GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Wormy Day

It was a re-fly of an instrument hop in the TA-4F from the replacement instrument training squadron at one of our master jet air stations. The briefing was short but complete. The lieutenant second-tour instructor and the lieutenant (junior grade) replacement pilot (RP) left the ready room at 1240 to man their aircraft. Start, pre-taxi procedures, and instrument checklist were normal, and clearance was obtained for takeoff. On the runway, takeoff checklist and manual fuel check were completed at 85%. At 100% for takeoff, engine instruments were normal and the pressure ratio reading of 2.28 was good. The instructor gave the controls to the RP under the hood in the back seat at 80 knots. He made a normal instrument takeoff, climbing out to 1,000 feet, three miles, at 300 knots.

Departure control was contacted and clearance received to continue climb to Flight Level 240. Power was added and the aircraft accelerated to 330 knots. At 5,000 feet, there was a loud bang. The instructor's first impression was that the emergency generator had somehow been deployed; the RP thought they had hit a bird. The aircraft immediately lost power, and the instruments started to unwind. The RP popped his hood while the instructor took control, deployed the emergency generator, and switched to guard channel on UHF.

They were now six to seven miles west of the air station, heading south. IFF was switched to emergency, and the instructor noticed that oil pressure was 20 psi with rpm and fuel flow 30% and 800 pph, respectively. There were no indications of fire. As they zoomed to 6,300 feet, slowing to 200 knots, the instructor noted that they were in an excellent position for a flame-out approach to runway 09. Because he had practiced flame-out approaches at least once a week, he decided to stay with the aircraft.

By this time, the throttle had been brought to *off* and preparations made for an airstart. After he had hit the igniters and brought the throttle around the horn to idle, the engine did not respond. A second attempt also failed, with the engine instruments remaining as originally noted.

The tower was notified of the pilot's intent to make a flame-out approach to runway 09R. As the pilot maintained an airspeed of 200 knots, the turn toward the field was completed. The RP started calling off altitudes, and it looked as if they were well set up for a landing. At 1,500 feet and approximately one to two miles from the runway, the gear handle was lowered, the doors opened, and the gear fell normally. The mains indicated safe, but the nose gear remained barberpoled. The pilots smelled smoke. The fire warning light then came on, and the landing gear went unsafe.

As the pilot was starting his flare to land, he noted fire in his right rear view mirror, and heard the tower say on *Guard*, "Aircraft on short final runway nine, drop your gear." At this point, the lieutenant decided they had better eject.

As they touched down, the starboard main landing gear collapsed. The instructor transmitted to the RP to eject and immediately pulled the face curtain with his right hand.

The following statement in the pilot's own words completes the story: "For an instant I thought the seat would not work because it took so long to eject me, this, of course, being the delay while the rear seat pilot exited the aircraft. When I finally did eject, I remember comparing the sensation of the ejection seat trainer, saying to myself that this was easier and smoother. As I was still going up, I let go of the face curtain and saw the plane go underneath me, to my left, on fire. I was tilted over on my right side, feet high. I felt the seat separate, and the next thing I knew the parachute opened, bringing me upright in a hurry. I saw the RP land over to my right and his chute land on top of him. I said to myself, I'd better pull the D ring. I did and threw it away. I then thought I'd better position myself for landing.

"Upon impact, I was in a left to right drift and touched down on my right foot. I immediately felt a sharp pain in my right foot and promptly sat down on my seat pan. I sat there for a few seconds, took off my oxygen mask and helmet and laid them by my side. The RP came running over to me from my right and asked if I was O.K. I knew my right foot was broken, so I lay down until the ambulance came. with a stretcher.

"At the dispensary they took x-rays of my ankle, foot, and spine, gave me

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a pain-killing shot, put me in a cast, and released me. I arrived home at 1615 after a very eventful day."

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great land o' Goshen! The Lord was on their side that day. That instructor was a real pro. By the book, 1-2-3, fast thinkin' and all that, but it just wasn't in the cards to save the bird. These ground-level ejection seats are really jewels.

On the Runway, Please!

It was a routine winter ASW patrol in the North Atlantic for the SP-2E *Neptune* and a crew of 12. The mid-morning takeoff was in the rain with IFR conditions existing all along the coast. The flight proceeded via airways to "on station," and the patrol was uneventful for about seven hours until the #1 AC generator trip light came on. Attempts to reset the generator were unsuccessful and the lieutenant (aircraft commander) elected to disconnect the constant speed drive unit. Positive indication of disconnect was not observed; however, both pilots were satisfied that the unit had disconnected and decided not to feather the engine.

As the aircraft headed for home, the Fleet Air Wing OpCon Center was advised of the problem. Forecast weather at home base was for 300-foot ceiling and one mile visibility with snow, sleet, and rain at their arrival time. Weather at an Air Force base about an hour closer was reported as a 200-foot ceiling with 3/4-mile visibility. Because it was closer with longer runways and no icing, coupled with the questionable status of the aircraft systems, prudent judgment dictated a landing there vice home base.

Upon crossing the coastline, the air traffic control center cleared the flight direct to the Air Force base. Approach vectored them for GCA final. The crew completed approach and prelanding checklists, reported ready for landing, and the GCA precision approach commenced routinely.

At five miles, the landing gear was lowered and landing checklist completed. All persons were in normal ditching stations except the plane captain who was in the jump seat between the two pilots.

Descent on the glide slope was described by the copilot as being made in "heavy turbulence." Although staying on course, the aircraft started low and remained below glide path throughout the approach. At approximately two miles from the runway, the flight became dangerously low and was given a waveoff by the GCA controller.

The pilot added power to the reciprocating engines and raised the landing gear while the copilot added throttle to the jet engines. The *Neptune* then leveled off and came to within 15 feet of the glide slope before again dropping dangerously low and striking the ground 4,400 feet short of the runway.

As the large aircraft grumbled to a stop, both reciprocating engines burst into flames. The pilot yelled for the crew to abandon ship and the nine men forward exited through the overhead and pilot's hatches. The remaining three crewmen exited aft through the side windows.

All were quickly accounted for, eight of them suffering minor injuries. The plane was soon completely destroyed by fire.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls o' fire! That's exactly what this'n turned into! Just can't figger out what was goin' on in that cockpit during the waveoff. Not much, I'd say. The pilot got in over his head with no one to help him out. Seems the copilot was watchin' the lights go by instead of helpin' his boss. "It takes two to tango" with one of these big birds. That's why they put two guys in the cockpit.

The rest of the crew, except for the plane captain, owe their survival to being strapped into their ditching stations during the crash. All were wearing proper survival and exposure gear, thank you. The plane captain was just plain lucky. Reminds me of a poem:

Ditching stations are designed for
Those who care enough to pine for
Family, friends, and fancy ways
To use those extra happy days.