



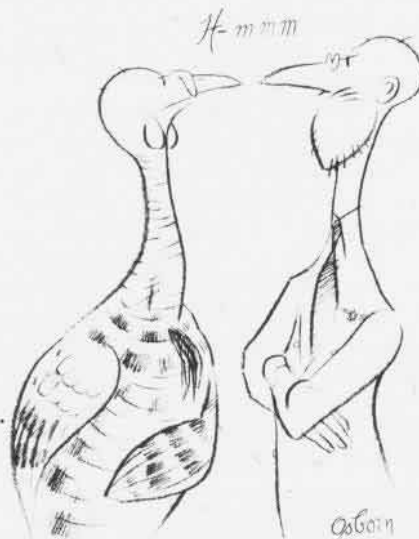
# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Super Scooter Save

The section of A-4M Skyhawks was scheduled for a close air support (CAS) sortie as part of an annual coordinated arms exercise. The brief, preflight, and takeoff from MCAS West Coast were uneventful. After a short flight to the target area, the Skyhawks checked in with the forward air controller (FAC) and positioned themselves for a series of attacks.

The spectators viewing the exercise included a group of visiting midshipmen. Radio transmissions were broadcast over loudspeakers placed near the viewing area to enhance the visual portion of the CAS missions. The spectators were able to hear all the radio calls between the FAC and the Skyhawk pilots throughout the mission.

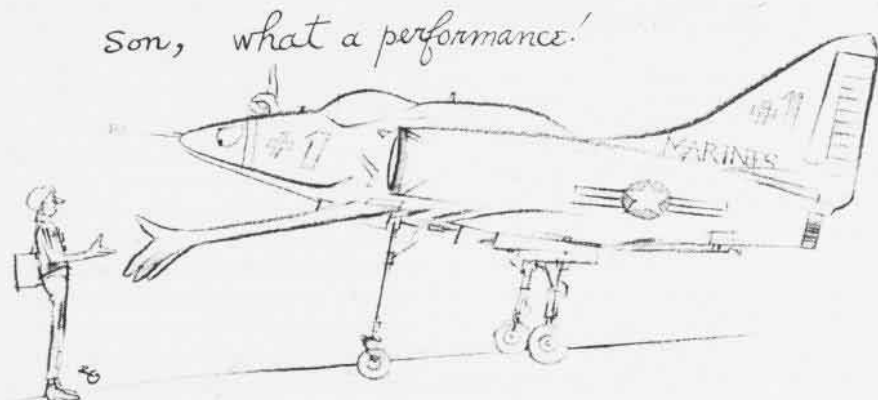
When the flight was called in, the leader attacked first. As he pulled off target, the wingman, Marine 1st Lt. Randy Myers, VMA-221, commenced a prebriefed 10-degree napalm run. Calling "wings level," he was cleared in "hot" and dropped the napalm with pinpoint accuracy. As the wingman pulled off target, he heard a loud bang and felt the Skyhawk shudder slightly. He pulled the nose up and noted a lack of radio side tone when he tried to transmit. A quick scan of the cockpit revealed a generator failure warning light. Reaching for the generator reset switch, he observed decreasing engine RPM and EGT. The cockpit filled with smoke. Zoom-climbing the faltering Skyhawk, the pilot selected the "manual" position on the fuel control and ram air to dump cabin pressure and smoke. He deployed the emergency generator, turned toward home base (30 miles away) and transmitted to the flight leader, "I have a flameout." The flight leader immediately turned to



join on his ailing wingman. The stricken Skyhawk reached a peak altitude of 5,000 feet AGL and the pilot attempted a relight. Observing no engine response to the relight attempt, the pilot placed the throttle to "Off" and attempted a second relight. Descending through 3,000 feet AGL, the engine relit and the pilot climbed and headed straight for home base. With his flight leader now on his wing, he switched the flight to

home base tower frequency and broadcast a mayday at 20 miles from the field. With reduced visibility due to haze, the pilot navigated along well-defined ground features to a straight-in approach to the longest runway.

Myers set the throttle at an intermediate power setting and gently lowered the nose to hold 300 KIAS. Passing through 3,500 feet AGL at eight miles from the field, the Skyhawk again flamed out. The pilot zoom-climbed and coolly radioed, "I've got another flameout." His attempted relight was unsuccessful. The stricken Skyhawk rapidly lost altitude as it approached populated areas. The pilot maneuvered the Skyhawk away from the populated areas, preparing himself for ejection, and attempted another relight. Passing through 2,500 feet AGL at five miles from the field, the engine responded but would not increase above 75 percent rpm. The pilot had now lost sight of the field because of severe haze. He radioed, "Doc, where is the field?" The flight leader responded with "Check right, 2 o'clock." The pilot turned immediately, sighted the field and rapidly calculated that he had insufficient power to make the field if he lowered the gear or flaps. He executed a straight-in approach



and lowered the landing gear passing through 500 feet AGL at one-half mile from the end of the runway. On touchdown, the pilot immediately deployed the drag chute and slowed the aircraft for a safe turn off the runway. He brought the *Skyhawk* to a stop on the taxiway with fuel gushing out of the bottom of the aircraft. He secured the engine and egressed as the crash crew arrived to assist.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! What a way to ruin one's day, and with a ringside audience to boot.

This pilot's difficulties were caused by failure of the generator access door latch hooks. The door, located inside the intake, separated and was blown into the engine compartment hell-hole, rupturing the main fuel line. At power settings above 75 percent rpm, the fuel supply was inadequate to sustain the engine.

Myers' timely and professional reactions make old Gramps pop a few proud buttons. Far too many in-flight material failure incidents, such as this, have resulted in an expensive loss of the aircraft with a resulting "pilot error" cause. Cool Hand Luke here not only saved the day, and possibly some lives, he saved the aircraft, too. Old Gramps suggests somebody ought to pin a medal on this young lad. Good On You, 1st Lt. Randy Myers!

## Feline Airline

"Perform condition four checks," the pilot in command of the P-3A aircraft instructed his crew following an uneventful preflight and takeoff on a routine training mission. While the crew was checking to ensure there were no fumes in the aircraft, a large domestic cat emerged from the galley and dashed forward toward the cockpit. An alert crewman, seated aft of the copilot, spotted the cat and made two valiant attempts to block the cat from entering the cockpit.

The frenzied feline, undaunted by the two frantic forearm swats, made a

third and this time successful attempt to claw its way into the cockpit. On this pass, the cat pounced upon the crewman's Nomex-covered right forearm and immediately commenced to rearrange the order of his epidermis.

The pilot became aware of the ensuing struggle when the observer emitted a bloody scream as he pried the clawing cat loose and flung it to the deck. Landing feet first, as always, the tenacious kitty quickly sidestepped the crewman, ducked under the copilot's seat, and then disappeared under the decking forward of the copilot's rudder pedals. The pilot, taking stock of the situation, aborted the mission, returned to home base and obtained medical attention for his clawed crewman.

After an exhaustive internal post-flight search, the aircraft was sealed and bait set out to entice the cat out of hiding. After a short wait, the ground crew dismantled several sections of the aircraft flooring. The cat, along with two kittens, 7 to 10 days old, discovered nesting beneath the cockpit deck area, were corralled and placed in precautionary rabies quarantine.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy flying feline ferocities! This aerial Clyde Beatty act sounds more like a "9-Lives EverReady Battery" commercial than a normal aircrew training mission.

Old Sagebrushface here was intrigued and amused with this event, but had some difficulty sorting out all the lessons learned. Some of the more apparent ones seem to be:

1. A thorough preflight doesn't guarantee that all is bliss. One should be prepared for the unexpected, even a meow or a hiss.

2. "Purring" can emanate from sources other than finely-tuned engines.

3. The galley cat's entry into the aircraft is a bit of a mystery. However, the cat's reaction and attack on the crewman is no mystery. It's not wise to fool with Mother Nature or Momma Cats either.

4. Nomex is fire retardant but not feline resistant, and is a poor substitute for armor plating during aerial cat attacks.

5. Last, but not least, I suppose we should add to the age-old saying that the flight is not over 'til the paperwork is complete... "and you put the cat out!"

In summary, the crew's reaction to the unexpected in-flight incident was as expected — professional! The decision to abort the flight and put the cat out was indeed wise. This kitty had at least 40 lives at stake: The 13 P-3 crewmen, her 9, and 9 for each of the two kittens. Had any one of the latter 27 lives become entangled in the flight controls, the lives of the other 13 would surely have been in jeopardy.

