



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Fly Off

It is always a good day when a carrier arrives at its home port after a long deployment, but it almost turned out badly for one intrepid aviator. He was a lucky one, having been sent back early to set up the squadron spaces for the move ashore from the ship. On "H" day he COD'ed (carrier onboard delivery) out to the ship early in the morning and was assigned to one of the squadron A-4F *Skyhawks* for the flyoff to the beach. A thorough brief was given by the commanding officer but no mention was made that this particular plane hadn't been flown since acceptance by the squadron and only four hours since calendar inspection, 60 days previously – by another activity.

Preflight and start and post-start checks were normal, as was the catapult shot. Immediately thereafter, however, things turned to worms. The nose came up too high, and the pilot pushed forward on the stick encountering a great resistance. The nose came down slightly but immediately started to rise again. It required both hands pushing on the stick to prevent

the aircraft from stalling. Nose down trim was no apparent help and, after several oscillations, the pilot raised the gear and flaps and called control on the radio to advise of the problem. Emergency trim was no help.

For several minutes the pilot fought with the aircraft, the nose bobbing up when he took his left hand off the

stick and down when he pushed with both hands. The plane was buffeting and narrowly averted a stall several times. A slow climb was accomplished up to about 5,000 feet with the airspeed varying as low as 160 knots. The emergency generator was deployed, and emergency trim was tried again.

An attempt was made to get the nose down by putting the aircraft into a shallow turn. This was partially effective, but the plane continued buffeting and losing altitude slowly. After making a complete 360, the *Skyhawk* neared a completely stalled condition. The pilot announced his intentions, rolled the wings level and pulled the face curtain.

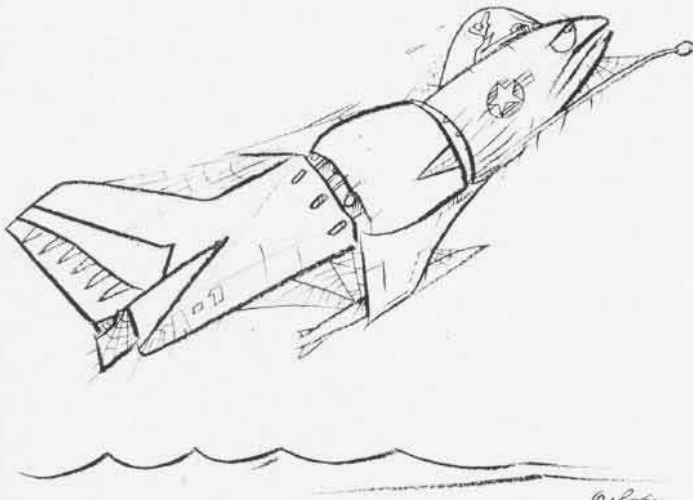
During his nylon descent, he removed his oxygen mask, raised his visor and opened the seat pan. The raft deployed below him and, upon entering the water, he inflated his MK-3C life vest. As he released the parachute fittings, he became entangled in shroud lines which he cut free with his shroud-cutter knife blade. The plane guard helicopter from the carrier picked him out of the water and returned him to the flight deck uninjured.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Gol dingit! I'm a suspicious cuss. I'd a wanted to know a bit more about that airplane before flitting off into the blue. That bird was just covered with hair. It should'a been lifted off the ship by crane.

From what I've heard, it really didn't get much of an acceptance inspection by the squadron and wasn't scheduled for a test hop at all. That was its first cat shot in nine months. Most probable cause of the control problem was a partially disconnected elevator package or a loose object jamming the stick. Which brings us to the pilot. Port cruise torpor? Why in tarnation didn't he try lowering the flaps again, or jettisoning his external stores or, above all, disconnecting the elevator package and going to manual? A little dense perhaps after his first few days at home?



VFR + IFR = Ricochet

The seasoned lieutenant, who had accumulated over 2,400 flight hours and 400 carrier landings, was on a typical, black-night, no-horizon approach to the large attack carrier in his A-7 Corsair II. Though it had been a rather exciting flight, the crisis was over and it was just a matter of getting back aboard in one piece.

Descending from marshal, the lieutenant was advised to take a speed of 275 knots which he held all the way down from altitude, flying in and out of clouds to 1,500 feet. As he leveled off at 1,200 feet and 14 miles from the ship, he noticed what appeared to be the light of another aircraft ahead and closing. He kept his eye on the light and, when the controller told him to dirty up (go to the landing configuration) at 11 miles, he reduced the power to 70 percent, actuated his speed brakes, slowed and dropped the gear and flaps.

The lieutenant continued to watch the aircraft ahead, occasionally glancing at the instruments. He noted 1,500 feet on the altimeter at one time but, two seconds later, the Corsair hit the water. By the time he realized what had happened, he hit a second time and, by the time he could pull the alternate ejection handle, the plane hit a third time. As the seat left the cockpit, the pilot estimated he was in a 45 to 70 degree right bank, 20 degrees nose down. The parachute streamed but did not fully open.

The badly shaken aviator came to, floating head down in the water. He struggled to get his head up and get some air, succeeded and eventually inflated his MK-3C life jacket. After about 30 minutes in the water, during which he had considerable difficulty releasing his oxygen mask and getting free of numerous shroud lines from the parachute, he was picked up and returned to the carrier by the plane guard helicopter.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Shades of Walter Mitty! This fella could'a got killed, what with ricocheting off the water a couple a times and all.

Uh huh, it's that big black hole five to ten miles aft of the ship at night. There's

just no lift in the air back there at times. Gotta be extra careful and on yur toes comin' down the pipe.

Seriously, this lad, in spite of experience and training, let his scan break down at a critical moment. He states, "I don't remember adding power after dirty up, nor do I remember ever checking airspeed." He probably misread 500 feet of his altimeter as 1,500 feet to boot, and there you go.

Purty durned lucky to be alive, with only a sprained shoulder and a cracked vertebra for a souvenir. There's no substitute for that safety device between your ears.

Some Never Learn

A Phantom F4J pilot, a real pro, became involved in a mid-air collision with another Phantom. He lost control of the craft and was forced to eject, while the other guy managed to fly his plane home. Landing in 50° water, he suddenly found himself in extremis.

Because he was not wearing a life preserver and without even a G suit which could have been inflated and with no other survival gear, he faced a wet doom in very short order. Luckily, a Coast Guard HH-52A Sea Guard helicopter just happened to be cruising through the area and was advised by a civil airliner that an aircraft had crashed. Taking a vector from the airliner, the helo crew spotted the crash site by the slick on the water and some smoke. Setting up a search pattern, the survivor was soon spotted

swimming in the five to six-foot waves. Since there had not been time to rig the rescue equipment, the helo pilot landed his bird in the water and positioned himself alongside the survivor. The crewman reached out and pulled the exhausted pilot aboard. He was unable to offer any assistance in getting himself aboard and would surely have succumbed in short order. Elapsed time from crash to rescue was about ten minutes.



Grampaw Pettibone says

Jumpin' Jehosophat! What in tarnation was he doin' up there without all his NATOPS flight gear? This lack of survival equipment, perhaps warranted from certain points of view, can hardly be justified if it increases the risk of injury or loss of life. A life jacket can be a man's best friend. This guy even discarded his seat pan containing the only flotation gear around, his raft.

From the reports I read, there are a lot of pilots and crewmen who take this flight and survival gear thing purty lightly. They "forget," or "it's too hot," "too heavy," they "can't see well through the visor," or the "gloves get slick when they're wet." A CAG once told me the nomex suit didn't have any style. Agreed, but neither does a scarred body.

They don't dress you in flight gear in your coffin. Like seat belts in your car, a minor nuisance 'til they're needed, but don't get caught dead sittin' on 'em. Supervisors and C.O.'s can enforce these NATOPS rules, you know.



Osborn