

Illustrations by **Ted Wilbur**

## Gramps from Yesteryear The Powerful Panther

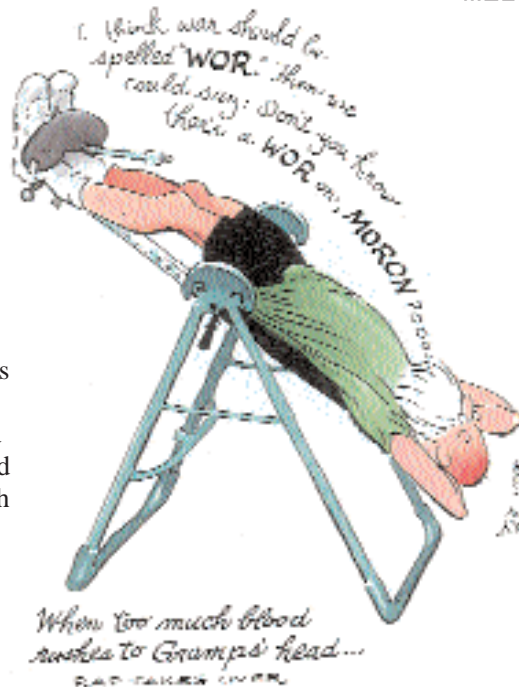
During qualification exercises aboard *Essex* (CV 9), an F9F-2 Panther defied all of the accepted principles of flight and performed a feat that would win a bet from any aircraft designer.

The pilot made a normal approach, took the cut and pulled his nose up slightly before easing over toward the deck. The resulting rapid rate of descent caused a slightly hard landing, and the plane failed to catch a wire. Instead of holding the nose of the F9F down so it would go into the barrier, the pilot lifted the plane to a flying attitude and it became airborne.

As soon as he realized he was flying, the pilot applied full power. By this time, however, he was low enough for his hook to engage the nylon tape of the barrier and carry it away. Part of the tape wrapped itself around the hook.

Forward of the barrier, one F9F was being taken below on the #1 elevator and another was waiting for taxi instructions to the port catapult.

The pilot who had taken the waveoff saw that he was about to hit the parked plane and pulled back on the stick. His starboard wing tore off the parked plane's vertical stabilizer,



while his starboard gear dragged through the aft part of the fuselage. His port wheel hit the canopy and was sheared off by the armor plate.

Miraculously, the pilot of the parked plane was uninjured. He was sitting with his seat all the way down. The canopy was smashed all around him and the armor plate had absorbed a gash nine inches long and a half inch deep.

The "flying" F9F continued on over the bow and leveled off inches above the wave tops. With the

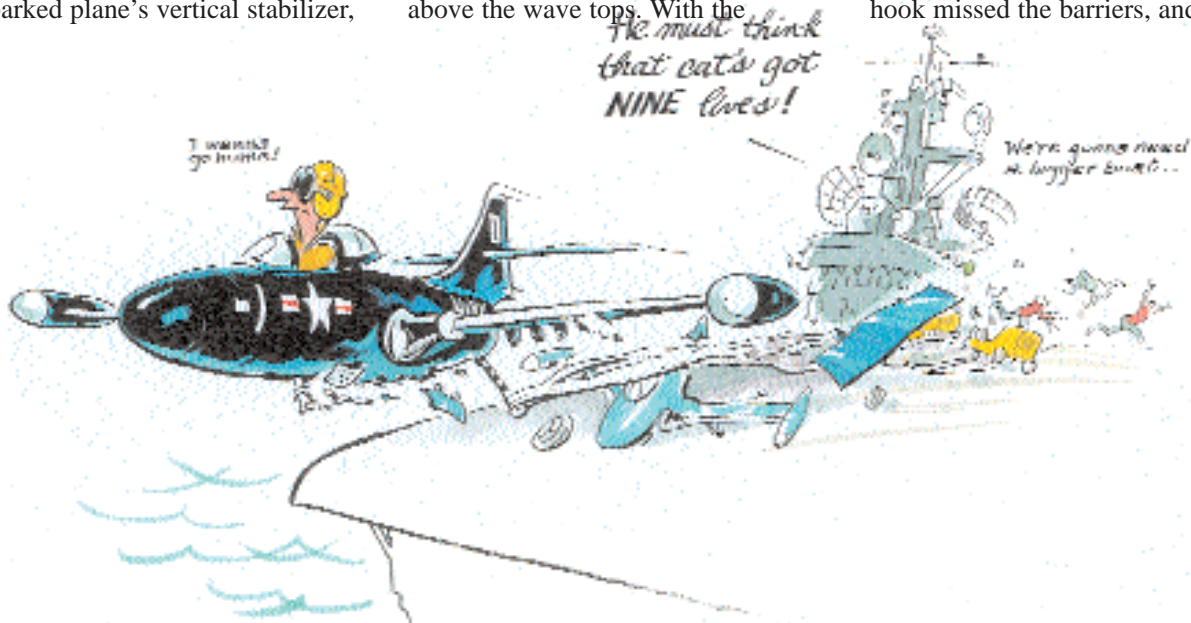
barrier tape dragging in the water and the jet blast leaving a noticeable wake, the pilot was able to affect a recovery.

The ship was 90 miles from the beach and there was a question as to whether the pilot had sufficient fuel to get there, especially since he was unable to retract what was left of his landing gear and flaps. Consequently, he was ordered to make another pass and land on board. This time the deck was cleared of all planes and a line of mules and tractors was set across the flight deck just forward of the barriers.

You ain't heard nothing yet!

On this pass, the pilot was slightly fast because part of his flaps and his port wheel had been carried away on the first landing attempt. He took a cut and eased the nose over. The plane made a reasonably satisfactory landing on the starboard wheel, nose wheel and port tip tank.

The hook did not pick up a wire nor did it drop the fouled tape. Once more, the pilot pulled back on the stick and became airborne. This time what was left of the gear and the hook missed the barriers, and the



pilot applied full power. The F9F then settled into the line of mules, losing the nose wheel and starboard landing gear on impact. This slowed the plane enough to make it settle to the deck on its belly.

The plane skidded up the deck for about 300 feet and then off the bow, tearing off the remaining flap, damaging the tip tanks and the underside of the fuselage. It did not kill the airspeed, however, and the pilot made a recovery, barely avoiding hitting the water.

While the ship was trying to decide what to do next, the pilot transmitted this masterpiece of understatement over the radio: "This is becoming a rather rugged flight!"

The pilot was ordered to bingo to the beach and an escort was launched to fly his wing. About 20 miles from the beach he ran out of gas and had to ditch. The pilot was picked up uninjured by a nearby destroyer which took him to port.

#### Grampaw Pettibone says:

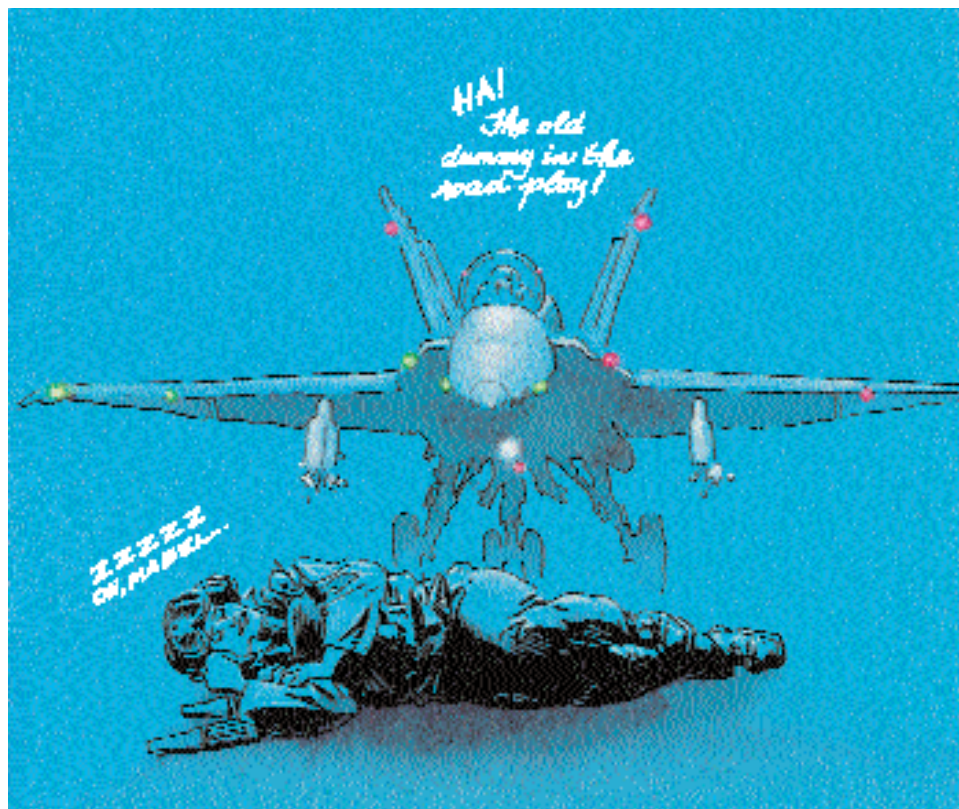
**Don't say it can't happen. They sent pictures to prove it.**

**The cost of this unusual "performance test" was slightly over a million dollars and I hear by the grapevine that the pilot has decided he is in the wrong racket and doesn't give a hoot about ever trying another carrier landing.**

**The lad who was sitting in the parked plane is said to be two inches shorter than he once was. Seems he shrivels up a little bit more each time he thinks of what a close call he had.**

#### **Hit by a Hornet**

During night operations, in an effort to take a break and rest while waiting for the arrival of an F/A-18C to land and proceed to his "hot brake" check area prior to the



refueling pits, a plane captain/hot brake checker laid down on the centerline of the taxiway and fell asleep. As the Hornet taxied to the hot brake check area the pilot's attention was diverted from the taxiway because he was unable to see the illuminated taxi wands where the hot brake checker usually stands. His attention was on the hangar, the refueling pits and the sides of the taxiway looking for the hot brake checker.

As the aircraft drew nearer the hot refueling pits, the pilot eyed another aircraft which was refueling. He expected the hot brake checker would emerge from there. The pilot never saw the checker lying in the taxiway, even with his taxi light on.

The checker did not awaken until after the Hornet's nose wheel hit him. He was subsequently pushed along by the wheel and although the wheel never actually rolled over him, the checker suffered severe trauma to his left knee causing permanent partial disability. He

managed to pull himself free from the nose wheel but not until it had dragged him 31 feet.

#### Grampaw Pettibone says:

**Holy rollers! Had the hot brake check area been better**

**illuminated, this youngster might have retained a normal left knee. He was exhausted all right, but he was fatigued because of illegal drug use and improper sleep.**

**Uncertain of the brake checker's position, the pilot would have been better off halting the Hornet and ensuring the way ahead was clear. But Ole Gramps has to admit, he can't remember the last time anybody fell asleep on the taxiway centerline, or even on the taxiway for that matter.**