

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by *Ted Wilbur*

Power Line Peril

A Fleet Replacement Squadron T-34C Turbo Mentor crewed by two instructor lieutenants exited the target area after performing FAC(A) duties for a division of F/A-18 Hornets practicing close air support. The T-34 did not fly a direct profile back to base; rather, it started its journey home by flying along a canal repeatedly, descending lower with each pass. The pilot, who had a history of flying unbriefed ACM in the T-34, then headed for a nearby lake where he flew just feet above the water for nearly a minute. After that, the T-34 entered a canyon area, sometimes flying below the canyon walls.

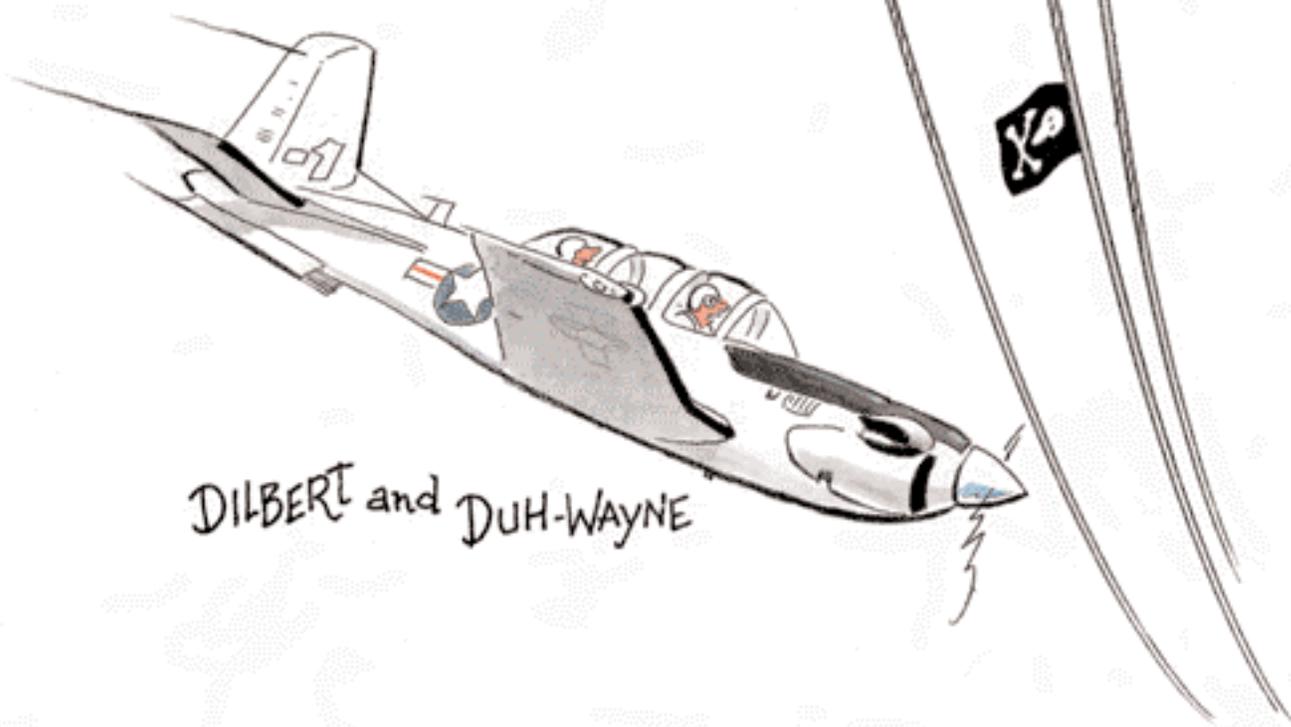
Power lines run across this particular canyon. The towers have two static lines that run nearly straight across the top and three power wires that sag approximately 30 feet lower at the center of their droop. The lower lines are about 70 feet above the canyon floor. The T-34 was heading west along the shape of the canyon in an attempt to fly under the static lines. The aircraft flew into the lower three lines and crashed in a near vertical attitude. Both aircrew members were killed.

During the mishap board it became known that two days before the mishap the pilot at the controls had flown a similar profile with a replacement pilot in the back seat. Just before the power lines, the pilot had pulled up, rolled the plane on its back, and remarked over the ICS: "We could make it under there."



Grampaw Pettibone says:

"He thought he could make it under there." It's a shame when a Brownsheer writes his own epitaph, isn't it?





A Message From Gramps

It's been a while since I've had the impulse to talk to you outside of discussing a particular mishap, but now it struck me, so here you go: I don't have to tell you all you've been working hard since that terrible day we call 9-11.

You've been some operatin' sons of guns in the last few years, and it don't look like there's a break coming up anytime soon. You done good work. Sorties flown. Tasking met.

But I gotta warn you (after all, that's what I do), just when you think you know what you're doing, the air machine and its surrounding environ are likely to show you that you don't . . . at least not as much as you thought you did. And in the last couple of years I've

seen too many mishap reports with the same two themes. Different platforms—fast movers, choppers, prop jobs—in every type of circumstance—day, night, severe clear, in the clag—but in the end it too often comes down to these two things: First one is the aviator didn't fly the brief. Second one is squadronmates didn't stop a failing aviator when they had the chance. I got a feeling fixing these two things would go a long way toward saving lives and aircraft.

In the meantime, keep fighting the good fight, my champions. And may I never have occasion to say other than, "Good on you." An old man (who could still take it to any of you, o' course) with nothing to write about would be a pleasant problem for us all.