GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Divert Dividend

Upon an A-3's arrival at a divert field, GCA took control of the *Skywarrior* at 1,500 feet on a modified base leg. GCA issued a turn to final with instructions to perform the landing check. These were acknowledged. On the glide path, the pilot said he was having some difficulty in maintaining his position because of a light fuel load.

Nevertheless, he proceeded without incident until just prior to touchdown. In switching his attention from the mirror to the runway, the pilot saw pulsing red lights lining the runway. He thought the lights were line-up aids; therefore, no wave-off was initiated. The aircraft settled to the runway without benefit of undercarriage.

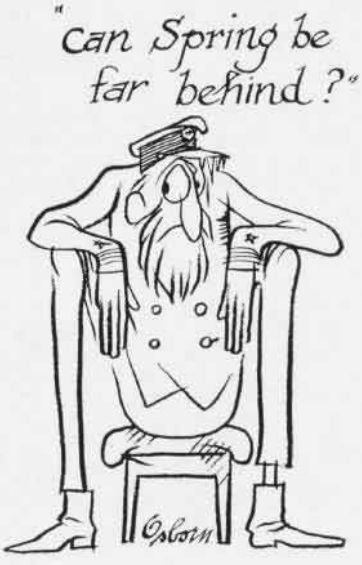
Grampaw Pettibone says:

Someday, someone will come up with a Dilbert-proof method of getting the gear down when its supposed to be, but until such time let's all use what we've got—the checkoff list, wave-off lights and our heads.

Check Double Check

It was one of those nights. The *Crusader* jockey spread his wings prior to leaving the line and en route to the duty had to fold them to permit a civilian jet liner to pass. On takeoff, he noted his speed was normal but the takeoff roll distance was excessive. After liftoff, the gear was raised and the nose seemed to be sensitive in yaw and pitch. At about a 200-300-foot altitude after the wing was lowered, the machine commenced a series of large pitch and yaw evolutions. (PC-1 and PC-2 were fluctuating 800 pounds.)

Recognizing the dilemma at hand, the credulous *Crusader* driver attempted to lock the wing but could not get the locking handle to move into the forward locking detent. Meanwhile, airspeed



had built to 260 knots and altitude to 4,600 feet. The driver then raised the wing and started a shallow right turn back towards the field, dumping fuel en route. (Angle of attack in the turn was approximately 14 units.)

Altitudes, airspeeds, and angle of attack from here on in are not accurately recalled as this pilot's main concern was getting it back on the runway.

Just before touchdown, the incredulous performer realized the landing gear had not been extended and placed the gear handle in the down position. Too late—the boneyard-bound bird landed gear up, wing up, wings folded and, after coming to rest, was abandoned by the red-faced birdman.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! It's a good thing this flight ended when it did 'cause, if there was any more moving parts on this airplane, you can bet this fella would've had 'em all in the wrong place at the right time.

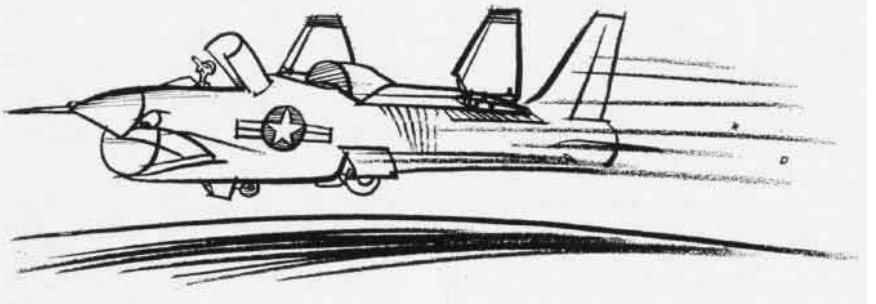
A red face is a mighty cheap price to pay for forgettin' the check list, but this kind of performance ain't much of a boost to the professional standing of an aviator. If Ole Gramps had a nickel for every accident caused by people ignorin' this handy placard, I could buy that farm and retire.

Before you push that kerosene converter handle forward next time, eyeball yourself in the rear view mirror 'cause that's the guy responsible for your safety.

Seahorse Requiem

In preparation for a scheduled vertrep (vertical replenishment), a transient UH-34 was flown off the replenishment ship to the nearby LPH the night before the evolution. This particular *Seahorse* was not scheduled to participate in the vertrep per se, but was to be the airborne plane guard.

Flight quarters was sounded aboard the LPH at 0530. The transient *Seahorse* crew members arrived at their aircraft at 0600, conducted a preflight and encountered no discrepancies. (The pickup hook was not functionally tested as



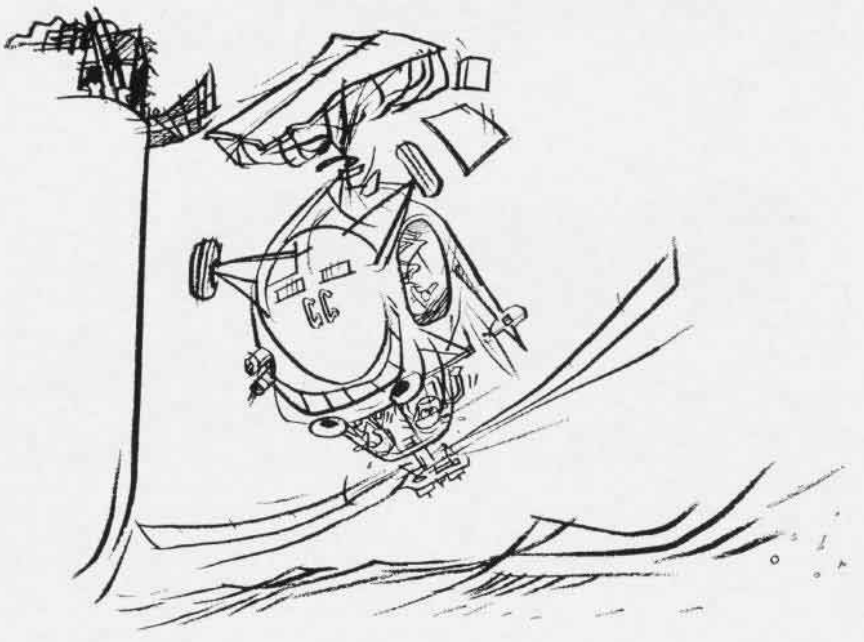
the assigned mission was SAR.) Engine start was a bit sluggish, but rotor engagement and preflight checks were normal.

Takeoff at 0615 was routine and the helo proceeded to a 15-minute orbit while the ships maneuvered for replenishment. During their orbit, vertrep control informed the unsuspecting pilot that he would take part in the vertrep. He "Wilco'd" the instructions and conducted a pickup hook check. (The hook released, but would not recock.)

Vertrep commenced at 0630 on a course of 040°, speed 12 knots, with a relative wind of 18 knots at 340°. The first approach was waved off as the cargo hook was open. On the second approach as the *Seahorse* came to a hover, the senior petty officer of the helo det ran out and manually recocked the hook. In spite of a moderately pitching deck, pickup of a load of approximately 1,000 pounds was effected smoothly and taken to the receiving ship. Hovering over the receiving area on deck, the copilot attempted to release the load by means of his cyclic thumb switch in the ON position. When the hook failed to release, he selected the AUTO position and the hook opened, releasing the load. (This hook malfunction was not reported to the pilot.) On return to the replenishment ship, the senior petty officer on deck noticed the hook had failed to close and signalled deck personnel to recock the hook manually.

Scheduled for pickup was a double load, situated outboard on the ship's port side and identified on the mark-up board as 1,000 pounds. (The weights of all loads were approximate as the ship's scales were inoperative.) The scheduled load's pallet became fouled and the hook-up man selected an inboard load which was nearby.

As the load was hooked up, the crewman called for the pilot to maneuver right to center the load and then up to clear obstructions. The load broke free of the deck and swung back, hitting the originally scheduled load and knocking it into the safety net. The attached load appeared to be free of all hangups and the "clear to go" signal was given by the flight deck officer.



During this time, the copilot maintained a watch on all instruments. They appeared normal; RPM was maintained between 2,600-2,750 with adequate MAP to hold position. As tension was taken on the load, the pilot added collective and started off forward and slightly to port. The load was observed to catch and drag across other loaded pallets, and fall into the port safety net. The pilot felt a jolt and the helo pitched to a 15-25° nose-down position, lost its forward motion and commenced a longitudinal oscillation.

As the load broke free of the net and cleared the ship, the *Seahorse* began a lateral oscillation, drifted aft toward the ship and rapidly became uncontrollable. (The pilots attempted—without success—to pickle [release] the load after initial jolt, cycling through all three positions of the master cargo switch at least nine times and making two attempts with the emergency foot release.)

The pilot attempted to regain RPM by rapidly and slightly reducing collective, but it continued dropping past 2,400 RPM. The copilot noticed the decaying RPM and reached for the collective to assist in adding power but found it already "two-blocked" with full throttle. By this time, the helo had drifted back to the ship and the right main mount settled in the net.

Realizing the situation was hopeless, the pilot alerted the crew to an imminent ditching and applied full left cyclic twice in an effort to dislodge the wheel from the safety net and clear the ship. The hung helo came free and fell aft and to port, entering the water tail first. It rolled on its port side, floated for a few moments (ample time for the crew to get clear) and departed for the deep six. Another *Seahorse* nearby adeptly plucked the crew from the water and safely deposited them aboard ship.

Crampaw Pettibone says:

Holy mackerel, what a mess! The AAR says the cargo hook malfunction was the primary cause of this mishap. I say the pilot in command of that bird did it all by himself. Changin' the mission after takeoff had no bearing on this accident at all. This lad knew he hadn't checked the hook and he had no business to pursue the vertrep any further without a functional check on deck.

Perseverance certainly is a desired trait in a Naval Aviator, but only when it is tempered with inquisitiveness, caution and just plain common sense.