhead. Ag turns are a bit more fluid and easier to stay out of your down wash, and in my opinion they are the preferable option. However, I should point out that you will lose the direction of the wind, since you yourself will be caught up in the moment; be careful and do not go too aggressive, stay wary of settling or flaring in your down wash. Remember, the helicopter is a dream machine, you are not.

### **The Triangle**

After you have had your fun, the next part can be a bit of a bore but can lead to a deadly mistake. I do not use the term in a figurative sense; I mean it very literally; you can easily drown if you screw up.

They will have you hover over and with the "triangle," and no, I do not have the slightest clue why they call it this. Basically, it is the end of the cork buoys where the cable then runs unsheathed to the drum winches. This uncorked section of cable is called the tow line, and when the fish master messes up his circle around the fish, and runs out of net, this line is still dropped in to the water till the boat meets up with the skiff. They then slowly winch in the cable till the corks meet up with the stern of the boat. Your job is simple: you hover over the end of the corked line till said corks meet up with boat. Unfortunately, this could be anywhere from 50 to 150+ yards.

During this time, you will have three net boats doing circles and dropping bags of dye, trying to make as much noise and color as possible and keep the fish away from this opening. Depending on the crew, they may stay out of your way; however, they may be assholes and decide to get as close to you as they can, or stay in your blind spot behind your tail rotor. The point being: keep constant visual contact with the net boats lest you clip one and have to explain why you hit a net boat to Rufus.



As the winch slowly winds the cable, and you get closer and closer the boat, the hovering continues to be boring and little strenuous on the left leg (depending on wind direction). This boredom can cause you to zone off; especially if you have already clocked 5.5 hours of flight that day. You may not realize you are getting closer and closer to the stern of the boat and its many rotor blade friendly cables. If you aren't paying attention you can easily run into the boat, crash, pop your floats on the sharp parts of the boat, snag a cable with a blade, and then promptly roll over and sink immediately, or sink partially and get trapped inside and wrapped in the net. So pay attention.

Another bad habit to be aware of: as you get closer to the boat and you are keeping an eye of the distance between the disc and the boat, you will start watch the motion of boat, and consequently your mind will unconsciously decide this is the motion of the horizon. End result: your hovering will go to hell, and you could easily clip a cresting wave. So remember your basics, keep an eye on the boat but use the ocean as your horizon.

Now, that you have landed and are walking off the helideck down to your room, you may come across the FM and he may tell you: "pie-wruuh psytay-ah." In crashing-forks-and-knives speak this means "pilot no good." Most of the time these idiots run over the damn fish with the boat and cause them to dive; yet, in their minds, you are to blame. Don't take this shit at all. Tell him: "No, fish master psytay-ah, make set sante maria!!" and make a big **X** motion with one of your hands towards him. Translation: you are shit at catching fish, and you can't make a damn set. This will either startle them, since no one talks to the FM like that, or he can go all angry fish-lipped-slant-eyed-gook on you. Either way, walk away and go in to your room, lock the door and watch a movie.

That is really all there is to the flying out here. It is hard to explain in words what exactly you are doing, but if you combine the numerous tuna videos, i.e. "Matilda and the Fox" (part I & II), you can get a fairly good idea of what you are about to be doing yourself.

## **Routines**

One last thing I would like to note in relation to flying, if you have a ritual or routine that you do every time you fly back home, keep that going out here and adapt it to the MD500. Don't break this ritual, it can save your life or at the least keep you from wrecking a helicopter on takeoff, getting fired and left with a hefty bill. With how many flights a day you can do out here, the number of days straight that you fly, and the never changing scenery you can become complacent very easily. For myself, every day for the last 13 months I have done the same prepping ritual for a flight. Every flight.

I get told to fly, so I hop out of bed, change in to my flying shorts, then grab my iPod and ear buds, drop the iPod down my shirt and in to my pocket. Leaving the ear buds outside my shirt, I go to the bathroom and take a piss, come back out, put my sunglasses on, grab my head set, snag my water bottle then head out the door. I put on my sandals, and pull my inReach off the its handrail mount. I go up the stairs, walk around the helicopter for a quick preflight, check the wind, then with left hand on the oh-shit handle, and my left foot of the skid peg, I pull myself up to the helicopter. I put my headset on the overhead cradle, snap the mid line clincher to a bit of frame, and plug in my headset. I then secure my inReach on a Velcro strip on the instrument panel, and hop in the cockpit, butt first then swing my right leg over the cyclic. I pull off the collective cover, buckle up my straps, then undue the pedals and put my right foot on the right pedal. Right arm under left leg, I light off. When I hit 58% N1, I release the starter then put my earbuds on, start the jams, then put on my headset and turn on the ANR, reach over and set the altimeter to 30 feet before hitting the stop watch. By then the N2 is over 60% and I flip on the generator and radio, do a quick gauge check. I do a double check to make sure I am good to go before undoing the cyclic frictions (forward/aft then lateral), then the collective friction. I roll on to full power, another quick gauge-check and double check frictions, give my mechanic a thumbs up. I watch what he is doing, and double check through the mirror and check the straps to my left and right, making sure they are down. He gives me two thumbs up, and I give him one back. He runs off the deck and I wait till he is clear, check the wind again and launch.

Every damn day.

Welcome to the Dark Side, enjoy your stay

Toodle~loo

*Blonde Bomber*