

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Last Cross-Country

An A-6 *Intruder* crew launched on an approved cross-country flight from a coastal air station to an inland airfield with a stop en route for refueling. At the stopover point the pilot, a lieutenant, and the *BN, a lieutenant commander, filed an IFR/VFR flight plan to their destination. They launched and proceeded to the airport but, rather than land, advised the approach controller they would remain aloft. The controller advised the *Intruder* that radar flight following was terminated.

The aircraft continued on to a rural area where the crew, traveling at about 360 knots, made a couple of steep turns about 200 feet above the ground, apparently in view of a relative of the BN who lived in the area, and other witnesses.

After the turns, the *Intruder* climbed to 1,000 feet where it leveled off for a moment then rolled left to the inverted position. It maintained this attitude for two to three seconds, after which the plane continued the left roll. As the maneuver progressed, the descent rate increased significantly and the heading changed about 45 degrees. The airplane continued downward and crashed into a cultivated field at 350 knots in a shallow angle, high rate of descent, right wing tip first attitude, killing both men instantly. Wreckage of the A-6 was strewn over a wide area.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Almost all wearers of wings want a flat-hat at one time or another. A few give way to such desires. They break the rules. Some get away with it. Some don't.

Ole Gramps has seen reports like this since way back when. They sear my soul as much now as they did then. And oh how they cost in loss of life and dollars.

Unsatisfactory airmanship is one thing. Violatin' regs is another. Together, they can spell disaster.

C.O.'s can't be mind readers but they gotta keep a wary eye on their people and on unit procedures to help prevent disregard for order and discipline before it starts. It's an individual decision whether to flat-hat, but I can tell ya this:



the genuine professional sweeps such thoughts away as if they were poison for the brain.

Brutal Blast

An evening check crew consisting of three men headed by a petty officer second class, was preparing for a routine jettison check on a squadron F-14 *Tomcat*. Inadvertently, the crew fired four Mk 107 cartridge activated devices (CADs), located in the MXU-611/A fuel tank release mechanisms on aircraft armament stations two and seven. The forward CAD on station two was explosively ejected from the breech and struck the crew leader in the chest, inflicting fatal injuries.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

What an awful price we pay for not using checklists! Supervisors up and down the line oughta hang their heads way down low on this one.

The outfit made a bundle of mistakes that led to the tragedy. Some of the mistakes follow:

- Informed that the *Tomcat* still had CADs installed (CAD removal is required





Naval Air is celebratin' its 75th birthday all through this year. Ole Gramps wants you to make it the safest one ever, on the ground and in the sky.

before jettison checks), the work center supervisor violated a unit instruction by failing to direct removal of the CADs.

- Aircraft preparation and fuel tank jettison system checklists were neither present nor utilized.
- Crew member tasked with dearming aircraft pulled ground safety handles and opened doors of MXU-611/As but failed to remove CADs or to disconnect electrical connectors.
- Close proximity of the F-14 mishap to air station fuel pits exposed crew to high noise level, impeding communications.
- Nonstandard signals were substituted to compensate for hindered communications in a high-noise environment.
- Crew failed to use proper two-way communication gear.
- Crew tried to conduct maintenance at night without a flashlight.
- Crew member performing AN/AWN-464 checks left scene to get a flashlight and was absent at time of mishap.
- Crew leader directed master arm "on." This enabled the armament safety override switch in the nose wheel well. The man in cockpit then actuated select jettison switch in response to crew leader command.

The squadron's ordnance teams ap-

parently violated safety procedures routinely and the shift supervisor apparently knew about it! "We only use the checklist when someone's watching," seemed to be the attitude of this crew.

Checklists serve a purpose in this world of high-tech Naval Aviation. Is your squadron on the ball when it comes to using them? If the answer to that question is "No," better do something about it. Now!

King of the Sea?

An H-3 *Sea King* was cleared inbound to the carrier for a night visual approach up the angle to spot 3. Winds were calm. The pilots could not see the fresnel lens as they neared the ship due to aircraft parked on the after portion of the angled-deck landing area.

The helicopter aircraft commander (HAC) told the copilot, in the right seat, to fly up the port side and slide into the spot rather than proceeding up the angled deck.

The HAC directed a waveoff when he observed another helicopter in spot 3, an A-6 positioned near spot 4, and that the landing signal enlisted was not visible.

Both flyers noted an unusual noise when power was applied but the sound was transient and considered not uncommon when coupled with power addition. The second approach was waved off due to a red deck signal from the tower and proximity of the A-6 to spot 4.

On final for the third approach, the *Sea King* was advised to land a little forward of spot 4. The H-3 proceeded with an acute, nearly perpendicular approach to spot 4. The helo was slowing to a creep and beginning to align with the deck when the HAC noted that the *Sea King* was, at 60 feet, slightly low. (Flight deck height was 52 feet.) The copilot responded by smoothly adding power and beginning a climb. During the power addition, the HAC detected the H-3 yawing slowly to the right.

As the yaw accelerated, the HAC took control and tried to arrest rotation with full left rudder. Control response seemed normal except for left rudder, even though the pedal pressure felt normal. Sensing impact with the ship was imminent, the HAC added full left cyclic in an attempt to turn away. Perceiving a tail rotor malfunction, he reduced collective then reapplied it. The H-3 rotated nearly three full turns then struck the water. The HAC's use of collective cushioned impact. The *Sea King* rolled inverted and sank, but all four crew members egressed successfully.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

O.K., folks, we lost the helo. Probable cause: tail rotor failure. Thank heaven the troops got out of the sinking bird safely.

Helicopter drivers deserve a better break. When cleared down through the dark night for an angled-deck approach, the pilots have a right to expect an angled-deck approach. The Air Boss is no magician and the helo crew's gotta be flexible — and capable — of flyin' up alongside then slidin' in to the designated spot.

I ain't blamin' any human being for this one. But maybe, just maybe, with a little extra concern for our non-fixed-wing brothers, and better luck movin' aircraft around on deck, the next *Sea King* comin' outta the gloom of night will have a better shot at puttin' down on the spot, first time around.