



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Cliff Hanger

The ship and air wing were in the middle of an Operational Readiness Inspection being conducted in tropical waters. This particular A-4 driver was returning from a mission that had been normal in all respects. As he approached the 180° position, he checked the brakes and found them to be firm. The pass, touchdown and arrestment were uneventful.

During disengagement from the wire, however, the pilot noted that the starboard brake was soft. As he commenced taxiing up the axial deck, he realized that the starboard brake had failed completely. He immediately announced his predicament over the radio to the air officer, opened the canopy and gave visual signals for chocks to the flight deck crew.

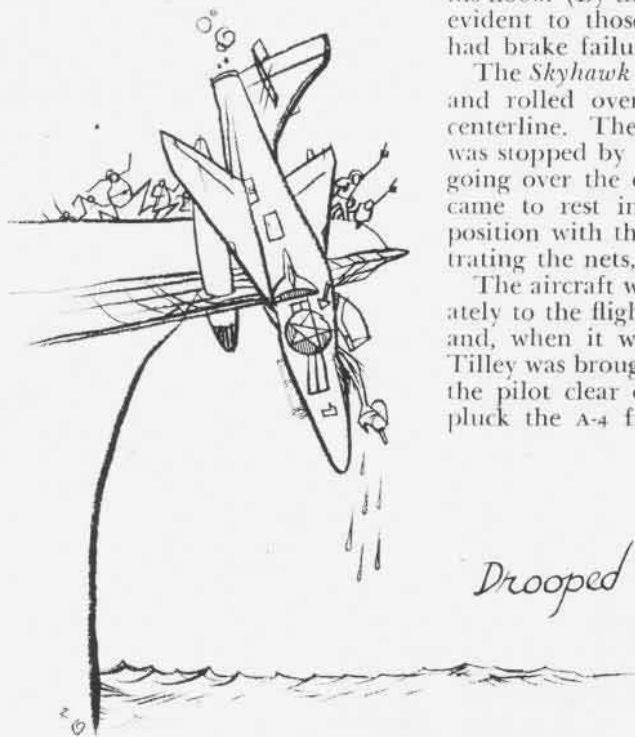
In spite of several crewmen trying to restrain the wayward A-4, it



continued up the axial deck. Ladders and other objects tossed beneath its nose wheel had little, if any, effect. Just about half way up the axial deck, the pilot lowered his hook. (By this time it was quite evident to those on deck that he had brake failure.)

The *Skyhawk* continued its jaunt and rolled over the bow on the centerline. The plane fortunately was stopped by the safety net from going over the edge completely. It came to rest in a 90° nose-down position with the drop tanks penetrating the nets, but holding.

The aircraft was secured immediately to the flight deck with chains and, when it was considered safe, Tilley was brought forward to hoist the pilot clear of the cockpit and pluck the A-4 from its perch.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy mackerel! Somebody coulda got hurt and we coulda lost an airplane in this fiasco. It was only a little over a year ago that ole Gramps waxed this same subject, but good. Seems like we need to take a look at this situation.

First thing this lad should've done was to lower the tail hook immediately to let folks know he had brake troubles. Secondly, he coulda secured that engine and used that good brake to ground-loop that bird and keep it on deck. Of course, every incident is different and no set rules can ever replace good headwork.

As the old sayin' goes—Don't worry about what may happen to you; worry about what you're going to do when it happens.

Obligingly

The crew of the *Skywarrior* departed "Heavy Land West" for a series of cross-country training flights which included stops at some East Coast air stations and a pick-up of a squadron mate on leave in the East. Arriving at the agreed meeting place, the plane commander was informed by phone by the person on leave that he was delayed at an air station nearby because an SP-2 had recently crashed and the field was closed.

After some discussion, it was mutually agreed to launch the A-3 for the municipal field which was near the closed field for the pick-up. During the phone conversation, the plane commander was assured that jet fuel and a jet starter would be available at the municipal field and that it was "customary to land at this field when the NAS was closed."

The plane commander had ordered a fuel load of 22,000 pounds while unaware of the required deviation from his original plans. The DD-175 was filed with weather forecast to be 800 feet overcast, one mile visibility in rain and thunderstorms; estimated time en route was 50 minutes. The aircraft's only

ILLUSTRATED BY *Calton*

drag chute was repacked and installed by the crew member. All hands climbed aboard and departed for the municipal field.

On the approach to the municipal field, the A-3 was routed in a conventional box pattern and the field was visible from 12 miles out. The plane commander was somewhat concerned over being heavy on landing and decided to extend the speed brakes early in the approach to burn some of the excess. An ILS approach clearance was issued but since visibility was so good, the driver flew VFR to touch-down 500 feet beyond the threshold of the 7,800-foot runway. (Although not called for by the tower, the check list was accomplished after a fashion.)

The drag chute popped at 1,200 feet and shortly thereafter nine suspension lines broke, rendering the chute useless. A sequence of braking techniques failed to slow the plane appreciably and, at about 1,500 feet before the end of the runway, the emergency air brakes were activated. As the plane overran the runway at about 60-80 knots, the tail hook was lowered. The machine traversed a 150-foot macadam overrun, a 210-foot dirt overrun and dropped over a 28-foot embankment, coming to rest on a collapsed nose gear with the lower portion of the forward fuselage burrowed into the ground.

Escape via the lower escape door was obviously impossible. With smoke and flames licking at them from below, the entire crew, uninjured, executed a hasty departure through the overhead hatch. The A-3 was a total loss.

 **Grampaw Pettibone says:**

Oh, my achin' back! It sure is nice to accommodate someone and I ain't taking issue with that, but I don't rightly see how this fella would talk himself into landing a 57,000-pound bird on a wet 7,800-foot runway at a civilian field in direct violation of OPNAV Inst. 2710.7C. That instruction was written by some pretty savvy gents and published to keep us from such embarrassin' situations in spite of ourselves.

Whenever a fellow decides to disregard regulations, the least he should do is start figurin' alternatives in case things don't go so good.

Headstrong Spad

Weather reconnaissance aircraft were launched that morning in search of a suitable operating area, but none could be found. The weather and the wind at the anchorage were satisfactory for the 27C (*Essex Class CVA*) to work the A-1 and C-1 aircraft so the decision was made to carqual the props while swinging on the hook.

The *Spad* driver concluded his briefing in the ready room and proceeded to man his assigned A-1H. (Approximately 70 uneventful arrested landings had been completed when the *Spad* launched.) The *Spad* driver made three normal approaches and arrested landings but noted the pattern to be a little rough because of gusty winds. He felt a little uncomfortable because his aircraft required a little right rudder pressure in addition to full right rudder trim at slow speeds, but at no time did he feel unsafe.

The three landings were followed by two wave-offs for foul deck and two wave-offs for being too fast. (Several aircraft in the pattern were cautioned by Paddles to "slow it down" and the wind was observed to be 30-40° from starboard at 14 knots.)

On the next pass, the *Spad* was observed to be flying a normal pattern up to the 180 degree position. At that point, he settled from a normal altitude down to about 100 feet in a 15-degree left bank. Pad-

dles called "wave-off" which the driver acknowledged, and power was applied (confirmed by black smoke) with the aircraft still in a 15-degree left bank. The plane's nose rose slightly slowing the descent and Paddles again called, "Wave off, you're pullin' your nose up." The *Spad* commenced a rapid roll to the left, nosed down and struck the water in a 135-degree bank and 70° nose-down attitude.

The left wing made first contact with the water and broke away from the fuselage. The engine separated next and the hulk settled in the water, right wing low, and slowly departed for the deep six. The pilot bobbed to the surface approximately ten seconds after the impact and swam clear of the sinking wreck for his retrieval and delivery to the ship by the helo.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Well, for cryin' out loud! I find it hard to believe this fella wasn't told all about torque and rolls and things shortly after he learned about the birds and bees caper. When ya see a pilot with over 1,600 hours in model pull a stunt like this, it kinda makes you nervous all over. How many more fellas are out loose willing to let the old *Spad* have its head in a situation like this?

Don't forget—an airplane is just like a woman. Let it get the upper hand and you'll find yourself in a situation that may affect your entire future, not to mention your present.

