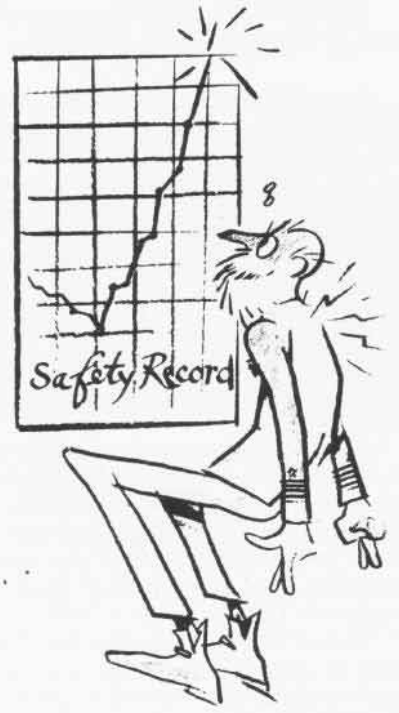
grampaw pettibone

Night Caper

A pilot was scheduled for a practice intercept flight in an F-8 *Crusader*. He made an uneventful evening departure from the ship and completed his hop without incident. Upon returning to the ship for a night recovery, the F-8 was vectored for a carrier controlled approach (CCA). The approach power compensator did not appear to be working properly so the pilot flew a manual approach from three miles out, continuing to utilize CCA. The pilot called the "ball" with 3,800 pounds of fuel remaining. He experienced some difficulty discerning ball position due to very dim datum light intensity. The *Crusader* went low and slow in the middle to in-close, and then waved off. The LSO's comments were, "Wave-off, little low in the groove, not enough power in close, low, slow."

On the second pass, once again the pilot could not discern ball position due to dim datum light intensity but chose not to comment on it since he had heard no complaints from the other pilots in the pattern. The LSO advised, "You're a little high, easy with the correction." The *Crusader* went low and decelerated to a slow condition, and the LSO called, "You're low, put on some power." The F-8 quickly increased its rate of descent continuing to show a slow approach light, and the LSO rapidly called, "Power, power, wave-off, wave-off."



The aircraft was approximately seven seconds from the ramp when it was waved off. It was doubtful whether it would clear the ramp. The LSO called "rotate, rotate" approximately five seconds from the ramp to ensure best wave-off performance.

The aircraft remained slow and cleared the ramp by approximately four feet in a slight climb, in a very cocked-up wings-level attitude. After clearing the cross deck pendants, the port wing dropped sharply and the aircraft appeared to stall, the port wing striking the deck first, 70 feet past the #4 cross deck pendant. The *Crusader* at this time was 14 feet left of center line.

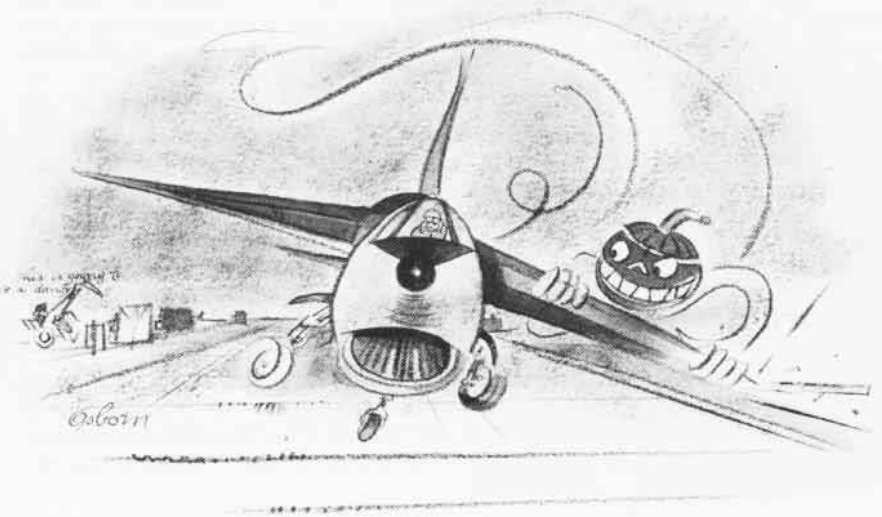
The aircraft then settled onto the main gear and departed the deck at about a 15-degree angle to port. The port main landing gear impacted the inboard datum light arm of the optical landing system and the aircraft settled rapidly in a slight nose-down attitude. At this time the LSO and air boss both called, "Burner, eject." The pilot selected afterburner and rotated to 20-25 degrees nose up, and ejected just prior to impact, approximately ten feet above the water in a wings-level attitude.

Ejection was normal. The SAR helo executed a successful pickup. The pilot was uninjured.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy Hannah! Makes common sense to me — if you can't see somethin' because of dim light, turn the blasted switch up. If you have a problem seein' something, you concentrate on it, and the next thing you know you have a breakdown in your scan. Then anything can happen — as it did here!

Additionally, this gent did not utilize the wave-off technique as briefed. Lets face it, the F-8 ain't the easiest bird to bring aboard. You just have to pay attention to the task at hand. Do it!



ILLUSTRATED BY Osborn

How Dry I Am

Following a two-night RON, two Marine Aviators manned their T-33 for return to home plate. The flight plan called for a refueling stop at an AFB which was 75 miles and 30 minutes away. Preflight and takeoff were normal with the fuel counter indicating 365 gallons remaining, including 85 gallons in the fuselage tank.

The climbout was normal with ATC giving vectors. At about 15,000 feet the fuselage gauge indicated 80 gallons with the warning light on. Fuel level stabilized at this reading and the pilot notified ATC that the aircraft had a minor fuel transfer problem. He requested vectors direct to the AFB.

The pilot rechecked the fuel switches. He noted the fuel indication had increased to over 85 gallons and the warning light was out. ATC gave vectors direct to the AFB and, at about 30 miles out, an en route descent was approved.

Approach control asked if special handling was required due to the fuel transfer problem. The pilot explained that no special handling was required but requested a short pattern. At six miles, the aircraft was passed to the tower for landing. The pilot lowered the gear and set flaps at 50 degrees. Shortly thereafter he transmitted that he was losing power. Both pilots checked the instruments and noted rpm was surging, fuel pressure fluctuating and exhaust gas temperature (EGT) decaying.

At this time the T-33 was at 125 knots. The rear seat pilot called flameout, and also said, "Throttle back, check fuel switches and ignition." The pilot then transmitted, "Mayday, short final." The tip tanks were jettisoned.

A high sink rate developed and the aircraft descended rapidly. Just prior to touchdown, the pilot popped the stick back.

The aircraft hit tail first, then very hard on the main mounts and nose gear. At touchdown, the canopy was jettisoned. The pilot called for throttle, fuel and battery off. The aircraft rolled to a stop on the dry bed and the crew exited normally. No fire occurred.

The crash crew personnel arrived less than ten minutes after the accident. It was verified that the fuel counter in the front cockpit read 195

gallons and that the fuselage gauge read full. The aircraft was a strike.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! Another case of having the fuel, but not where the pilot thought it was. Apparently, earlier in the flight, neither the tip tank or leading edge tank switches were on to provide pressurization of the tanks and normal fuel flow.

The fuel gauge reading of 195 gallons was due to an attempted air start during which all the tank selector switches were open. Still, not enough fuel was transferred to assist in obtaining a relight.

In addition, this pilot forgot to "fly the airplane." With the long "dry bed" available the aircraft could have been landed without damage. Incidentally, I believe that the pilot could have gotten more help from his rear seat man; however, maybe he didn't know the fuel system either!?!

The Door

Two Marine Aviators departed in their VC-117D on a cross-country training flight. Destination was an AFB with intermediate stops scheduled at two naval air stations. The crew chief briefed the passengers on safety procedures, operation and position of seat belts and no smoking signs. Preflight, takeoff and the first part of the flight were normal. Three passengers were discharged at the first stop during a 45-minute refueling layover. The cargo door was opened two times by the crew chief during the stop, once to remove baggage and the second time to place battens in the aircraft.

Departure on the second leg was normal. Although filed for 6,000 feet, the flight was cleared to 8,000. Weather conditions in the climb and at altitude were intermittent IFR with light to moderate turbulence in clouds. A lower altitude was requested to avoid turbulence and adverse headwinds. Approach control approved descent to 6,000 feet. Power was reduced and the nose was lowered to begin descent. At 6,500 feet, airspeed 160 to 170 knots, the cargo door came off the aircraft and struck the port horizontal stabilizer. The nose dropped abruptly and was not leveled until the aircraft bottomed out at 2,000 feet.

Fourteen degrees nose-up trim was required to maintain level flight. Maximum G loading did not exceed 2 Gs as estimated by both pilot and copilot throughout the flight. An emergency was declared and the crew vectored to the nearest suitable airfield. They maintained 160 knots.

The pilot-in-command decided against a slow flight check at altitude. The landing and rollout were normal in all respects. The door remained lodged until it was forcibly removed from the horizontal stabilizer after the accident investigation.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Jumpin' Juniper! When you think that one of our machines has been around long enough to finally have all the "bugs" worked out — bang, it happens. Who would have guessed that with all the modifications on this aircraft, the doors are still coming off!

In all honesty, these gents did a heck of a good job in recovering the aircraft and bringing her home. There is a story in all of this regardless of the age of your machine. The "bugs" may not be out of it. Be alert!