GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

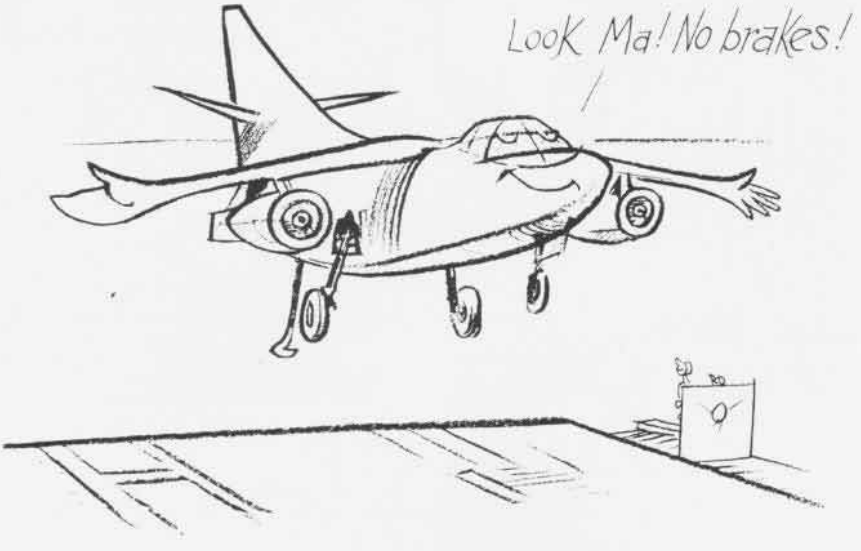
Haste and Waste

Approximately 15 minutes after a night catapult launch, an A3D pilot was notified by radio that he "may have hit a tow bar on the launch." The pilot could find no discrepancies in his hydraulic system or landing gear, so he continued with his mission.

Thirty minutes prior to recovery time, he cycled the landing gear and had a visual inspection made of the nose wheel through the cockpit deck inspection plate. Hydraulic system pressure and the eyeball check were both normal. A CCA approach was then made, followed by a normal arrested landing. The A3D was pulled back in the gear on signal, and brakes were applied. The wings were folded, and the aircraft was directed up the deck, a slight turn being made to taxi across the foul deck line. Up to now he had normal braking.

As the pilot taxied forward to the deck part on the axial deck, suddenly he had a complete normal system brake failure! The emergency air bottle was swiftly actuated, but there was no response!

Shutting down his engines, the pilot deliberately turned the A3D to starboard, using the nose wheel steering, and aimed it for a parked and unmanned A3D. It was that or go over the side! The big aircraft smashed together, nose to nose. The runaway was halted. Inspection revealed both main and emergency brake lines had been severed at the wheel.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great jumpin' Jehosophat! Tow bars adrift on the deck are as deadly as a lighted stick of dynamite and could be just as catastrophic.

Appears to me that if wheel or brake damage was suspected, that A3D should have been inspected before movin' it an inch after arrestment. If time was a problem, a tractor and tow bar could have cleared the aircraft from the landing area mighty fast and done it a lot safer. Pri-Fly knew they had a "probable," why make it "positive" damage? There's just no substitute for good headwork.

Fire Ball

A division of A4D's were engaged in night MLP at an outlying field. Two full bounce periods had been completed, but the group of planes were running somewhat behind schedule. They were instructed by the LSO to expedite the turn-around for the next bounce period.

Fuel trucks were standing by, so three of the pilots remained in their cockpits while their aircraft were refueled. On one A4D, the plane captain immediately noticed there was no fuselage cap cover and that the fuselage cell cap was missing! Obviously the pilot had lost them during the previous MLP period. In addition, he was the only one who needed fuel in the fuselage cell, so it must have been siphoning in flight!

Climbing up to the cockpit, one of the plane captains told the pilot refueling was completed, but his gas cap cover was missing. The pilot told him to go get something to cover it and to hurry it up. The man checked the line shack and cruise box but found no cap. Returning to the cap-less A4D, he stopped another plane captain who was bringing out a "bundle of rags" to stuff in the filler pipe and told him NEVER TO DO THAT!

Climbing up the ladder again, the plane captain now shouted to the pilot that he couldn't find a gas cap. The pilot had his APH-5 on, and the start-

ing unit was connected and running. He thought the man said only the cover plate was missing and signalled he wanted to start the engine. Figuring the pilot must know what he was doing, the man gave him a start and directed him out on the taxiway.

During taxi-out, the pilot informed the LSO in the mobile runway control that the A4D had a missing gas cap, and he was returning to the home base.

The LSO said, "Say again," and the pilot repeated his message. The LSO then asked if he was going to fly without a gas cap, and the pilot replied "Affirmative." Not believing anyone would be so foolish as to fly without a gas cap and thinking the young pilot obviously meant the fuselage cover plate, he cleared the A4D for take-off.

During the take-off roll, observers saw the plane burst into flames and heard an explosion! As the pilot heard the explosion and saw the flames in his rear view mirror, he cut the engine and braking to a fast stop, jumped out and ran for safety. The crash crew put out the fire promptly, but the wreck may be irreparable.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

This lad musta been standin' behind the door when they passed out the brains! With all the mish-mash about no fuel cover, no fuel cap, you'd think he'd at least get out to take a look! Sittin' in there like a chicken ready for the roastin' while they refuel a hot airplane is a prime boo-boo in the first place. It took a lot of people to set the scene for this one.

Night Hawks

An A4D-2N pilot and his wingman were engaged in night MLP at an auxiliary field. There were no other planes in the landing pattern upon their arrival and their signal was "Charlie." Passes with a wave-off because of heavy fuel state were initiated.

During the flight leader's second pass to the mirror, he heard the second section of his division, which had proceeded from the home field independently, cleared into the airfield traffic pattern, and then cleared to break and join the MLP pattern.

While taking a low wave-off, the flight leader suddenly became aware of a bright, distorted flashing light reflecting through his canopy. It seemed to be directly overhead, descending, and closing at a rapid rate! Instinctively he pushed over in a descending right turn in an attempt to avoid what seemed an impending collision, and struck the runway slightly nose down and in a skid!

A momentary shower of sparks and a bright flash of flame was visible to everyone on the airfield, but these subsided as the pilot pulled the stick sharply back and the A4D again became airborne. At this point he glanced up and was able to distinguish the lights of two aircraft breaking overhead, the section leader's lights on DIM, the wingman's bright and flashing.

Climbing in a gentle port turn, the pilot now checked for signs of trouble. The warning light in the gear handle was ON, flight controls checked O.K. and wheel position indicators showed DOWN. He told the tower what had happened and was cleared for a low pass near the wheels watch and LSO for a damage check. After the pass, he was informed by the LSO that the main landing gear appeared to be at trail.

Climbing back up to 2500 feet and orbiting the airfield, the pilot now asked his wingman to do an airborne check of the damage. The tower came up on the air at this point to caution them on the possibilities of a mid-air collision during such a maneuver at night. Both rogered for the advice and did the check anyway, confirming the observations of the LSO.

About this time the utility hydraulic pressure warning light came on steady—no flaps or speed brakes would be available. The pilot now decided the home field would be better equipped for an emergency wheels-up field arrestment. The necessary radio calls were made to get clearance home, alert the home field to foam the runway and to announce an emergency.

About half-way home the whole port gear assembly fell off the airplane, but the two 300-gallon drop tanks still held fast. A check of stall speed was made, with 142 knots showing up as about the minimum speed he could use safely.

The hook was dropped and checked down. He made a long straight-in approach, no flaps and no gear, at 150 knots, to a successful field arrestment.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! I grant you that it puts an icy chill in your back to see what appears to be lights converging on you like that at night. He thought he'd had it for sure, but after such a scare why the heck INVITE another by doing a plane-to-plane damage check AT NIGHT? We had a fatal collision at the same field doin' just that a short time ago. These guys sure have short memories.

For the second section, why break directly over the MLP runway? Around the ship we come up the starboard side and take interval. It sure saves a lot of confusion there and might have prevented an accident here.