Grampaw Pettibone

Night Bingo Boogie

. . . Just another chorus in the sad saga of a truly endangered species — Naval Aviation!

Immediately upon completion of A-7E Cat I replacement pilot training, Lt. Norman Newguy joined his squadron during the peak of the ship's/air-wing's Type III workup training. In the short period of 10 days, he had become highly involved as a member of the air wing team and had flown three day and three night missions in the A-7E *Corsair*.

During the late afternoon of his eleventh day aboard, he launched on a night mission (his fourth). Shortly after rendezvous, Lt. Newguy informed the A-7E flight leader that he had just suffered a PC-2 hydraulic failure and had attempted unsuccessfully to extend the refueling probe. He anchored overhead the ship for 20 minutes, until the flight leader joined up, and proceeded to the assigned Marshall fix at the bottom of the holding pattern. Upon arrival at Marshall, Lt. Newguy was assigned a new holding fix at the top of the pattern in order to recover last.

I did as well as I could!

Lt. Newguy reported in Marshall with a fuel state of 5,900 pounds and was assigned an approach "pushover" time of 1901. Marshall broadcast the primary divert field bearing 272 degrees at 130 nm. A-7 bingo fuel was given as 2,400 pounds. At that time, several pilots informed Marshall that there were abnormally high headwinds at altitude and that bingo fuel requirements would have to be raised. Specifically, winds were 280 degrees at 60-80 knots at 10,000 feet and 110 knots at 20,000 feet.

The A-7 flight leader informed Marshall that they should recover his ailing wingman first. In the event a Bingo was required, his wingman would be committed to a dirty configuration bingo with high headwinds. (Once the gear and flaps are blown down, they cannot be raised while airborne.) His request was denied and it was reiterated that his wingman would recover last. (It was policy aboard this carrier to recover PC-2 failures last to avoid fouling the deck.)

The required fuel for the 130-nm dirty bingo, considering 100-knot headwinds and a drag count of 100, was calculated from the Natops manual by air ops and squadron reps to be 4,200 pounds. They calculated the A-7 would arrive "on the ball" at bingo-plus-one fuel state.

The pilot commenced his approach, lowered the gear and flaps by the emergency extension system, and arrived on the ball at 3/4 nm with a fuel state of 4,200 pounds. He subsequently boltered.

The LSO was totally unaware that the A-7 was at bingo fuel or that he had a PC-2 failure.

Following the bolter, the pilot heard "Signal bingo, flaps up, hook up, climb, pigeons 272/131!" The pilot switched to departure control and stated that he was unable to raise his flaps. He was then directed by the squadron carrier air traffic control center rep to climb to 25,000 feet, commence an idle descent at 35 nm from the divert field and execute an arrested landing. He was told he would have about 1,200 pounds of gravy (fuel) remaining.

The pilot climbed out on the bingo profile as instructed but was unable to get above 22,000 feet. The readout on the tactical computer showed the

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winds to be 120 knots on the nose, so he commenced a descent to 19,500 feet and continued inbound toward the divert field.

After switching to CIC control frequency, no transmission of assist or concern was made for the next 24 minutes. The pilot then called CIC to inform them that he was 82 nm from the field, at 19,500 feet with a fuel state of 1,800 pounds.

The squadron CIC rep then asked the pilot if he was able to make it to the divert field. The pilot replied that he was now 70 nm, 19,500 feet, with 1,400 pounds of fuel. After a short pause, the rep stated, ". . . you don't have enough gas to get to the field." This was the first realization by anyone on the ship that the aircraft was *in extremis.*

An airborne E-2C reminded CIC that a closer in-line-of-flight airfield was closed. The A-7 pilot rogered and stated he was pressing on, and switched to center which had already observed his emergency IFF squawk. Two minutes later, the ship initiated efforts through the E-2C to open the closed field.

At 1959 the pilot descended out of 19,500 feet in search of lesser winds. At 2004 the ship broadcast an order for the pilot to land at the airfield, whether closed or not, using his taxi light.

At 2005 a tacan lock-on to the field was obtained at 28 nm. The pilot continued his idle descent and arrived at 1,200 feet and 4 nm southeast of the airfield.

At 2016 the pilot reported the field in sight, fuel state was zero on the digital totalizer, with 200 pounds showing on the main needle. At 2017 the engine flamed out. The pilot safely ejected at 900 feet MSL. The aircraft continued ahead and impacted the water .9 nm from the approach end of the runway.

Grampaw Pettibone says,

Holy jumpin' Jehoshaphat! This gas-war-at-sea fandango is enough to jack your jaws! There were more contributors present in this tacair tap dance than at a good Navy Relief Ball.

This inexperienced fleet readiness squadron graduate checked into the squadron with less than above average night CQ/flight grades. Old Gramps has the perception that this young feller was thrown into a fast moving road show with minimum supervision. On his ninth day aboard he did not fly.

On the tenth day aboard, he stood a day-long duty watch. Later that evening, he flew a surface ship surveillance mission, recovering at 0130. After five hours of sleep, he briefed and launched on a mid-morning CAP mission. Upon return he ate lunch, briefed and launched on the ill-fated war-at-sea mission. (Fatigue was not considered to be a factor. Hmmm. Can you believe this?)

Three days previous to the mishap, he had been counseled by the commanding officer about his fuel management techniques. Yet this young lad was launched, without escort, on a night dirty bingo, with a PC-2 failure, over a 130-nm stretch of open ocean with 100-knot headwinds, and then was not monitored en route for nearly 24 minutes.

It appears to Old Gramps that while this performer was exiting stage left, the rest of the cast was taking 5 — 25 to be exact. This leaves me angrily cold, gents, but not nearly as cold as it left this pilot. Old Singed Whiskers just can't believe that the LSO was not informed of this pilot's problem. He could have saved the day, and perhaps the aircraft. Even worse was the inability of anyone involved to determine an accurate bingo fuel requirement. We've only been bingoing A-7s for nearly 16 years. Now that we're about to start phasing them out, we decide we don't know how to read the charts! From the profile data passed to the pilot, it appears that the "gear down (flaps up)" column, vice "gear down, 40-percent flaps down" column, was erroneously used in calculating the bingo profile. The mishap board stated it learned, in discussion with a contractor tech rep, that the flaps can't be raised with a PC-2 failure. Great balls o' fire! This has been a fact since the initial introduction of the A-7A some 16 years ago. It is difficult to imagine that aviators as experienced as mishap board members, and perhaps air ops/squadron reps, did not know this fact. This could explain why the "gear down (flaps up)" bingo fuel column was used.

Poor Lt. Newguy did not have 1,200 pounds of gravy but was in fact *short* 1,600 pounds from the very start. The only option he had on his first night bingo was figuring out the best place to go swimming.

A lot of concern was voiced over the possibility of today's positive control training environment. In this case, I have a lot more concern over the quality of the information this positive control team was putting out. This pilot did exactly as directed except he failed miserably when ordered to make an arrested landing at the closed/open field.

Gang, this fiasco points out a well-documented, but obviously not respected, fact that a dirty night bingo is an emergency looking for a place to happen. Naval Safety Center data shows that since CY 1975, three percent of all bingos have resulted in a mishap, 21 percent of all A-7 PC-2 failure bingos resulted in mishaps (some fatalities), and 29 percent of all night dirty bingos have terminated with a mishap. This data includes aviators of varied experience levels from Lt. Norman Newguy to Charlie Commander.

Old Sagebrush Face feels very strongly that we literally pushed this lad in over his head and, to add insult to injury, I'll be danged if we didn't try to tack the bad reviews on this young understudy's stage door. The billing on this marquee should have read "Supervision, Lack of" (cast of thousands).