



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Fatal Flirt

The 1530 brief in the *Phantom* ready room was for air intercept practice. The air plan and air wing SOP called for the fighters to pick up 1,500 pounds of fuel from the airborne A-3 tanker at 10,000 feet.

The senior lieutenant commander and carrier air wing LSO briefed his crew to rendezvous with the tanker immediately after takeoff, get their fuel and then continue with the mission. There was no joint brief with the tanker as the inflight refueling was routine.

The 1700 launch from the large CVA went without incident; however, the *Skywarrior* rendezvous with the off-going tanker at 9,000 feet to consolidate fuel could not be completed because of a malfunction in the off-going aircraft. The lead F-4 *Phantom* soon joined on the tanker's port wing and, after an exchange of hand signals and a radio check, the drogue was extended. The tanker continued in its 10° to 15° banked port orbit of the CVA. Fueling proceeded normally and was soon completed. Then the F-4 pilot disengaged, retracted his refueling probe and joined in a tight parade position on the starboard side of the tanker. The tanker's wing overlapped a portion of the *Phantom* "to allow the navigator to read the *Phantom's* side number for his fuel record."

The tanker pilot, a commander, noticed his right wing being pulled down and looked out the right side of his aircraft. He could see only the upper part of the vertical fin of the *Phantom*, very close aboard. He then felt a bump on the right side and immediately saw the twin exhaust pipes of the F-4, very close ahead. The canopy then imploded and, with the rush of flying plexiglass and air, his helmet was blown off.

After stabilizing the tight parade formation, the lieutenant commander *Phantom Phlyer* applied full power and watched the KA-3 cockpit until it disappeared from his peripheral vision. He then pulled back hard on the stick and commenced a climb. The aircraft



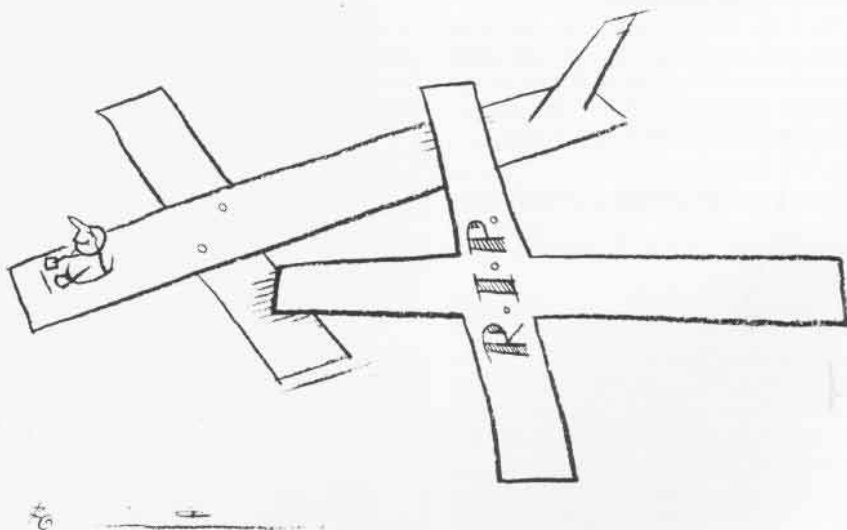
jostled about, made three or four very rapid, violent longitudinal oscillations and settled down. The F-4 radar intercept officer then observed the tanker at the seven o'clock position with what appeared to be a large part of the back radome missing from the nose. At the same time he saw a large object come from the upper starboard portion of the cockpit; a little later, at some distance, he observed another large object leave the cockpit area.

A large white parachute was sighted by the F-4 crew. They orbited and watched until it disappeared into the water. It was later learned that the parachute was the F-4 drogue chute.

Damage was minimal and the F-4 was easily controllable. A divert ashore was ordered and, after landing, it was discovered that the drogue chute and door, as well as the port outer stabilator section, were missing. The starboard stabilator inner trailing edge was also bent upward.

After the collision, the tanker's bombardier/navigator glanced around the cockpit and observed that the third-crewman seat was empty and that the lower escape hatch was still closed. The commander gestured with his hand to blow the escape hatch and bail out. In the process of leaving, the B/N noted that the top of the cockpit was completely missing. He made a somewhat rapid descent because of a damaged parachute canopy and was soon rescued by the plane guard helicopter.

The pilot then checked the cockpit, saw no one else around and proceeded to slide out the escape hatch. During his parachute descent, he saw no sign of any other aircraft or parachute. After landing, he was picked up by one of the escort destroyers. The third crew-



man was never seen, and there was no sign of him after the collision.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sufferin' souffléed catfish! Don't this one really wilt the lily on the bush. Why this otherwise mature, professional Naval Aviator suddenly shifted control to the seat of his pants, we'll never know. Maybe he does. But the life of that airman will weigh heavy on his conscience for many a year.

We can't none of us live long enuf to make all the mistakes there are to be made. We gotta learn from the experience of others or we won't be around long enough to enjoy that place in the country.

All Fogged Up

Following a thorough and extensive briefing in the ready room, the experienced lieutenant commander manned his A-7B *Corsair II* for a scheduled night strike mission from the CVA. After a normal preflight inspection and start, the aircraft was taxied forward and positioned just aft of the port catapult. Wings were spread and locked with no difficulty, and the lieutenant commander was shown the weight board. After a change from 34,000 pounds to 33,500 pounds, he approved the reading, replaced his flashlight in his survival vest and taxied onto the port catapult.

Ordnance personnel armed the guns, the aircraft was tensioned and the pilot applied full power. He conducted his usual cockpit checks which included retracting the nose tow bar and checking the engine pressure ratio, oil pressure and hydraulic pressure. All indications were normal. He turned the doppler radar to the sea position, turned on his computer and switched the IFF to normal.

Visible moisture then began to come out of the air-conditioning vents. The pilot checked the air-conditioning switch in the 12-o'clock position and in automatic. When he turned the switch to the full hot position, the vapor disappeared. He re-positioned the switch to the one-o'clock position and waited a few moments to see if this corrected the problem. No moisture was visible, so he turned on his exterior lights as the signal that he was ready to go. The catapult officer gave the signal.

Almost immediately, vapor again appeared. The cockpit quickly and completely fogged up so that he couldn't



see the instrument panel. Dilbert removed his left hand from the throttle grip while he turned the air conditioning to full hot with his right hand. He was still looking down and to the right at the a/c switch when the catapult fired. He returned his right hand to the stick and, with his left, pushed the throttle lever forward from near the idle stop where it had moved at the start of the catapult stroke (throttle friction wasn't on).

He re-positioned the stick in what he felt was the normal position; however, he was still unable to see any of the instruments. Off the end of the cat, the rudder shaker began and the pilot also noticed a buffet. Still without instruments, he eased the stick forward and, at the same time, the top of the cockpit began to clear. He saw what he thought was the horizon below the canopy bow and felt as if he were flying into the water. As he reached for the secondary ejection handle, the radar altimeter warning light glowed red through the fog. He pulled the handle and ejected.

Ejection was normal and, after one swing of the deployed parachute, he entered the water. He inflated his Mk-3C life preserver and was dragged five to ten feet before the parachute collapsed. As the ship bore down on him, he became extremely anxious to get free of the parachute. He turned on his strobe light and searched vainly for the Koch fittings. After the ship had

passed, he finally found and released the fittings but was unable to free his feet, which were entangled in shroud lines. Ending a futile search for his shroud cutter, he deployed his seat pan — a mistake: the seat pan also became entangled in the shrouds. He jettisoned the seat pan, pulled free of the last shroud line around his left leg and paddled clear.

The rescue helo approached but flew right on past. He frantically searched for a flare in his survival equipment!! The helo crew finally located him anyway and put a swimmer in the water who started out in the wrong direction. The lieutenant commander finally found a signal flare and diverted the swimmer his way. Other problems occurred, but the rescue was eventually completed and the wet pilot was returned uninjured to the flight deck.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great horned toadies! This guy could'a got killed. He must've got up on the wrong side of the bed. From what transpired, you'd'a thought he was a nugget on his first night launch. Only a couple of small (?) errors in correct procedures and the whole situation turned to worms in seconds. It's a cinch he wasn't mentally prepared for a survival situation in the water, either. The episode was actually a continuous search, often unsuccessful, for various items of survival gear. Perhaps others can learn from this expensive lesson.