

Illustrations by Ted Wilbur

Don't Mess with Mother Nature

Severe weather was forecast at the air station where two P-3C Orions undergoing scheduled periodic maintenance were partially hanged. That is, their tails were exposed while the major portions of the aircraft were undercover.

At around noon, Condition II was set. A tornado warning accompanied the severe thunderstorm threat. A couple of hours later, the air station went to Condition I. Each time, maintenance control received immediate notification from the squadron duty office of the increasingly bad weather, yet the maintainers continued to casually secure the aircraft.

Nearing 1800, a storm producing heavy rains and winds in excess of 90 knots whipped up over the field. Maintenance personnel scrambled to secure loose gear in the hangar bay. During this period, the noses of both aircraft began to move up and down as gusts of wind pushed against their tails. The aircraft were not completely or properly tied down. Personnel shifted their attention from securing loose gear and tried to keep the aircraft in place with additional tie-down chains and chocks, but the P-3s continued to bob and move.

The tie-downs failed to restrain the aircraft as a gust of wind spun one Orion 90 degrees counter clockwise, causing it to impact the hangar doors. Shortly afterward, another gust caused the second aircraft to swing around clockwise a short distance, striking the hangar door and maintenance stands.

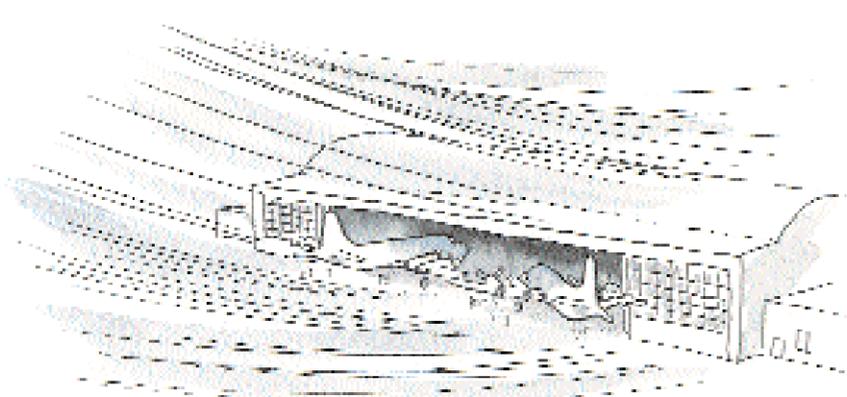
The hangar door windows were damaged and damage to the aircraft



in responding. Turns out there was inadequate written guidance for bad weather situations up and down the chain of command, particularly in the area of training.

Ole Gramps has added another nightmare to his inventory. The visions of those huge Orions spinning in place bristles the few hairs still left on his head.

What happened to common sense? When the wind blows the cradle will fall, right? Secure those birds nice and tight as soon as you can. Believe the weatherman. If he's wrong, so be it. If he's right and you don't use your noggin', better stay clear of spinning flying machines, even if they're on the ground.



included a bent wing tip, a crushed rudder assembly, bent prop blade and numerous other "bruises."

 Grampaw Pettibone says:

If it looks like a severe thunderstorm, sounds like a severe thunderstorm and acts like a severe thunderstorm, it's probably a severe thunderstorm! These folks had plenty of warning that ferocious weather was headed their way, yet took too much time

Gramps from Yesteryear

Unguided Missile

An FJ-4B Fury pilot commenced his run-in for a medium angle loft maneuver. He was at 100 feet above the water and traveling at .72 Mach, carrying a 1,000-pound general-purpose bomb. All switches had been properly checked. As he passed over the pull-up point he pressed the bomb pickle and eased back on the stick to commence the lofting maneuver.

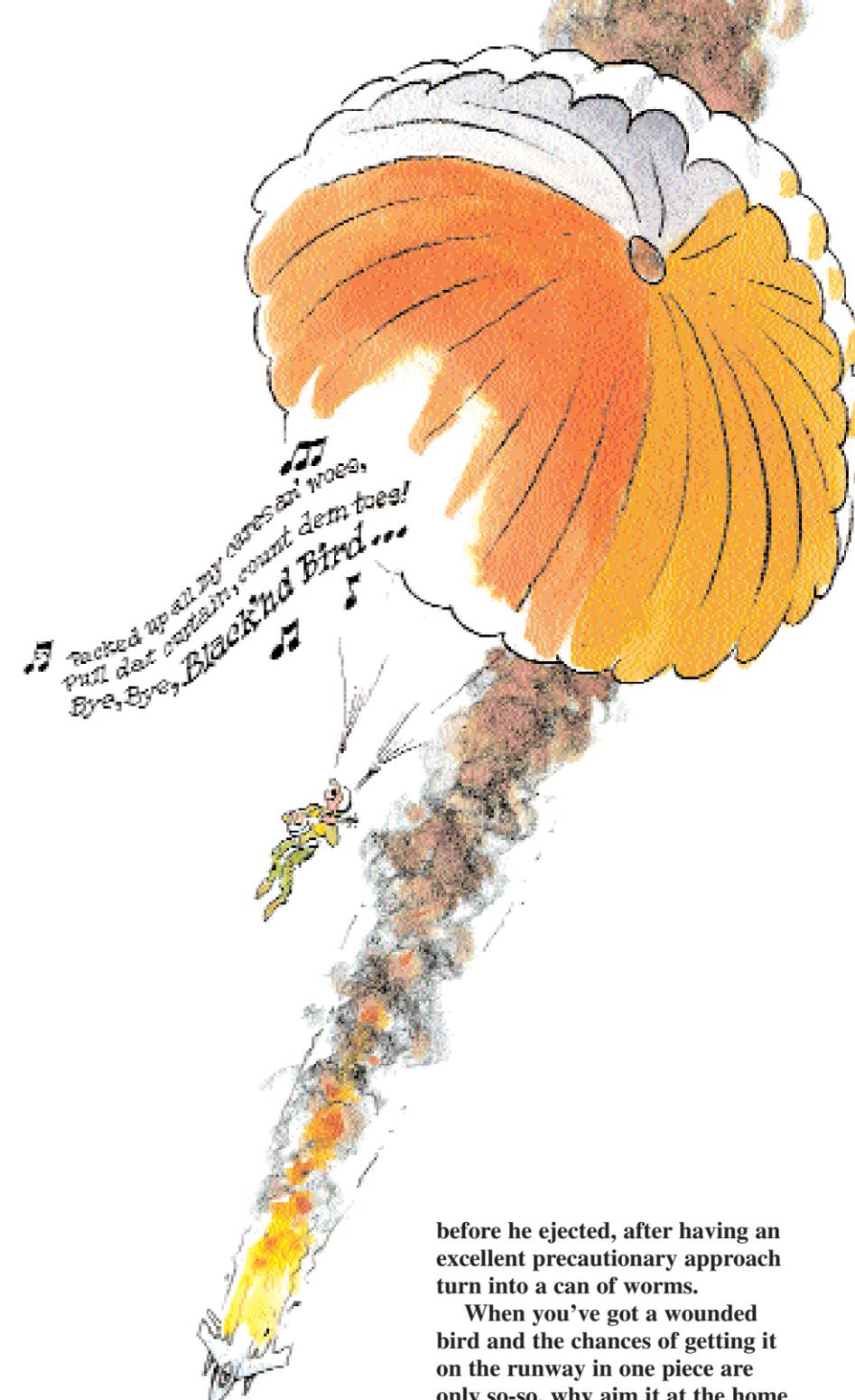
A sudden impact raised the port wing slightly. The bomb had released prematurely and exploded under him!

The pilot continued pulling through, completing a smooth loft run, and rolled out on top with a constant buzzing vibration running through the airframe. The flight leader told him to "get some altitude and head for home," so he went to 100-percent power, climbed to 15,000 feet and proceeded toward home base.

He had a hole in an outboard wing panel and was streaming fuel vapor behind. The low-fuel warning light came on as he arrived over the home field, and the flight leader advised him to point the Fury seaward and eject. The pilot of the stricken plane found himself in a perfect high key position and broadcast that he would make a precautionary flameout approach. The tower cleared him, and the field chain arresting gear was readied for engagement. Knowing the pilot's skill, the flight leader did not transmit disagreement and followed him at a safe distance.

At the 180-degree point, flames suddenly erupted along the entire lower fuselage of the FJ, and the engine flamed out. Informed of the fire by his flight leader, the pilot pulled the nose up in a turn away from the field and ejected. Everything worked as advertised, and he was soon floating down under a beautiful canopy.

Meanwhile, the pilotless plane had turned toward the naval air station and was plunging toward the hangars. The flight leader transmitted a warning to the tower and alarms were sounded. The FJ veered and headed broadside for a big attack carrier that was tied up at a pier adjoining the airfield. Fortunately, the deadly plane-turned-missile continued to turn and crashed in the water directly under the stern of the aircraft carrier.



before he ejected, after having an excellent precautionary approach turn into a can of worms.

When you've got a wounded bird and the chances of getting it on the runway in one piece are only so-so, why aim it at the home folks at all? That crippled plane becomes a missile when you leave it, and it could wipe out a whole flight line, a hangar, barracks or housing area.

If it looks like it'll be an ejection anyway, it's far better to do it over a safe zone and cut down on the chance of a major disaster.

 Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sonofagun! It's mighty difficult to chew out a man who's done everything just about perfect—kept his head, brought his machine home like a real pro and made an attempt to steer it clear