Carrier Caper

The student Naval Aviator in a TA-4 *Skyhawk* made his final trap aboard the carrier and was told that he was qualified. It was also his last training command flight prior to designation. He received instructions to depart and return to home field. He was catapulted from the bow, proceeded three miles ahead of the ship and, at about 1,000 feet, executed an aileron roll. This unauthorized maneuver was observed by the LSO and the Air Boss.

As a result, the prospective Naval Aviator's designation was withdrawn and he did not receive his wings.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Too tough a punishment? You might ask, 'Why waste a million dollars worth of training? Why not give the man another chance?'

Ladies and gents, we can't play it that way. The flyer executed an acrobatic maneuver in an area where it was prohibited. He was briefed before the flight that unauthorized maneuvers would not be tolerated. Tom Cruise can get away with it, but that's in the movies.

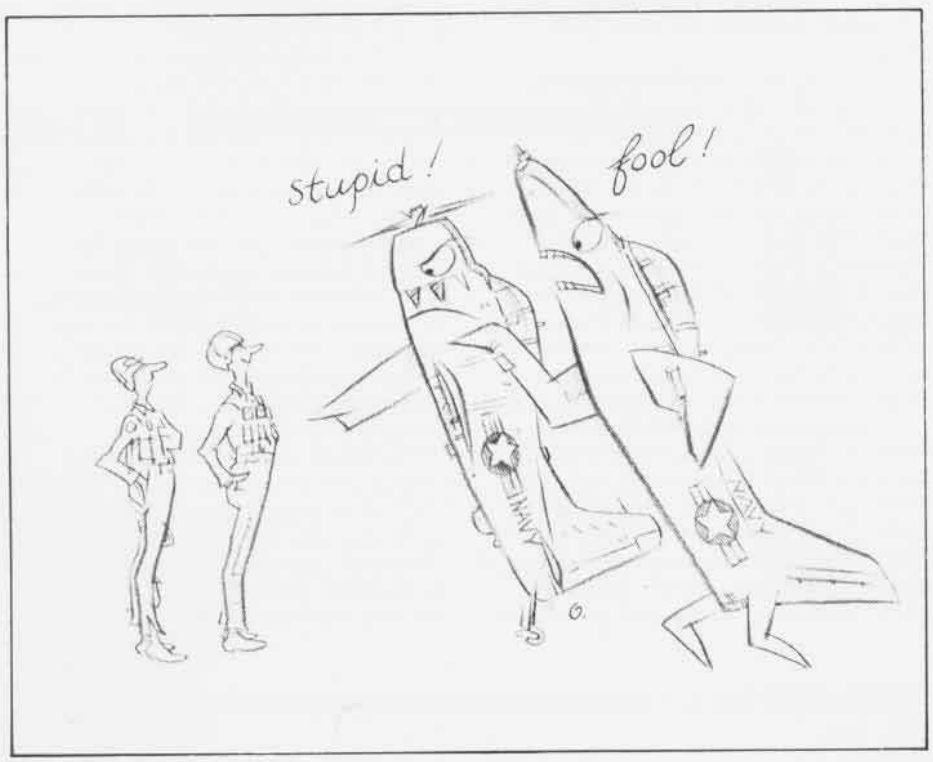
Admittedly, the pilot was excited over achieving a major milestone in the pursuit of gold wings and he felt compelled to perform the roll. But being excited under such circumstances is no defense for breaking the rules or for endangering himself and his machine.

A generation or two ago there was an officer on his final flight before designation day. He had successfully qualified aboard the flattop in the A-1 *Skyraider*. He was thrilled and joyous over his achievement as his flight of four headed for home ashore.

Unfortunately, he could not resist the temptation to display his aerial skills for an audience on a nearby beach. He executed an aileron roll but became disoriented, stalled and plunged into the sea. Next day, the commanding officer refrained from expressions of sympathy. He was, instead, filled with fury at the terrible and absolutely unnecessary loss of a prospective Naval Aviator and an airplane.

Everybody up and down the chain of command better get the message loud and clear. In these days of diminishing assets, human and hardware, there's no room for those who won't abide by the regulations.

And another thing. Gramps is aware that there may be a small minority of pilots out there who have broken the rules and gotten away with it by virtue — if that's the word — of their experience or seniority. Count your blessings — if that's the word — because you've still got those gold wings on your chest. Then ask yourself 'What kind of an example am I setting?'



Old Man Weather and a Valley

This was not a Navy/Marine Corps mishap, but it carries a lesson of value to all flyers.

As part of a major exercise, a section of helicopters were on a planned five-hour, nighttime, low-level contour navigation flight using terrain-following radar and night vision goggles. They maintained 200 to 300 feet AGL. There was an en route stop along the way after which the aircraft were to proceed to a live firing range and execute an "insertion/retraction" of troops operation.

The first leg was uneventful and weather was satisfactory. During the stopover, neither crew updated the weather although, unknownst to them, thunderstorm activity was rapidly developing in the range area.

Because of the rain, authorities decided to close the range. The range was later opened in a "cold" status, precluding the live-firing portion of the mission. This information was passed to the helo crews at the stopover except that the reason for closing the range — weather — was not conveyed to them.

Due to the thunderstorms, several

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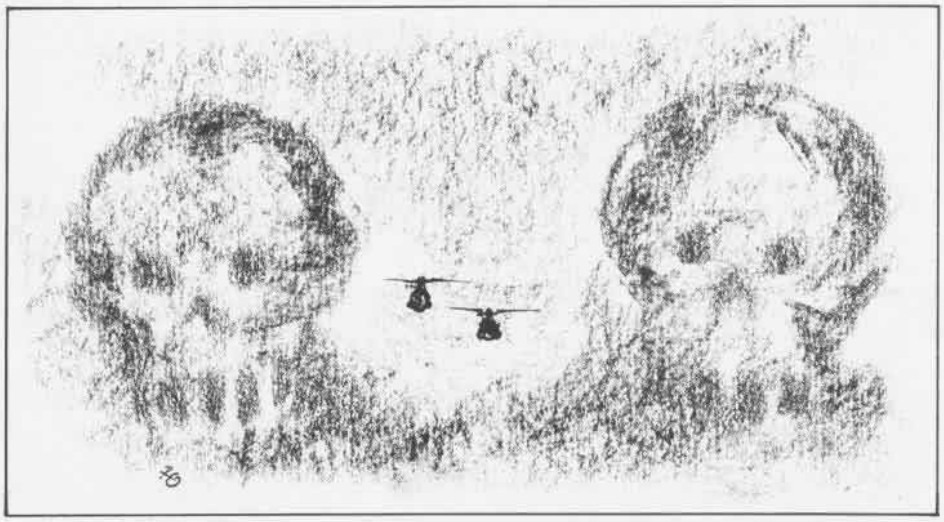

Why didn't they TELL us!

weather warnings were issued to the network of activities involved in the operation but for various reasons they were not transmitted to the aircrews on this flight.

The helos launched for the range. Lightning was observed to the northeast, but its relative distance could not be accurately determined as the flyers were wearing the night vision goggles.

The formation continued and entered a valley where it encountered light rain and reduced visibility. Lead's radar indicated several intermittent obstacle warnings (OWs) with associated climb commands. The rain intensified and lead's radar again gave multiple intermittent OWs, rendering it unreliable for terrain following. Lead climbed and advised number two to use mountainous-terrain-lost-visual procedures, if necessary. Number two fell behind and the lead crew lost sight of the ground. At this time, lead received a constant OW and full climb command on his radar.

The wingman closed toward lead and at one point number two's main rotor blades overlapped lead's tail rotor. To avoid a collision, lead reduced his rate of climb while number two maneuvered to the left, high and abeam lead, in a nose-high attitude.

A crewman on the port side of lead's aircraft then saw number two impact the ground and burst into flames. Simultaneously, the lead crew sighted terrain and initiated an abrupt, evasive maneuver by applying full-aft cyclic and full-up collective to avoid impact. Lead, now in a high-nose up attitude, climbed, broke out of the clouds and declared an emergency.

Attempts to contact the downed helo were unsuccessful. Lead proceeded to home field. Darkness and weather thwarted immediate search and rescue efforts. Next morning, wreckage of the helo was located on the side of steeply rising terrain. There were six personnel on board. All were killed on impact.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Weather was OK on the first leg of this hop. Maybe that contributed to the crew's not updating conditions. Nonetheless, rainshowers were abuildin' at the time. Also, it might have helped if, when the range was closed, the crew was given the reason why — thunderstorms. Weather warnings were incompletely disseminated to the network monitoring the operation and the crew didn't get the info. They did see the lightning, though.

Both aircraft commanders were responsibile for updating weather at the stopover. They didn't do it. Instead, they charged off as briefed only to be trapped by a valley, rain and poor visibility.

Maybe when the helo crews saw the lightning they should have given thought to setting down or reversing course.

Maybe the communications folks oughta check their procedures for getting the word out to those who need it most: the folks in the air.

Lot of "maybes" here.

Military flyers must be tough, aggressive and determined. They also have to realize that no matter how tough, agressive and determined they are, old man weather and deep valleys have a time-honored advantage over them. Don't push it, especially in peace time. There are days and nights when turnin' round and goin' home is the way of the wise.

Gramps Grab Bag

Grampaw Pettibone encourages safety-related inputs from all hands and all units. Stories can be "sunny" or "somber." The only requirement is that they be true. Please send your contributions to *Naval Aviation News*.

The following items are from *CALLBACK*, published by the Office of NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System. They are "general aviation" items but can have military application.

Shortly after takeoff [on a balloon flight], my passenger and I had a pilot-light flameout when a quick-disconnect released inadvertently. The breeze was a little brisk. Approaching the river, another balloon and I "kissed" gently. I then flew through the top of a tree deliberately to make two "splash-and-go" landings in the river. As it seemed that we would cross the river again into the Indian reservation, I decided to land on the west side. We spotted power lines ahead so I added heat to rise. A combination of warm air near the ground, low fuel pressure [causing low flow rate], and a brisk breeze carried us into a set of home feeder wires. I was able to push the upper wire away from the balloon, but not before one of the suspension cables was partially burned through. We made a hasty, panicky, but safe landing in a field where a boy had marked out "LAND" with PVC pipe. The home owner's power flickered twice while I was arcing, but the power stayed on.

More from *CALLBACK:*

. . .I think it was so beautiful outside the aircraft that I just didn't pay close enough attention [to the clearance].

. . .I guess the human factor for error is doubled in a two-pilot operation. I never seemed to have this problem in single-pilot company. [Zero pilots = zero errors?]

[A pilot] checking a preflight sump drain was surprised and dismayed to note that the fuel appeared to be pink and thus incorrect for his aircraft. Relief came with the realization that he was wearing rose-tinted sunglasses, and that all was well.