



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Coarse Air Work

Dateline Mediterranean: Sixth Fleet carrier operations off the coast of southern Italy. As the sun broke through the predawn haze of the calm Ionian Sea, a pair of A-7 Corsair II pilots were finishing an early breakfast and discussing with enthusiasm their upcoming low-level training mission through southern Italy. The flight brief, utilizing squadron briefing guides, discussed controlling agencies, frequencies and details of the Italy-One low-level route. A change of flight lead en route was briefed; however, the exact procedures were not discussed.

After launch, the section of two A-7s rendezvoused and proceeded toward the beach to their coast-in point, holding briefly at 10,000 feet for clearance onto the low-level route. Following radio contact with the controlling agency, their clearance for descent to 2,000 feet above ground was granted approaching the first checkpoint. The flight proceeded

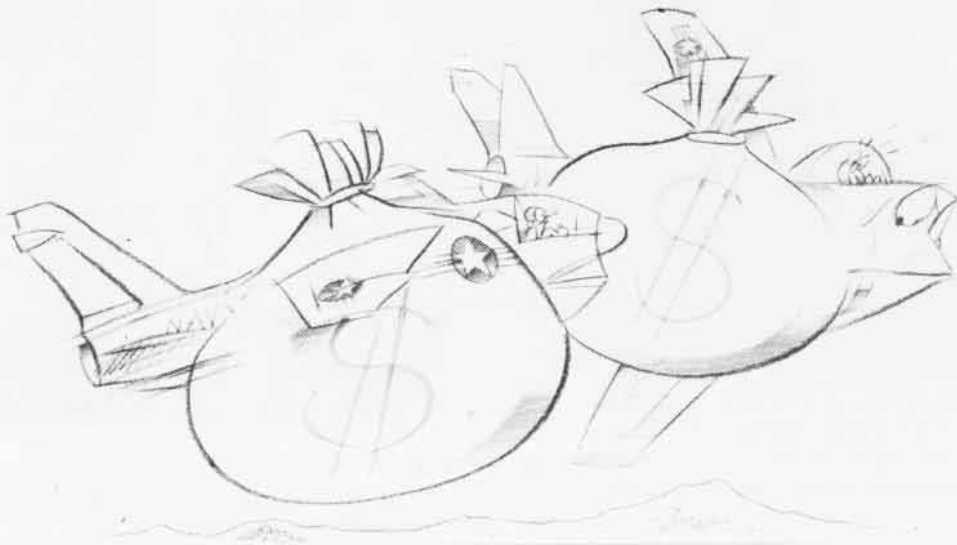


across the beach, the wingman maintaining his prebriefed position with 400-500 feet separation on the left

wing line. Passing the first checkpoint, the flight leader directed the wingman to cross over to the right wing position. The wingman complied. Passing checkpoint two, while in a right turn for checkpoint three, the wingman suggested, "Why don't I go ahead and take the lead?"

The flight leader concurred with a transmission of Okay (exact wording not recalled). The flight leader meant that he would pass the lead visually as soon as he was wings level. He had made a left turn at this point to correct for a slight overshoot of the desired course. The wingman, however, assumed that the lead had been passed and transmitted, "I've got it."

This call was not heard by the leader and no reply was received. The leader, at this point, had leveled his wings and was visually clearing the area to his left. He was close to a small town and civilian airport. The wingman accelerated slightly to facilitate the lead change and continued in an easy left turn. He observed the leader closing on him and thought that



he was crossing over to the right wing, so he took no evasive action. He then looked briefly back into the cockpit to check his instruments.

The leader now looked to his right to pass the lead when he saw his wingman less than 20 feet away. With collision imminent, the leader pulled hard up and left. The aircraft collided, both becoming uncontrollable. The leader's aircraft rolled rapidly to the left for an undetermined number of revolutions. The pilot ejected in an inverted attitude approximately 1,500 feet above ground. The wingman experienced a severe yaw which was unsuccessfully countered with opposite rudder. His aircraft then rolled violently left. Departure recovery procedures were initiated, but were ineffective. The wingman ejected in a steep nose-down attitude, approximately 1,200 feet above ground.

Both pilots made successful parachute landings (uninjured) within one-fourth mile of the crash sites. One aircraft impacted a cultivated farm field, the other crashed into a two-story farmhouse and a barn, unoccupied at the time. The pilots were assisted by local citizens of the nearby town, examined by a doctor, then transported to the Sigonella naval air facility.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy low-level lunacy! This is enough to make grown men cry. We lose enough flying machinery to equipment malfunctions, emergency situations, etc., but to give away a pair of Corsairs to a "low-level" benefit like this is just two much! The cause of this accident was listed as pilot error. Some attributed credit to the leader (whoever he was) and some cited the wingy (the other guy).

The leader was cited for his inadequate brief, nebulous radio transmission and failure to maintain adequate lookout and

control of the flight. The wingman was tagged for his failure to request clarification of the leader's Okay; acknowledgement of his call, "I have it;" and failure to exercise due care during what he perceived to be a lead change.

It was stated that the wingman, who had been with this command for four months during work-up training and operational readiness exercises prior to deployment, did not know how to make a lead change, for a variety of reasons (i.e., did it differently in the training command, didn't know SOP, lead change not discussed in Natops, etc.). If this be the case, Old Gramps would lay a few pounds of supervisory error on the command for not monitoring this young stud's capabilities. Gramps just can't believe this was the first lead change this pilot performed in this command. Who observed or debriefed the others?

Dang it all, gents, this really gets back to basics! This accident could have cost two lives. It did result in the loss of two Corsairs - a breed which is vanishing like buffalo. You can rest assured we have literally bought the farm, in this case!

From the Mailbag

At the end of a safe-for-solo check flight, a student Naval Aviator was asked to demonstrate the T-34B engine failure emergency procedures. The student, 6'3" tall, had raised his seat to the full-up position which was contrary to the instructor's advice. During execution of the engine failure procedure, the student moved the canopy aft, in accordance with procedures, but his helmet visor button became jammed in the canopy bow, pinning the pilot's head back against the seat. The pilot lost control of the aircraft and was unable to communicate with the instructor due to garbled snorts and grotesque sounds resulting from ram air effect upon his attempted conversation with his nose stuck in a slip stream. The instructor made a recovery and the duo returned safely to land. However, the student got a down. The instructor got nauseous.

