



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

CVA-54, Where Are You?

The second tour lieutenant commander was assigned as flight leader for a two-plane, F-4B strike training mission from a deployed CVA. He and his lieutenant junior grade radar intercept officer were assigned aircraft Patrol Car 205. His wingman, another lieutenant junior grade, was in Patrol Car 213. The flight members assembled in the ready room at 0600 and were briefed for the mission over closed circuit television from the integrated operational intelligence center.

The brief was continued verbally by the flight leader and covered all requirements except for a weather alternate and divert, and lost radio or lost navigation aids procedures. (All flight members had previously been instructed in these standard procedures.)

Two minutes prior to manning aircraft, the crews were notified that their target weather was too low, and an alternate mission was assigned. Fuel load was ample (17,000 pounds) and the two *Phantoms* were launched at 0800. Patrol Car 213 reported no TACAN, an unreliable ADF and an intermittent UHF radio. Patrol Car 205 was a good aircraft with only a failed AJB-3 gyro.

The mission was conducted in a normal manner with the flight leaving the target area with 6,400 and 6,100

pounds of fuel remaining. Fuel management en route was sound; normal reserves remained for recovery.

As the two F-4's passed out to sea and turned toward the task force for recovery, the flight leader asked his RIO to tune in homeplate CVA TACAN. This the J.G. did, getting a lock on at the correct azimuth, but the range was about 100 miles too great. The pilot didn't request that the TACAN volume be turned up (in order to positively check the audio identi-

cation signal) and the RIO didn't do so on his own.

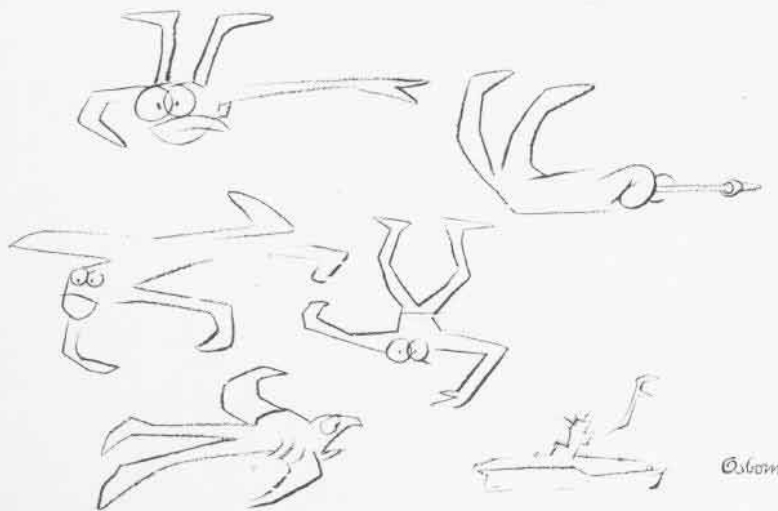
When the TACAN range read 100 miles, the pilot contacted the CVA strike radar controller. The controller acknowledged the call and advised that he held contacts on radar at 94 miles and that the ship's weather was 3,000 feet broken clouds, 1,500 feet scattered clouds with visibility ten miles plus. The lieutenant commander then requested an en route descent to the ship and was turned over to the marshal controller who was on a different console and radio frequency.

The marshal controller was informed that Patrol Cars 205 and 213, being passed to him for control were at about 160 degrees, 70 miles from the ship. When the flight leader checked in, he acknowledged that he held a good primary radar target at that position.

Without having positive radar contact, the controller cleared the Patrol Car flight for a Case II instrument penetration, when the flight leader indicated they were about 25 miles out. The two *Phantoms* lost all radio contact with the carrier passing 10,000 feet, entered the top of the overcast at 8,500 feet and finally broke out underneath at 300 feet with 1½ miles' visibility. Almost immediately they passed over a guided missile destroyer.

After completing a 360-degree turn and again passing over the DLG, the flight leader decided to climb back on top and try again. The flight broke out of the overcast at 8,000 feet and set up a holding pattern over the "ship." The flight leader switched to emergency IFF and guard channel. Fuel state was now 2,600 pounds. The CVA soon replied that a tanker was overhead at 2,000 feet with 2,000 pounds of fuel to give away. The lieutenant commander requested that the tanker be sent on top of the overcast to rendezvous, but the flight did not make contact.

Reaching a fuel state of 2,000 pounds, the lieutenant commander decided to make another TACAN approach. Again he passed over the DLG at about 500 feet, but there was no sign of the carrier. Patrol Car 213 sud-



denly called that he had land dead ahead at eight miles on his radar. The flight quickly turned back the other way. As the two forlorn *Phantoms* groped their way back on top of the overcast, again, the flight leader finally asked his RIO to cross-check another TACAN station. Podunk AFB came in loud and clear. He reset the CVA channel, which locked on at 150 degrees 102 miles, and the flight headed for the carrier.

Meanwhile the CVA had launched a fresh tanker which was being vectored at max speed toward the wayward flight. All too late, however, as Patrol Car 213 flamed out at 70 miles and the crew ejected. A few minutes later, Patrol Car 205's engines started to unwind and the flight leader and his RIO followed the other crew into the drink.

The SAR helicopter forces, previously alerted, soon picked the dripping ex-*Phantom Phlyers* from the sea and returned them to their lost carrier deck.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Jumpin' Jehosophat! What in tarnation happened here? Ain't this really a comedy of errors. How complacent can you get? Just dug around in my hip pocket and there it was, that old habit I learnt in flight school — check all channels and frequencies twice and always listen for the ID signal. It's saved me more'n once. Too bad it wasn't around to save them. Twaren't just the flight crew sittin' fat'n happy, though. The carrier's air traffic control personnel blew the NATOPS manual wide open when they didn't make positive identification of the flight. Two controllers let that one slip by. Hope the CIC and CATC officers got jacked up a bit on their responsibilities in this little matter.

Afraid the flight leader just wasn't with it that day, either. He had to make two passes over the DLG, underneath the overcast at 300 feet, before he realized it really wasn't the plane guard destroyer behind the carrier, which was reporting 1,500 scattered and 10 miles' visibility — Tsk! Tsk!

Dubious Distinction

While at marshal, the veteran lieutenant experienced a utility hydraulic failure in his F-8 *Crusader*. He notified the ship and was advised to come aboard. He had been airborne for over 2½ hours on a double-cycle, night barrier combat air patrol and was just a little fatigued. When he dropped his

hook, the hydraulic pressure came back up but continued to be erratic for the rest of the flight.

Thirty minutes later, he and his wingman started down the pipe for CCA's together. They separated at the 5,000-foot "platform," the lieutenant executing a 360-degree turn. He called the ball slightly high with 2,200 pounds of fuel. When the ball started to go higher, he increased his rate of descent and started to catch it just as the LSO radioed, "Okay, start catching it with power." Because he was still right of centerline, he made a correction. The nose started to drop and the LSO called for a little power, which the pilot gave the F-8, breaking the throttle out of automatic. Shortly thereafter, he stated that "things started feeling different — uncomfortable"; so he went to 100 percent power with the ball still high. It stayed there for a second and then the LSO started yelling for power and waveoff. As the lieutenant approached the ramp, he saw the ball go from high to center, to low, to red, to off the mirror, and he knew he would more than likely smack the ramp.

The *Crusader* did hit the ramp in the vicinity of its main landing gear and continued on up the deck. As the lieutenant reached for the face curtain, the aircraft rolled right about 10 or 15 degrees. Thinking he might eject right into the island structure, he hesitated but then, glancing in the rear view mirrors, saw the wing scraping along the flight deck and, knowing the F-8 would roll no further, positioned himself and pulled the curtain. The ejection was smooth and good. He saw the

Crusader, on fire, pass beneath him and felt himself flying through the air, hoping everything would work as advertised. After what seemed an eternity, the chute opened, and he started to swing. He was about to inflate his life vest when, on his second oscillation, the bow of the ship loomed up beside him out of the darkness. He noticed that he was going to hit the front end of the ship, too. Bracing himself, he swung hard into the right side of the bow, thus gaining the dubious distinction of being the only pilot to hit both ends of the ship on the same night. He hit, facing into the ship, on his right leg, foot, and then his left foot. His hardhat was severely buffeted and he felt himself being dragged up and over something, then found himself lying on his back, supine in the bow safety net. Unable to release the Koch fittings of the parachute, he just relaxed and watched the burning airplane float by until somebody came out to rescue him.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

About the only way to have prevented this accident would have been "to have stood in bed." The exacting requirements of a night, F-8, double-cycle, small 27C carrier, pitching deck landing add up to ramp strike. Captain! Admiral! Is this trip really necessary?

What kinda work schedule is 12 hours on, 24 hours off, alternating day and night operations every other day. How can anyone sleep well?

Thank God for rocket seats. We can now save most of the pilots who hit the ramp. But, can we stand the dollar loss of the aircraft?

