grampaw pettibone

Abort Disaster

A Naval Aviator and his bombadier/navigator (BN) were scheduled for a two-plane training flight in an A-6E *Intruder*. The pilot, who was the flight leader, had over 600 hours in the A-6 and over 1,200 total hours.

Following a standard brief, the crew obtained a weather brief via closed-circuit T.V. There was no mention of thundershowers for the scheduled takeoff. The crew arrived at maintenance control on time but, due to aircraft reassignment and some minor maintenance problems with the second aircraft, the flight taxied approximately 40 minutes late. During this time, a thunderstorm passed over the field, causing heavy rain and left water standing on the airfield surfaces.

After the flight received an IFR clearance and arrived at the takeoff area, another thunderstorm passed over the field, again causing heavy rain, leaving more water on the runway and decreasing local visibility. Because of these conditions, the pilot advised clearance delivery that he desired a one-minute departure separation betweeen the two aircraft. He then delayed his request for takeoff clearance for approximately ten minutes in anticipation of reduced precipitation and increased visibility. When the visibility increased to an estimated two miles, the pilot requested clearance. The *Intruder* initiated takeoff from a position approximately 400 feet from the approach end of the runway.

The takeoff temperature was 77 degrees F and tower winds were 130 degrees at eight knots. As the roll commenced, departure control inquired, "Are you up?" and "Are you airborne yet?" The pilot answered both these transmissions as he was accelerating down the runway. The reason for the inquiries was that the passing thunderstorms had caused numerous power failures in the preceding three minutes and departure control was unsure of the location of the lead aircraft. Departure control then transmitted, "Be advised, we've been losing our radar here intermittently because of power fluctuation." At this point, the A-6 had accelerated to an airspeed of approximately 105 kias and the pilot made the decision to abort his takeoff.

The throttles were pulled to idle. The aircraft was aligned on the center line and as the pilot initiated light braking, he saw the 4,000-foot marker along the runway edge. As braking pressure was increased, the left tire suddenly blew out and the aircraft commenced a left drift which the pilot attempted to correct with nose-wheel steering and moderate differential braking. The hook was lowered. As the aircraft continued to drift, it failed to respond to attempted directional control.

The A-6 travelled approximately 1,500 feet after the tire blew out before it engaged the abort gear at an estimated speed of 50 kias, 40 feet left of center line in a 30-degree left drift. After approximately 300 feet of runout, the left landing gear departed the runway, paralleled the runway for nearly 100 feet through the muddy terrain and contacted a cement runway light foundation approximately one foot below the surface.

This contact collapsed the left gear rearward and swung the aircraft further left causing it to completely leave the runway and travel 200 feet through the muddy grass surface on its left wingtip, nose gear and right gear before the abort gear halted its progress.

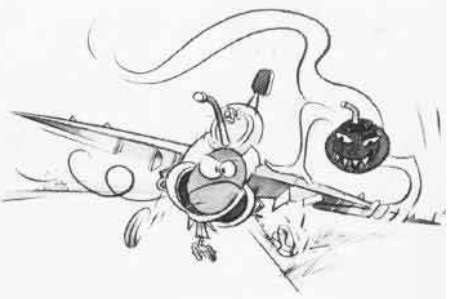
The pilot secured the engines and the crew exited the aircraft by manually unlatching the canopy. There was no fire. The crash crew and other airfield units responded immediately to secure the aircraft, which sustained substantial damage.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! When things seemed to be goin' good, this gent decided to screw them up! Why abort at that speed with all that water just because the controllers were losing their radar?

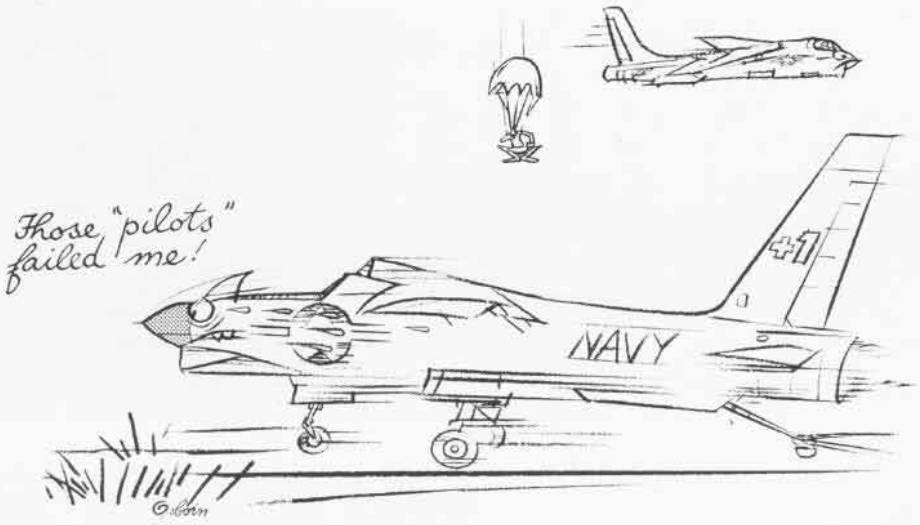
"I'll tell you something else. That controller had a "hand" in this. His cries of "wolf" during the takeoff roll were completely uncalled for! He gave both of the gents in the aircraft an uneasy feeling that something just wasn't right.

However, in order not to be misquoted — the pilot did it ,but, controller, you certainly "helped."



ILLUSTRATED BY Osborn

F-8 Superdrone



The pilot was scheduled for his second familiarization flight (Fam 2) in the F-8H *Crusader*. A lieutenant commander was assigned as chase pilot for the afternoon hop and the brief was conducted accordingly.

Some thunderstorms were observed in the local area. The decision was made that the Fam 2 could be conducted within the necessary parameters (VFR conditions). The weather forecast for return was 4,000 broken, 25,000 unbroken, seven miles visibility, winds at 140 degrees, ten knots and thunderstorms in the vicinity.

The pilot launched but, because of possibly deteriorating weather conditions, the squadron duty officer (SDO) was directed by higher authority to issue a weather recall to the Fam 2. Chase assured the SDO that the flight would have no difficulty returning VFR and requested permission to remain in the touch-and-go pattern, weather permitting. This request was granted providing winds were favorable for the Fam 2 touch and go's.

Chase decided the pilot could make some practice approaches to burn down to landing weight. He instructed the tower to inform him if the crosswind increased. Tower rogered and advised that the thunderstorm appeared stationary.

After about ten minutes, touch and go's began. Runway 17 was in use and the wind varied from 220 degrees at four knots to 270 at 12. After several landings the wind was reported 270 at 16. Because of the crosswind limitation on the F-8H, chase informed the pilot of a possible field arrestment.

He then directed the pilot to make a low approach on his next pass to allow more time to evaluate the gusty wind conditions. The wind was again reported 270 degrees at 16 knots. The low approach was completed and the tower now reported winds 270 at ten. Realizing that winds were again within aircraft limits, chase directed the pilot to make a full stop on his next pass. The pilot commenced the approach with winds 270 at 16 and chase directed a touch and go vice a full stop. Following the completion of this touch and go, the chase pilot directed the next pass to be an arrested landing.

The duty runway had two approach end arresting gears and two long field arresting cables located at 6,000 and 7,000 feet from the approach end of the runway. The pilot commenced his approach and touched down approximately 500 feet short of the number one arresting gear and rolled into the gear. The *Crusader* hook skipped both short field wires and the pilot executed a go-around.

During the next approach, chase was flying on the starboard side at the four o'clock position approximately 100 feet aft. Because a short field arrestment was not briefed, chase found it necessary to refresh the pilot's memory on this procedure while airborne. With wind 270 at 14, the aircraft touched down approximately 500 feet from the first arresting gear. According to chase, the aircraft attitude appeared normal and approach procedures were satisfactory. The pilot stated that he left approach power on the aircraft during his ground roll. Once again the F-8 boltered both wires.

Chase quickly directed the pilot to take it around. The F-8 became airborne well past midfield. The *Crusader* left the runway in a nose-high condition, fishtailing. Some witnesses said the aircraft was over-rotated. Others described the aircraft as on the edge of uncontrolled flight. The pilot said that he felt the aircraft start to settle and, 17 seconds after the bolter call, he transmitted: "I got something, this thing's not flying." In the same moment the pilot selected afterburner and an *estimated one second later he ejected.*

The aircraft rose 20 feet. The pilot ejected at about 15 feet. After ejection, the aircraft continued 600 feet, touched down and engaged the number four arresting gear, 1,000 feet from the end of the runway. The aircraft touched down approximately 30 feet from the number four arresting gear cable and came to rest near the left side of the runway. The pilot's seat functioned normally. The pilot landed in a lake along the port side of the runway and was rescued uninjured. The aircraft sustained limited damage.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sufferin' catfish! This one takes the cake! I frankly must admit that this aircraft did a heck of a lot better without the pilot.

It was pretty interestin' to note that field arrested landings were not briefed because "They weren't in the book." In other words, "Do only the minimum required." Baloney!

What was "in the book" was that an "LSO should be on station during attempted arrestment." However, this was very quickly *rationalized* away. I don't recall seeing or hearing about a Natops change submission or a waiver request on the subject of "LSO during field arrested landings." Seems to me that there is something called *complacency* in this squadron.