



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

'This Way to the Egress'

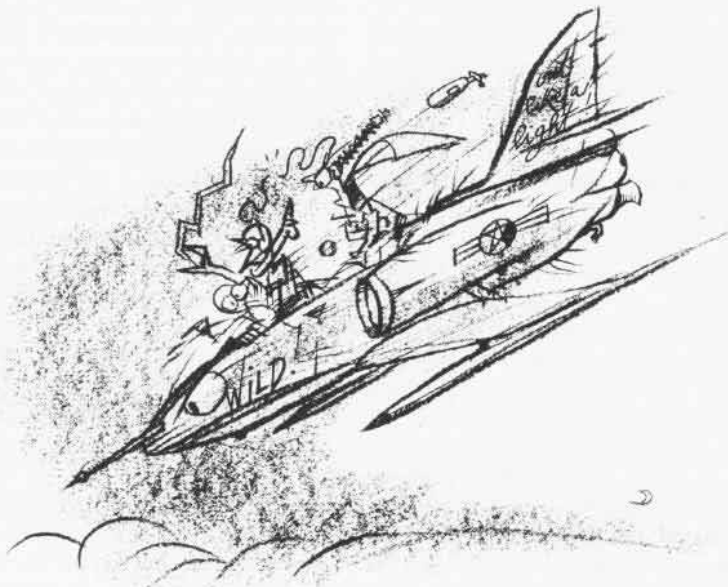
The TA-4F two-place *Skyhawk* jet trainer was preflighted by two pilots in preparation for a night bombing and instrument practice mission. Both external tanks were noted to be half full, and, upon strapping in, the pilot in command, a major, found he had unsatisfactory interphone communication with the rear seat. He called for a technician who checked it out and found the seat pan fittings were bad. He attempted to bypass the seat pan and connect the oxygen hose directly to the aircraft. When queried by the pilot, the technician admitted there would then be no bail-out oxygen available. The pilot decided to wait the 30 to 40 minutes necessary to replace the seat pan.

The remaining checks went normally, and the flight departed for the target area. In the rear seat, the lieutenant colonel took control of the aircraft while the pilot handled the radios.

Over the target, the major took the airplane, completed his runs and again



turned the *Skyhawk* over to the "guy in the back" for instrument practice. After the plane had been airborne for over half an hour, a turn was made toward home plate for a radar vector to a GCA approach. It was then noted that the Tacan had broken lock-on



and, as the major was cross-checking his fuel gauges, the low fuel warning light came on. Before there was time to analyze the situation, all the lights went out and the ICS failed. Expecting a flame-out momentarily, the major reached to deploy the emergency generator and suddenly the canopy blew off. He had grabbed the wrong handle.

The blast of cold air buffeted both pilots harshly about the cockpit. Soon the pilot managed to get the emergency generator deployed, and the lights came back on. He then took control of the airplane, which was slightly left wing and nose down, retarded the throttle and tried to pull back on the stick. It did not respond to stick forces, so the major actuated the speed brake switch. The brakes didn't come out, so he then reached for the manual brake handle.

Suddenly he was jerked back tightly into the seat and saw a flash as the rear seat ejected from the aircraft. Then, bang, out he went into the blackness.

Earlier, the lieutenant colonel in the rear had noticed the fuel needle dropping and thought the pilot was just checking the gauge. When the low-level light came on, he tried to call on the interphone but found it dead. As he was checking his headset cord, the lights went out. The next thing he knew, his oxygen mask and hose blew up into his face, and the canopy was gone. Even with his visor down, he couldn't see very well. Finding that he had not been ejected as he expected, he reached out to retrieve his mask and adjust his helmet. The wind quickly took his right arm and pinned it back along the outside of the cockpit. Using his left arm, he retrieved it. Then he lowered the seat and positioned himself properly, still expecting to be ejected at any moment.

The *Skyhawk* was now descending left wing and nose down. There was no way to tell if the major was all right or

if he was in control of the aircraft. As the buffeting became more severe and the plane continued to accelerate in a shallow left spiral, the lieutenant colonel tried to pull back on the stick without success. Noting 8,000 feet of altitude and still unable to communicate with the major up front, he decided to get out. Using the command selector and the alternate firing handle, the lieutenant colonel ejected himself and the major from the plane.

Both officers landed in the trees and, after several misadventures involving signal flares and the jungle penetrator hoist (another story in itself), were rescued by helicopter.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Doggone cantankerous beast! Even two of them couldn't keep ahead of it.

Nothin' like abandonin' the ship if the goin' gets too rough, but was this nylon let-down really necessary? Even the accident board couldn't decide.

Did they actually run out'a fuel? Experience other material failure? Or was it just the loss of the generator? Did the canopy hit the horizontal stabilizer? Or didn't the crew try hard enough to maintain control? Since the wreckage wasn't recovered, the truth will never be known.

However you stack it, it looks like poor crew coordination and lack of cockpit familiarity on the part of the pilot. Who was really in control of the aircraft after the lights went out? Nobody, I guess.

And while we're pointin' fingers, I'd hate to count the number of canopies we've lost because the design engineers put the canopy jettison handle right next to the emergency power package. And what about the supervisor who sent this pilot on a night attack practice mission with only 37 hours in the aircraft? No wonder he clutched up.

Triple Threat Jock

The flight of four Crusaders departed their home station for bombing and strafing practice. They arrived over the desert target on schedule and set up a pattern.

On his first strafing run, the number two man, a Ltjg., was right on target with a 20mm burst. He rolled in at 5,800 feet for his second run and set up a 23° dive. He squeezed the trigger at 1,500 feet and began his pullout as he passed 1,100 feet. He remembers putting some positive G on the aircraft and looking to the left to check



interval with the flight leader. Suddenly, he realized that the desert sagebrush was zooming past the canopy much too fast and much too close. He vaguely recalls an impact, then woke up later and saw black smoke.

The aft section of the F-8H struck the desert floor with a very small rate of descent in a wings-level, nose-up attitude. After skidding 200 feet, the craft became airborne while transversing a shallow depression in the terrain. Four hundred feet further along, it struck the ground again and disintegrated. The pilot either pulled the face curtain while the plane was airborne following initial touchdown or the ejection seat was fired by the disintegration of the cockpit when it hit again.

The ejection gun had only propelled the seat 16 inches up the rails before the tubes were bent and frozen by the progressing damage. The fighter pilot must have left the cockpit in a flat trajectory at a forward speed in excess of 300 knots. The seat drogue chute had deployed, and his personal parachute was ripped and torn.

The seat was found 300 feet beyond the pilot along the line of flight. It is

probable that he was decelerated and pulled from the seat as his personal parachute caught on vegetation. He struck the ground hard, leading with the seat pan and right foot. The bottom of his right boot was completely torn off by the impact. The seat pan absorbed much of the force that would otherwise have caused major spinal injuries.

Target crewmen reached his side almost immediately, finding the pilot fully conscious. Although he very nearly expired en route to the nearest naval hospital, the young man rallied and has since made a good recovery.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Thunderation! This lad had a purty narrow squeak. He was really out to clobber that target. First, he bombed it, then strafed it, then flew into it. Hope this'll be a lesson to a few other over-eager tigers. Better they should miss a few and come tack to try again another day.

If Only . . .

'This accident could have been avoided if my date last night had not been so obstreperous.'