

“AVO – Battlefield Cabbie”

by Captain Conway Bown
Official Army War Artist



‘AVO – Battlefield Cabbie, Graphite on Illustration board, 297 x 420mm, 1995, Collection of the Artist.’

“AVO – Battlefield Cabbie is actually a portrait of the artist when he was a Black Hawk pilot in the early ‘90s. The term ‘AVO’ (pronounced AY-Voe), is a slang term for aviator. And battlefield cabbie is a humorous interpretation of the role of the Army aviator; a cab driver delivering soldiers from one point to another.”

“The Black Hawk is a very capable aircraft. Designed and manufactured by Sikorsky, it is usually crewed by two pilots and two loadmasters who man the machine guns. It was designed to have the maximum in battlefield survivability so that should it experience significant battlefield damage, the safety of the occupants is maximised. Such safety equipment on board includes overspeed protection such that if the engines overspeed, they will automatically shut down (especially important in a crash if the rotor blades

have been ripped off). It has armoured fuel tanks that can absorb large and small calibre rounds. There is also a special protective barrier around the fuel tanks that, if punctured, will release a fluid that reacts to fuel and will harden and block the leak. The fuel lines have special self-sealing unions and break away fittings and all the seats can absorb vertical impacts up to 10 times the force of gravity which helps to protect the spine of the occupant in a crash. There is also a generous amount of armour plating as well.

Points to Note:

The Uniform: The pilot wears as much fire protection as possible. The one-piece lightweight flying suit is made from fire resistant Nomex as are the gloves. Normally, the sleeves would always be rolled down, so the fact that the pilot in the picture has his rolled up indicates that he is probably not immediately about to go flying.

The Helmet: The flying helmet is an Alpha helmet. It is a lightweight aviation helmet with integrated intercommunications system (ICS) allowing the wearer to talk and listen to other people or radios connected to the aircraft's intercommunications system and radio system. The mouthpiece microphone needs to be pushed up against the lips to minimise the amount of external noise entering the microphone and maximising the sounds of the wearer's voice making it easier to transmit.

The helmet has two Perspex visors; a clear visor for flight at night and a tinted visor for daytime flying. Either visor can be used separately or together in the up or down position. In the image, both visors are in the up position and are hidden behind the visor protector which is visible. Immediately above the forehead and below the visor protector is the NVG rail. This is a fitting that allows night vision goggles to be attached to the helmet. The NVGs can be placed in the up position, sitting up above the field of view, or if in use, can be flipped down so that each of the eyepieces of the goggles sit immediately in front of the eyes of the wearer.

The Instrumentation: On the instrument console (immediately in front of the pilot) and the centre console (to the left of the pilot's left leg) hold the instrumentation and radios and switches of the aircraft's nav aids, systems and avionics. Nav aids is the term used to describe navigational aids and avionics is the term used to describe aviation electronics.

Nav aids are those instruments that allow a pilot to navigate through the air with or without visual reference to the ground. In basic flying a pilot needs to be able to read a map and interpret what the map says to what he or she sees on the ground. This is known as 'visual navigation' and is done in meteorological conditions that allow this known as VMC or visual meteorological conditions. If the conditions do not allow this, ie rain or cloud or fog or other obscurations hamper visibility, the pilot can – if appropriately trained and with the appropriate equipment – navigate by use of nav aids and other instruments. This is known as flying on instruments and is the way in which aircraft can fly in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC).

On the Black Hawk, most of the radios and other systems are situated on the centre console and most of the other instruments used for flying are on the instrument console.



An S-70A-9 Black Hawk of the Australian Army Aviation Corps