



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

F-8 Wingfold Folly

A division of F-8 pilots was briefed for an air-to-air gunnery flight about 0745 on a bright clear morning at a desert air station. The flight was scheduled for a 0915 departure but was delayed due to aircraft availability. At 0945 the pilots manned their aircraft, after a normal pre-flight inspection, with each aircraft reportedly in an up status.

All pilots got normal starts but when the division leader spread his wings the line chief, supervising the launch, noted the left wing lock flag was up about an inch. He tried several times to push the flag in, but was unsuccessful. He then signaled the pilot to fold the wings and as the folding cycle began a small piece of metal fell from the wing fold area. It actually hit one of the men who had gathered around to assist with the problem. The broken piece of metal was quickly identified as the face plate from the forward port wing-fold locking bolt. The wing fold area was inspected by the line chief and detachment C.O. but no evidence of binding, misalignment or scoring was noted on the locking lugs.

The pilot was then directed to



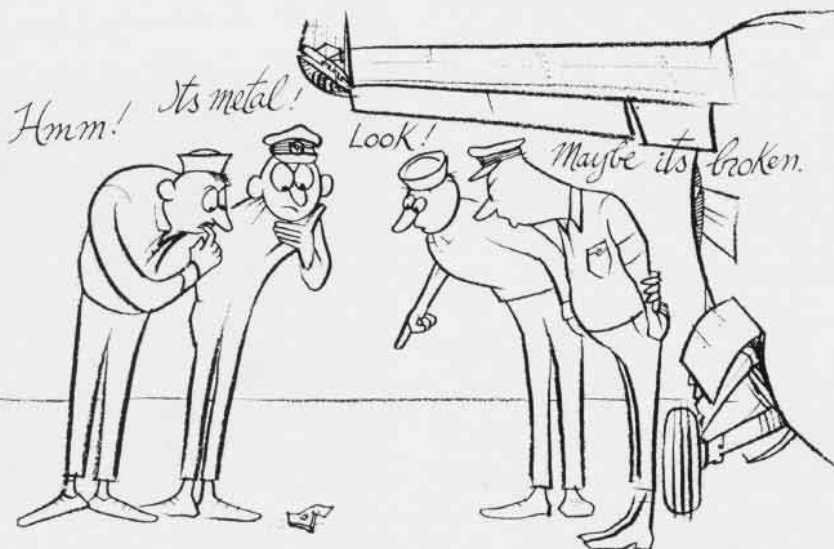
spread and lock the wings but the flags would still not fully retract. Personnel on the ground visually checked the aft locking bolt through the inspection port and found it to be in the locked position, but were not fully in agreement that the forward pin could be seen. The decision was made that the flags failed to fully retract because the forward locking bolt had been shortened by approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch due to the missing

face plate. The detachment C.O. then walked to the side of the aircraft and indicated to the pilot with thumbs-up that he was clear to taxi out for takeoff.

The remaining ground checks and arming proceeded normally so the flight departed at about 1000. During climb-out, the flight leader's radio became very weak so he passed the lead to the No. 3 pilot who had been briefed as the alternate flight leader. After passing the lead, the No. 1 pilot dropped back to the No. 3 position.

At 20,000 feet the flight went into a loose column to check the gun sights in 360 degree, 60 second, $2\frac{1}{2}$ "G" turns. As the No. 3 pilot went through 45 degrees of the first turn he started to cross to the inside but as he crossed about 200 feet behind the No. 2 man there was a loud noise and the *Crusader* pitched down violently. The pilot was thrown forward in the cockpit and almost immediately became completely dis-oriented with the feeling he was standing on the rudders with the stick full forward. In a few seconds he managed to push himself back a little and get the stick into a neutral position. This seemed to reduce the rotation and ease the "G" forces, but at this point he saw flame and smoke coming from the fuselage when he looked through the mirror.

Immediately, the pilot placed both hands on the curtain and pulled. Everything operated normally and in a few seconds he spotted the F-8 burning in a plowed field. After landing, the pilot made his way to the burning aircraft, to warn the people who had gathered there, about the ammo aboard. A rescue helo soon arrived and the pilot was flown back to the air station.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Egads, lads! Somebody could've got hurt. This whole bunch—pilot, line chief and even the detach-

ment C.O. worked like beavers to booby-trap this *Crusader*. It's pretty plain that the pilot played this one with his feet, but he sure got nothin' but bum steers from the people on the ground. They helped him out all right—plumb out!

The gents who investigated the accident concluded that the thump the pilot felt when he flew through the jet wash was caused by the left wing panel separating from the aircraft at the wingfold. This ruptured the fuel cell allowing the fuel to be ignited by the broken wires to the wing lights which were on at the time of the accident.

We've found a lot of odd ways to bust up mighty expensive hardware, but a stunt like this is downright hard to figure. With all the checkin', inspectin' and discussin' that went on before the big decision was made to launch this bird, it would appear there was some question as to whether it was the right thing to do. The old adage was proved again—WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T.

Get-Home-Itis

A CVA returning from a West-Pac deployment launched an F-8 squadron shortly before noon in good weather to fly ashore. Destination for the *Crusader* pilots was the home air station they had left nearly eight months earlier, which was approximately 600 miles away.

The ship's position at launch time was 450 miles west of a naval air station designated during the preflight briefing as the primary divert field. The pilots were also briefed on the availability of an Air Force base that was 380 miles from the ship.

Immediately after the catapult launch, one of the F-8 pilots found that he was unable to get the gear up and in a couple of minutes he realized that he had a generator failure. He quickly dropped the RAM air turbine and informed the ship of his generator failure and of his inability to retract the landing gear. The ship questioned him about his intentions. He informed them he would proceed to the primary bingo field—wing down, gear down and RAT out, rather than come back aboard.

The ship quickly assigned a wingman to accompany the pilot to the beach. During the first few minutes of the flight, the pilot noted a fuel flow of 4,000 pounds/hour at 5,000



feet and 3,700 pounds/hour at 10,000 feet with an estimated ground speed of 240 knots. With this fuel flow and ground speed, the pilot figured he would arrive at the bingo field with around 1,200 pounds of usable fuel abroad, not counting the 1,200 pounds he would be unable to transfer because of the generator failure. His TACAN was inoperative owing to the generator failure, so the escort pilot did the navigating.

At an estimated distance of 260 miles from the ship, the TACAN at the Air Force base that was briefed as a secondary bingo field was picked up and indicated that they were 196 miles west. The pilot quickly realized that they had not made good the 240-knot ground speed and that the fuel flow was nearly 500 pounds more per hour than had been indicated. The flight was quickly altered to head straight for the Air Force base, but the pilot soon realized that he would not make it and directed his wingman to request search and rescue from the AFB.

The *Crusader* flamed out at 8,000 feet 47 miles west of the AFB. At a speed of 180 knots, the pilot ejected. The seat and chute worked as advertised and in a few minutes the pilot was squared away in his raft.

Search and rescue aircraft were launched shortly after the escort pilot informed the AFB of the emergency and rescue was accomplished approximately one hour after ejection. The pilot was taken to the

AFB dispensary where he was examined by a flight surgeon. He was released and later in the afternoon flown to the destination naval air station.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! If this fiasco wouldn't wilt the lily, nothin' would.

Here is a *Crusader* driver with over 800 hours in the bird and he lets overconfidence, complacency, get-home-itis—or maybe a combination of all three—influence him to the point that he attempts to fly a crippled aircraft ashore rather than land back aboard for repairs. That desire to arrive at the home station with the squadron after a deployment can cause a guy to make pretty shaky decisions sometimes, and it appears this is just what happened here.

I don't doubt for one minute that this experienced gent took a real hard look at the situation before decidin' to fly his machine ashore, but I can't help but believe that the old "get-home-itis" played a big part in his final decision.

Sure hope the next fellow that finds himself in a spot like this will weigh all the facts and remember "When in doubt—don't." (Sound familiar?)

Memo from Gramps:

During the past few months the mid-air collision problem has increased at an alarming rate. When you take a hard look at the reports and messages, such things as improper preplanning, incomplete briefing, poor join-up, poor throttle technique, losing sight of lead aircraft and operating beyond the capabilities of the least qualified pilot in the formation, keep jumping out at you.

In most mid-air, it's pretty clear that somebody in the supervisory chain failed to carry out his responsibility. When proper action is taken by supervisory personnel (I'm talkin' about the section leader and right on up), the mid-air problem will be a long way toward bein' solved.

You can bet your last sawbuck that no truer words were ever spoken than the ones that appeared on a Safety Center poster a few years back: "A mid-air collision can spoil your whole day." It's just as true that nothin' can help your day as much as havin' a swivel neck and never assumin' what the other fellow is goin' to do.