

## Fumin' Phantom

A pair of F-4N *Phantoms* executed a section takeoff from a West Coast air station and soon entered a thick overcast. Noting that his fighter-bomber's exhaust appeared to be whitish rather than the customary black, the radar intercept officer (RIO) in the second *Phantom* asked his pilot to check his gauges. (There is no fuel gauge in the rear cockpit of the F-4N). The pilot reported that all appeared normal. He added that he was very busy just trying to maintain visual contact with the lead aircraft as they climbed through the weather.

At 34,000 feet, the clouds began to thin and the pilot got a good look at his gauges. He noticed that half his fuel was gone and the *Phantom* had been airborne for only 10 minutes!

Assuming he had a serious fuel leak, the pilot immediately broke away for home base. Time being critical, the pilot and RIO knew that if they flew a bingo profile, they would run out of gas. So the pilot declared an emergency and hurried back to the point of departure at 450 knots. With the gauge virtually on empty, the *Phantom* touched down safely. The pilot cleared the runway and immediately shut down the aircraft, the entire bottom of which was covered with fuel. Fuel also flowed from each intake. The crash crew arrived and prevented a fire.

Investigation revealed that this squadron was to transition to F/A-18 *Hornets* in a few weeks and the maintenance troops got careless. The aircraft had a previous fuel gripe and the day crew had worked on it but didn't finish the job. The message in

*Remember St. Valentine's Day!*



the pass-down log to the night crew said, "Defueled and flamed out aircraft 03." But they didn't mention that they had popped the turtleback fixture and taken the probe out of the number 2 fuel cell. They had rested the probe back in the hole and tacked the turtleback on.

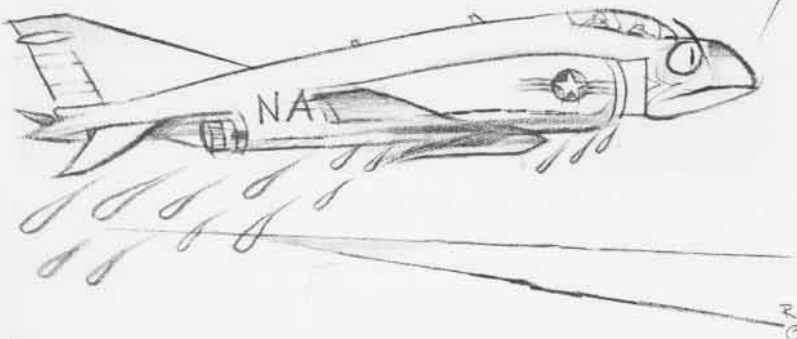
The night crew worked on the problem but didn't look under the turtleback. They just screwed it down without securing the probe.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Bet that Phantom crew breathed real deep when they got their bird**

*maybe THEY ought to be drilled with a plug or two!*



back onto the concrete. Bet they were real mad, too.

Ain't no excuse for this kind of carelessness – even if the squadron was givin' up one set of birds for another. What bothers me is if this outfit acted like this at the end of their *Phantom* "tour," what's to say it'll be any different at the beginnin' of *Hornet* time. Makes me shiver!

## What a Break!

The pilot was relatively new to the squadron. He and his crew were on a field carrier landing practice flight at an outlying field. They were fast approaching the field. The landing signal officer (LSO) had visual contact with the aircraft and cleared it to break at the numbers. Paddles transmitted, "Show me something in the break."

The pilot broke over the approach end of the runway and initially rolled into a 60 to 70-degree bank. The aircraft continued the turn, the roll increasing to nearly 120 degrees. Excessive rate of descent also developed. Paddles issued an altitude warning call. The aircraft was now in a 25-degree, nose-down attitude.

At approximately 400 feet above ground level, the crew ejected. But they were beyond limits for the aircraft's attitude and none survived.



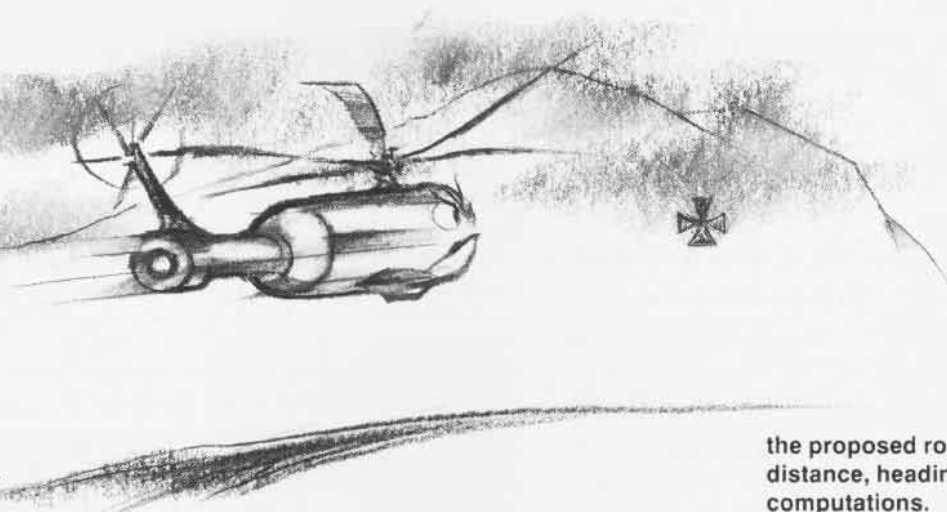
**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

This one's got nothin' to do with type aircraft or souls onboard. It's got to do with attitude and smarts. Poor and lacking in this case.

Apparently, at this particular stage of training, squadron LSOs liked to "instill a sense of confidence" in the pilots ... buck up their "stick and throttle" skills, so to speak.

Nothin' wrong with that. BUT ... how well did the pilot know departure procedures? And ejection envelope parameters? Why didn't the call to "recover" or "neutralize controls" come sooner. What's "show me somethin' in the break" mean?

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## Helo versus Hill

A CH-53D *Sea Stallion* launched from one overseas air station to overseas home base on a day VFR flight plan. Although the weather forecast met the minimums, there were clouds and reduced visibility along the route. Also, there were impending typhoon conditions some distance from their destination.

The day before takeoff, the pilot advised his squadron at home base that weather was expected to be clear enough for the trip. He added that on the day after the planned flight, a front was expected to move into the area. He received word indirectly that his C.O. said, "Good, tell him to launch if they have the weather."

The ceiling was 3,000 feet, visibility two miles at the departure point, and the helo was allowed to launch via a special VFR departure procedure. The helo launched and proceeded normally. Radar service was terminated when the CH-53 was a few miles south of the base.

The *Sea Stallion* climbed to about 1,000 feet and continued on course overwater. About 25 minutes later, a few seconds after crossing the shoreline of an isthmus and traveling at about 110 knots, the aircraft crashed into a hillside at a point approximately 800 feet above sea level. All seven personnel onboard were killed.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Terrible toll! Old man weather – with help from poor judgment – was the victor on this one. It was another easy win for him.**

**We don't know for sure what happened because there were no**

**witnesses, but evidence indicated that the copilot was at the controls when the *Sea Stallion* struck the ground. The copilot had been in the officers club until 2200 the night before, and an autopsy showed that he had enough alcohol in his system to impair motor and sensory functions. The helicopter aircraft commander had no alcohol in his system, but he knew the copilot had been drinking the night before.**

**Appears the crew used an operational navigation chart (ONC) in planning, which is normally OK since most of the flight was to be overwater. 'Cept an ONC doesn't have the contour detail of a larger scale map and, using an ONC for this particular region, it is possible to believe that the highest obstruction in the area was at 400 feet. An ONC – but no other VFR navigational maps – was found in the wreckage. It's also probably true that the pilots got themselves forced into IFR conditions but may not have been alarmed due to their flight altitude.**

**This aircraft and crew had been away from home base for three weeks and the squadron was soon to depart for their return to CONUS after six months. The crew coulda had a touch of "get-home-itis." The weather forecaster at the departure base indicated the crew displayed typical impatience with delays associated with poor weather conditions. There was also some question as to the thoroughness of the crew's overall planning for the flight. For example, no evidence was recovered of a jet log listing**

**the proposed route of flight, time, distance, headings, or fuel computations.**

**So, you pour these nuggets of information into a sack, shake 'em up, roll 'em out, and they spell "accident waitin' to happen."**

**And it did.**

## Osborn Exhibit Opens

On November 28, 1989, Vice Admiral R. M. Dunleavy, Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Air Warfare), was guest speaker at the opening of the Navy Museum's exhibit which salutes Robert Osborn's contributions to the Navy through his art. Mr. Osborn's characters Grampaw Pettibone, Dilbert the Pilot, and Spoiler the Mechanic have been known in the Naval Aviation community for almost 47 years, first appearing on the pages of the *BuAer News Letter*, which later became *Naval Aviation News*.

Miss Izetta Winter Robb, who served on the *NA News* editorial staff for over 26 years and retired as managing editor in 1969, cut the ribbon, officially opening the display which will remain at the museum for six months.

In the photo, Miss Robb and Dr. Dean Allard, Director, Naval Historical Center, listen to VADM. Dunleavy chronicle Osborn's artwork.



Ed Frasher