GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Eerie

The night was very dark when the *Skyhawk* driver manned his aircraft on the flight deck for a scheduled night mission. The engine start and all post-start checks were normal. However, five minutes before launch, squadron maintenance personnel signaled to him that his plane was now "down." He had no indication why, so he double-checked inside the cockpit for a possible cause.

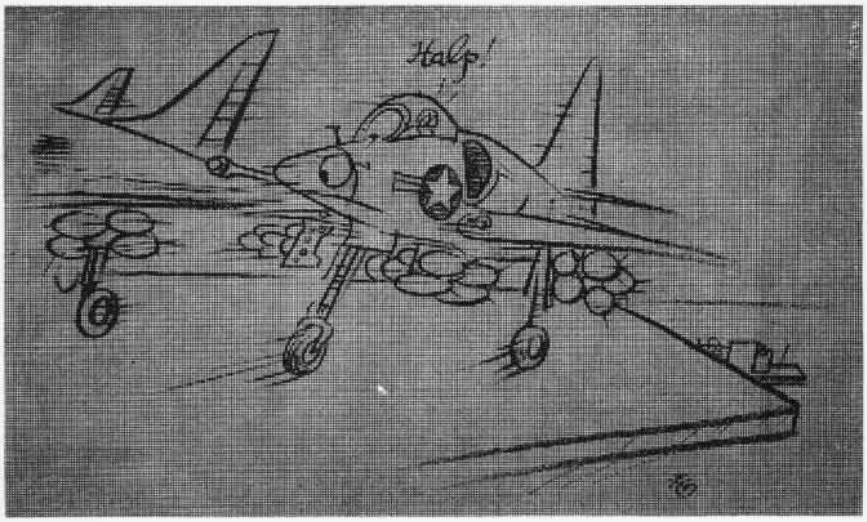
When he looked outside the cockpit, he had the sensation that he was rolling backwards from his position in the middle of the flight deck towards the port side of the angled deck. His first reaction was to step firmly on the brakes. When he continued to believe he was still moving, he dropped the tailhook and secured the engine to signal flight deck personnel to chock the plane's wheels. After there was no indicated change in rate of motion, he felt he was about to go over the side and pulled the override switch and raised the gear handle. The next thing he noticed was that the nose wheel had collapsed.

It was at this time that the *Hawk* pilot realized that he hadn't moved at all, but had mistaken the movement

of other aircraft for the movement of his own A-4 *Skyhawk*.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great heavenly days, what a predicament! If your first reaction to this lad's plight is to smile, you'd better think twice. This sort of optical illusion can descend on the best of us. It takes real discipline to overcome it.



Down and Out

With the rest of the air wing, a flight of four A-7's rendezvoused on the 180-degree radial at 9,000 feet, 15 miles from the ship, to perform in an air power demonstration for visiting foreign dignitaries. At 0900, under excellent weather conditions, the A-7's executed a division run, dropping their bombs on a point 3,000 feet from the port beam of the ship.

This portion of the flight proceeded without incident and the *Corsairs* rendezvoused with the rest of the air wing in preparation for a fly-by. The A-7's took position on the port wing of the A-6 division (air wing lead) and a flight of four F-4's took the starboard wing.

As the group rolled out on course for the fly-by, approximately ten miles astern the ship and at an altitude of 1,500 feet, the second section leader of the *Corsair* flight experienced a PC-2 hydraulic failure from an unknown cause. He punched out the master caution light and informed his division leader of his difficulties but decided to remain in formation as they were inbound to the ship.

No more than a half minute later the *Corsair* jockey experienced a complete flight control failure. The aircraft began a slow descending roll (fortunately away from the other aircraft in the formation) which the pilot could not control. He glanced at his instruments and noted the PC-1 hydraulic pressure was not normal and, in this predicament, did not consider deploying the emergency power package. At this time, the A-7 was indicating 320 knots at 800 feet and the driver decided to eject. He glanced briefly into the cockpit, then over his shoulder to make sure he was clear of the slot aircraft and the remainder of the division, and pulled the curtain.

The ejection went smoothly. After a short time in the water, the uninjured pilot was retrieved by the ship's rescue helicopter.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great horned toadies, somebody could'a got hurt! Ole Gramps realizes things happened pretty fast to this youngster, but even so, I can't understand why he even thought of staying with the fly-by when the hydraulic system told him it was gettin' sick.

It was darned lucky that machine decided to roll left, away from the rest of the flight. It could'a gone the other way and really made a mess of the entire operation.

Of course, we all want to please and impress the audience with precision formation but never at the expense of an accident or a near-miss.

Crowded

Two TA-4F's took off at 1810 heading for home after an extended flight. Within 100 miles of their destination and minutes of each other, both aircraft experienced constant speed drive failure and lost all external lights. The *Skyhawks* continued on their way and at about 2025 contacted their home base tower to say that they were commencing the ten-mile arc on the TACAN approach.

Earlier, at about 1920, two F-4's had taken off from the same home field for a local ordnance flight, but, owing to rain showers and poor weather in the target area, they were unable to drop ordnance. The F-4's were now in the process of burning down fuel for their return to base and contacted the tower for GCA's. The F-4's were passed to GCA frequencies to be controlled separately.

GCA could not maintain radar contact with the first F-4 because of the rain, so the pilot decided to terminate the GCA and land VFR. The second F-4 then commenced his GCA. (This evolution transpired at the same time the *Skyhawks* were entering their ten-mile TACAN arc.)

The A-4's encountered VFR conditions at about 5,000 feet MSL and the leader notified the tower that he elected to cancel his IFR flight plan and continue to the field VFR. He also informed the tower that he and his wingman would be without external lights and would lose their radios after touchdown. The tower acknowledged the information, cleared them for a straight-in and instructed the *Skyhawks* to report three miles with gear.

After clearing the A-4's, the tower passed landing clearance for the F-4 to the GCA coordinator as follows: "Cleared to land number three behind two unlighted A-4's." The GCA coordinator passed the information to the final controller who was a student, but does not recall passing the word that the A-4's were unlighted. The final controller in turn passed the clearance to the F-4 as he received it, so that no information about the unlighted *Skyhawks* was received by the F-4 driver.

The A-4 flight continued its approach but failed to report three miles. The *Hawks* made a section landing, with the wingman taking a longer than normal interval due to the weather, and rolled out to the end of the runway.

The F-4 on GCA landed close to GCA touchdown (shortly behind the A-4's) and noticed the runway was slick from the rain showers. He considered taking the arresting gear, but as he approached the "3,000 feet remaining" marker, he noted his airspeed indicating zero and felt he could slow down to turn-off speed.

With approximately 1,000-2,000 feet of runway remaining, the F-4 pilot saw what appeared to be two objects suspended above and near the end of the runway. At about 600 feet from the bitter end of the runway, the F-4 driver's suspicions were confirmed and he veered right in an attempt to avoid a collision with the A-4's. The *Phantom* entered a mild sideways skid to the left and collided with one A-4 which caused him to enter a clockwise spin and proceed off the runway backwards.

Fortunately, there were no injuries and the other A-4 and F-4 made it without incurring any damage.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! It was a sad day when this crowd mustered. It's quite clear that everyone involved but the F-4 jockey contributed to this needless mishap. If it's gonna be a safe operation, the necessity for being exact and precise can't be tempered with any assumptions or superstitions.

Memo from Gramps

From time to time, I see somethin' that really makes sense and good readin'. Take this bit from an article by Captain F. W. Ault, USN, published in the MAW-2 *Hot Dope Sheet*. It was entitled, "Safety and Command Responsibility."

"Many people have searched for years for some sweeping change or some major program calculated to reduce the safety problem to manageable proportions. Even the most expensive ideas have achieved only moderate success, however, and none of these can be entirely successful until we fully realize that success lies primarily in meticulous attention to even the smallest detail.

"One contention is that safe operations evolve automatically from establishing how a thing can best be done, insisting that it be done that way and checking to see that it is.

"One final word: Almost invariably the highest states of readiness are characterized by low accident rates in those organizations where safety is viewed—not as an end—but as a by-product of a sound doctrine."