

And How Was Your Day?

This one happened to our brothers in that other shade of blue. It could happen to you.

A USAF RF-4C was straight and level on a low attitude reconnaissance mission in southeast CONUS when the *Phantom II* pitched and yawed abruptly. The pilot depressed the emergency quick release lever and the motions stopped.

The weapon system operator (WSO), same as our RIO, saw fire and smoke emanating from a circuit breaker panel. The crew went to 100-percent oxygen and the pilot secured both generators while climbing to VMC conditions between cloud layers.

The WSO successfully battled flames in the rear cockpit while the pilot extended the ram air turbine (RAT). However, all electrical power, including battery and RAT, was lost. So, among other items, the crew had no navigational instruments, no attitude reference system, no fuel monitoring, no fuel transfer, no radios, no transponder and no external fuel tank jettison. They communicated by written notes and hand signals.

Circling in a clear chamber of airspace, the crew completed an emergency checklist but, when the pilot turned the generators back on, the WSO rapidly signaled that the fire had restarted. Generators were turned off.

The WSO was uninjured but was uncertain if he could eject safely. The *Phantom II* orbited for an hour as the crew worked without success on circuit breakers to restore some power. The RF-4C was still confined to a hole of clear space surrounded by clouds.

Concerned about the operability of the WSO's ejection seat, the pilot decided to land the jet on a 4,000-foot civilian strip spotted earlier.

On a precautionary low pass, the crew noted trees closely lining both sides of the runway, a steep cliff at the approach end and a severe drop-off at the departure end. The pilot elected a gear-up, no-flap landing, figuring he had no way of ensuring the gear were down and locked, due to inoperable position indicators and



no chase aircraft to check them visually. Also, if the gear were lowered pneumatically, antiskid and nose gear steering features were lost. Plus, the runway was too short for the *Phantom II*. The crew recalled a recent successful gear-up landing during which the jet sustained minor damage.

The pilot made his approach and touched down 300 feet from the approach end. The RF-4C slid nearly 3,000 feet before coming to a halt.

Although fire erupted from spilled, trapped fuel in the centerline tank, it burned out shortly. The crew climbed out safely. The WSO suffered a mild muscle strain which resulted in one lost workday.

Electrical arcing in a cannon plug probably caused the fire. A wire bundle was burned through. The aircraft sustained structural damage to the left wing, control surfaces, and forward fuselage and canopies.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

It rains. It pours. These unlucky gents ran into a buzz saw of bad happenings one right after t'other. Goes to show how a flyer's day can turn into creepy crawlers — worms — in a hurry. Happily, the crew got the beast down and walked away from it in fair shape. What happened to them simply doesn't happen much in these modern days. But the incident got Gramps to thinkin'.

'Member the left-hand triangle, lost comm procedure if you got lost in the glue and couldn't tell anybody? And the nav aids didn't work? Radar readers would, presumably, see the triangle on the scope and vector help to lead you down.

Turns out the Flight Information Handbook (FIH), which augments the En route Supplement, lists the procedure in the NATO/ICAO (International Civil Aeronautical Organization) section: The triangle should consist of two-minute legs at 300 knots or less, one minute if faster; right-hand if the receiver's OK, left-hand if it isn't; make two triangles, then proceed on course for 20 minutes before flying the pattern again. But the FAA section of the FIH doesn't address the "triangle." Experienced Navy ATC types tell me only half of our controllers nowadays are aware of the triangle procedure, so don't count on it. But if you get stuck like these guys, it wouldn't hurt to give the procedure a try.

Lights and Limitations

An SH-2F pilot was flying night deck landing qualifications and experienced difficulty in pressure-fueling. The ship was about 15 miles from land. Rather than shut the *Seasprite* down so that the crew could gravity-fuel the machine, he quickly loaded his practicing pilots and launched even though the fuel "low level" light, indicating less than 300 pounds, was illuminated. The copilot did not question the senior pilot who, in fact, was to become the commanding officer.

En route to the refueling station ashore, the aircrewmembers and passengers

ILLUSTRATED BY *Osborn*



instinctively tightened lap belts and prepared to ditch. The pilot neither declared his low fuel condition to the tower nor did he request an entry into the pattern that would place the aircraft expeditiously over land. Instead, he accepted an over-water approach to the field, which required a sharp banking maneuver to execute. The fuel totalizer now indicated 100 pounds. The *Seasprite* landed safely.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Another blood boiler! I bet the subordinates of this sortie breathed one horrendous sigh of relief when the SH-2F touched down on mother earth.

There's absolutely no mission in peacetime that calls for this brand of disregard for safety. NATOPS says that, in the *Seasprite*, 30 pounds of gas is unusable. It can't be drawn out by the fuel pumps. It's common knowledge in the community that the SH-2F's totalizer can easily be 100 pounds off. And you ain't supposed to make steep turns when you're as low on go-juice as this group was.

Any wonder that a number of people in this command requested not to be scheduled with the pilot of this nail-biter?

When it comes to fuel warning lights, don't push it, ladies and gents. You might end up pushing somethin' else, like flowers, from under the you-know-what.

Fumin' over Fumes

While examining cargo on a C-9B *Skytrain*, an inspector discovered: an engine-

driven air compressor gas tank that had not been purged; a metal parts barrels lid containing hydraulic lines and a pool of about one pint of hydraulic fluid; and a stainless steel canister filled with liquid chloride poison packed in a cardboard box and not listed as hazardous cargo. Fortunately, takeoff was delayed until discrepancies were corrected.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Dang blast it! I'm fast losin' patience with this hazardous cargo situation. This report is one more for the stack on my desk and that stack's gettin' higher and higher.

A junior, inexperienced crew loaded up this *Skytrain*. They needed proper supervision and didn't get it. An unpurged gas tank alone is a catastrophe waitin' to happen. These folks added a pool of hydraulic fluid for good measure. Toss a match in there and...

I'm having nightmares lately picturin' a sleek and beautiful transport burstin' to shreds at altitude!

Everybody: Know what hazardous cargo is, pack it up right and imagine that you yourself are gonna be ridin' in the aircraft!

