GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

F-4 Fiasco

A pilot and an RIO picked up an F-4B from an overhaul activity in Japan to ferry the aircraft back to their squadron which was deployed aboard ship. The crew planned to ferry the F-4 to an NAS and await orders from the ship.

The flight was uneventful with one stop for fuel. After getting the report on the weather at his destination, the pilot decided to cancel his IFR flight plan. He proceeded VFR to the field and, about 12 miles out, received landing instructions from the tower.

Approaching the field, the pilot and RIO noted rain showers in the area and saw puddles of water on the runway. Downwind on initial approach, the RIO suggested they inquire about the status of the Morest gear. The tower advised the gear would be ready in five minutes. The pilot continued the approach but decided to take a wave-off owing to poor line-up and the fact of being high and fast. On the second time around, line-up, speed and altitude looked good. However, the tower advised the pilot that the Morest gear was not up; it would be ready on the next pass.

While downwind for the third approach, the tower advised that the Morest was ready, so the pilot called the gear and continued the approach. The approach and landing were normal to touchdown, but the pilot elected not to use the drag chute because he intended to take off again if he missed the Morest. He also intentionally kept the hook up, figuring he would drop it about 500 feet from the arresting gear. The hook handle was actuated at a point estimated to be 500 feet from the Morest, but the pilot quickly realized he was past the gear with no arrestment. He immediately went to MILITARY POWER in an effort to take off, but failed to realize his hook was down and that the abort gear was coming up. Both the pilot and RIO failed to hear the tower transmit, "Hook down."

Just as the aircraft reached take-off speed (approximately 140 knots), the tailhook engaged the abort gear. When the pilot felt the aircraft jolt, he suddenly realized what had happened and brought the power to idle. The aircraft continued to decelerate and left the runway at about 100 knots. The nose gear failed when it encountered the soft dirt and the F-4 finally stopped about 200 feet past the end of the overrun.

The design limit of the abort gear was exceeded so badly during the engagement that a number of the 40-pound links disintegrated. Some of the pieces were whipped through the air for a distance of over 6,000 feet. One man was injured by a piece of chain link, and a parked car and aircraft were damaged.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Fetch me another asprin tablet, my ulcer's doin' nip-ups. It took a lot of real loose plannin' and very little headwork to send this F-4 right back where it came from—OVERHAUL.

This lad was concerned enough about the wet runway to request the Morest, but looks like he'd landed without it on the first pass if his line up had been good. Kinda hard to convince your ole Dad it's smart not to use the drag chute in a case like this and not to drop that hook until the last second is downright foolish.

The tower tried to warn the pilot about his hook bein' down, but you know it's fairly hard to make out transmissions when that hook's scraping on the runway.

ILLUSTRATED BY Oblom

When you're flyin' a good bird, have a drag chute to use, a Morest and abort gear, it takes a lot of hard work to plumber a landin' this bad.

Check my Six

Two dauntless *Crusader* drivers were scheduled for night FMLP. Their assigned birds had full fuel loads and were ready for the 1650 launch, ample time (70 minutes) to burn down for an 1800 Charlie.

Dauntless One managed to become airborne at 1732, switched to paddles frequency and the bounce field TACAN. Owing to the nearness of Charlie time, he was attempting to burn down, cruising at 12,000 feet, 450 knots, executing barrel rolls and wingovers "to keep his speed down," all in a high density air space.

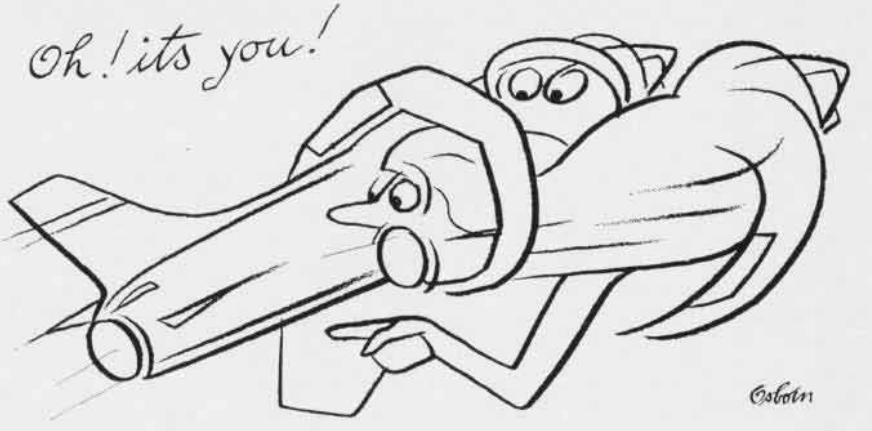
Dauntless Two became airborne from runway 36 at 1743, climbed in burner to 20,000 feet, deselected burner and started a left turn to circle home base at 10 miles. East of the field, he let down to 15,000 feet and continued the left turn. He was checking "his six" (six o'clock position) all the way as there were two other heavy F-8's up with fuel to burn. North of the field, he eased the nose up and while indicating .93, hit burner and pulled the nose up further, still checking "his six."

In a rather rapid climb (.95) and after checking "his six," Dauntless Two was confronted with Dauntless One directly in front of him and a little above. Closing Dauntless One from five o'clock he realized a rendezvous was imminent, deselected burner and attempted evasive action by pushing the nose over and rolling left. . . . After impact, Dauntless Two found himself in front of and above Dauntless One at 11 o'clock. He rolled wings level, extended speed brakes and jockeyed to look his victim over.

At approximately 1748, Dauntless One felt a tremendous jolt and caught a glimpse of what looked like an aircraft as it came into view from under his nose. At the time, he was in a level turn of 10° bank to port. Thinking he had been struck, he immediately reached for the face curtain and reduced power to idle. He glued his eyes to the instrument panel. As the machine settled down and continued to operate normally, he decided *not* to eject.

After proceeding to a neutral corner, Dauntless Two held inventory. All instruments were good except the ball, which was all the way to one side. The aircraft would not answer trim correctly and made violent movements each time he tried. Although badly bruised, the bird was manageable, so he too decided to stay with it.

After getting together like two porcupines, the twosome looked each other over. Both birds were sporting Bravo damage, none of which impaired their ability to land. Handling characteristics in the landing configuration were satisfactory. Both aircraft returned to base for uneventful landings.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

How hairy can it get? This experienced lad with nearly 1,000 hours, over 600 in this model, and designated over three years, deliberately ignored rules for staying alive.

Sure, he had a heavy bird; but the flight schedule provided ample time to expend this fuel in safe, useful endeavor. There will continue to be occasion when availability, weather or operational requirements dictate the use of aircraft fueled for different missions. But as long as lads of this type fail to discipline themselves, constructively plan their flights, and adequately brief, life won't be worth a plugged nickel in the same air space.

Why this tiger on the prowl devoted so much attention to his "six" is beyond me. Had he maintained the swivel head lookout of a truly hungry tiger, it's doubtful his whole day would have been ruined.

This sort of foolishness in a high density air space is as sensible as playing "Russian Roulette" with one empty chamber. I've said it before and I'll say it again, "There is no substitute for that safety device between your ears."

Meals, not Snacks

Pilots, inclined to grab snacks on long flying missions, should heed the following (adapted) admonition of Lt. Curtis G. Graham, Navy Flight Surgeon:

While over-eating may be a threat to health on a long-term basis, under-eating can become an immediate threat to you and the lives of your crew or passengers.

Your body, like your aircraft, runs smoothly when the tank is fueled. Your main fuel tank lasts about four and a half hours after a good meal. It burns about 250 calories per hour under a moderate work load. When it begins to run dry, the reserves are called upon. Sugar is released from the liver, the body's "reserve tank," and this may last another three or four hours. If you are already operating upon your reserves and an emergency arises when your body needs a sudden burst of energy, the necessary reserve may not be there.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Amen to that! I've lived a long time and I ain't missed one of my three square meals a day yet.