Osborn

Tragic Trap

A fully qualified plane captain at NAS West Coast headed out to the line with his NC-8 power cart ready to assist his squadron mates with an EA-6B *Prowler*. He conducted proper preoperational checks on the NC-8 and safely drove to the flight line.

He stopped the NC-8 just forward of the starboard engine and began backing up to place the power cart parallel to the jet. His left hand was on the NC-8's steering wheel, his right on the back of the vehicle, looking over his right shoulder as he backed into position.

At some point during this evolution, the NC-8 turned into the aircraft, pinning the plane captain and the cart under the starboard engine bay door. The NAS fire department responded immediately and began efforts to extract the pinned airman. A four-wheel-drive, heavy duty pickup truck had to be summoned to pull the NC-8 out from under the aircraft. The plane captain was rushed by ambulance to the local hospital but was pronounced dead shortly after arrival.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

You just can't let up for one second when dealin' with flyin' machines! This airman was an outstanding performer in the squadron, but for one horrible instant he was distracted or got complacent and that cost him his life.

Investigators believe it happened this way: As the airman backed up, he failed to notice that the starboard boarding ladder was down. Also, over the noise of the NC-8, he didn't hear the crunch when the power cart contacted the boarding ladder. Still looking over his right shoulder, the boarding ladder struck the airman's left leg as he continued backwards. Surprised, the airman twisted around to see what was pulling his left leg out of the vehicle. Inadvertently, he moved the steering wheel counterclockwise, in effect turning the NC-8 INTO the Prowler.

As the NC-8 continued backing under the aircraft, the airman was pinned against the steering wheel. The force of impact caused him to jam his right foot further down on the accelerator, firmly wedging the vehicle underneath the jet. The NC-8 shut down when the steering wheel compressed against the master ignition switch.

***Dos and Don't's for Support Equipment* (NAVAIR 00-80T-96) cautions against backing a vehicle toward an aircraft. It states, "If you must, then do use an outside director and safety observer."**

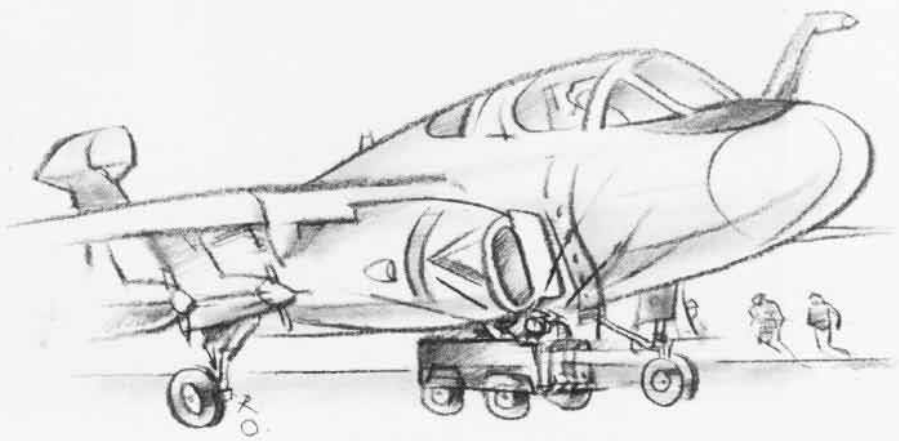
Is your command aware of this? Are you? Ole Gramps sure hopes so. This accident was as rare as it was tragic and we damn well don't want another one like it.

Skyhawk Skip

A TA-4J *Skyhawk* was on a post-maintenance functional check flight which required disconnecting the hydraulically powered flight controls. For a normal landing, NATOPS (Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization) recommends a maximum crosswind component of 8 knots for the TA-4J with the controls disconnected. The pilot completed all checks satisfactorily and called the tower to check his winds prior to disconnecting the controls. After disconnecting, he extended gear and flaps, armed the spoilers, and commenced the approach. Because the winds were variable (with gusts), the pilot asked the tower to "keep up the wind calls."

Just as the *Skyhawk* approached touchdown, the tower passed the latest wind information and the pilot responded, "That's right at my limit right now."

He was cleared to land and two more wind calls followed. The pilot



transmitted, "Taking arrested." He then dearmed the spoilers and dropped the tailhook. Touchdown speed was 120 knots, on centerline, 500 feet prior to the E-28 arresting gear, wind coming from the right.

On touchdown, the throttles went to idle power and the aircraft began an immediate left drift with the right wing coming up. The pilot used both hands to push the stick full forward and right, into the crosswind, in an attempt to overcome degraded control authority with the back-up mechanical system. Tapping the right brake had little effect and his hook skipped the short field arresting gear.

Due to fuel state and threatening weather in the vicinity, the pilot had made the decision not to take it around even if he missed the gear. He did not use right rudder or nose wheel steering to stop the left drift, because he feared it would further aggravate the right-wing-up attitude and possibly cause the *Skyhawk* to roll over.

The rapid left drift continued and 1,600 feet beyond the cross deck pendant, 20 feet before the aircraft exited the left hand side of the runway, speed at 110 knots, the pilot ejected. The egress system worked as advertised and the pilot experienced a half swing in the chute before landing on the runway.

The aircraft continued across an off-duty runway and rolled nearly 600 feet before the nose wheel collapsed and the nose of the TA-4J buried itself into the ground in an area of small shrubs and undergrowth, the engine still running. The crash crew arrived and shot water into the left intake to secure the engine. The pilot suffered minor injuries. The aircraft was seriously damaged but repairable.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Good Grief! He forgot the spoilers!

A former attack driver, the pilot got a bit confused as to whether the spoilers should be armed or not for a field arrested landing. At decision time, he reverted to the old procedure of deactivating the spoilers when the hook is extended. The Skyhawk NATOPS states that spoilers should be armed for all landings (except for shipboard operations because of the hazard to flight deck personnel), adding that the action of "wing spoilers, when extended with full flaps, reduces wing lift...and minimizes aircraft weight change on the tires as the aircraft decelerates...that landing rollout characteristics are improved with spoiler deflection and significantly improved in crosswind conditions through the combined spoiler effects of reduced lift, increased deceleration, and reduced weathercocking tendencies." Also, the good book sez flaps oughta be up in crosswind landings.

It's interestin' to Ole Gramps that investigators found no helpful guidance in NATOPS, or anywhere else, havin' to do with a wave-off after touchdown with the powered flight controls disconnected. And this bird's been around for many a moon.

This flyer was dealt a bad hand – landing the Skyhawk with the manual back-up is no picnic regardless of the wind – and he did everthin' right, 'cept for the spoilers. They mighta saved him that ride in the hot seat.

NATOPS also sez: If the upwind wing rises, the nose of the bird will track toward the downwind side, rather than weathercock into the wind, as ya might normally expect.

Skyhawk drivers, put that in your mental notebook.