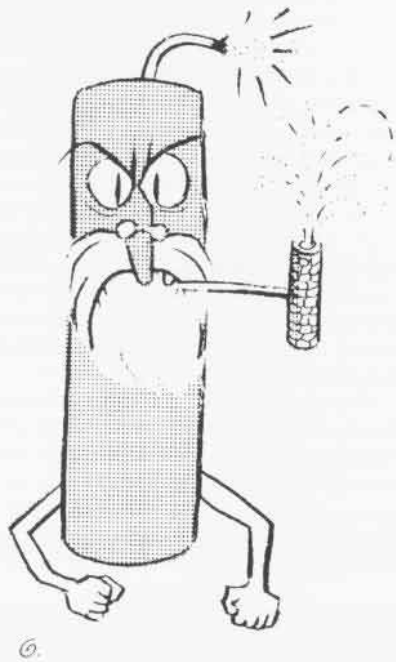
GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Surf's Up

The first tour Marine first lieutenant was standing the squadron duty one evening when the maintenance duty officer called regarding a "taxi test" on one of the squadron's new F-4J *Phantom II's*. The SDO questioned the advisability of the duty officer taking an airplane but was assured that it would be OK since it was just a taxi test and it would be after 1800, when he would normally be secured to the BOQ. The lieutenant also advised the MDO that he had never conducted a taxi test before and, in fact, had never flown the F-4 at night. The MDO briefed him on the test and said he would accompany him on the mission.

The test was being made to check the proper functioning of the aircraft's generators and could be completed by taxying to the approach end of the runway and back, on the taxiway.

At about 1830, the first lieutenant received a call from maintenance control advising him that the aircraft was ready and that a sergeant from the electric shop was ready to go with him. Assuming that maintenance had rescheduled the sergeant to replace the MDO, he did not question the change and met the sergeant in the electric shop. The sergeant asked that the generator be checked at all power settings including afterburner. Judiciously, the first lieutenant decided that if he was to use the AB's, the test should be conducted on the runway rather than in the warm-up area on the taxiway.



Both crewmen proceeded to the aircraft. Surprised at how dark it was outside, the pilot conducted his preflight using a signal wand. Not satisfied, he sent the sergeant for a flashlight and went over the aircraft again. They found the seat pan and bucket missing from the back seat, so the sergeant returned to the shops to get assistance. Meanwhile, the lieutenant climbed into the front and prepared to start the *Phantom*. The sergeant returned shortly, without a pan or bucket, to find the lieutenant with his helmet on and the external power unit plugged in and running. A confused and misunderstood exchange of words followed and the sergeant climbed into the back.

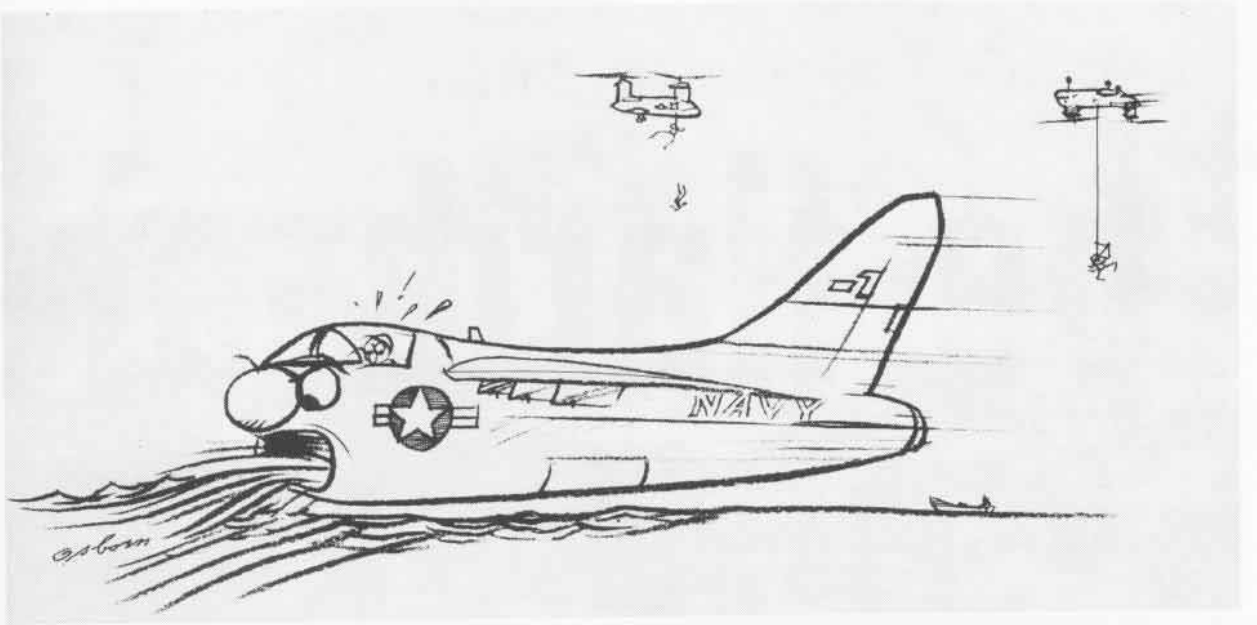
The lieutenant performed a normal start on the aircraft, did not perform normal post-start checks but proceeded to taxi to the end of the runway. There, he performed an engine run-up and pre-takeoff checks. Cleared onto the runway, the engines were run up to full power and, as the brakes were released, the afterburners selected. The pilot then checked all the engine instruments, specifically the generator lights, and found everything normal. He de-selected the afterburners and initiated abort takeoff procedures. At one time, he saw 100 knots on the airspeed indicator and commenced braking at 80 knots. When the arresting gear sign came into view, he dropped the hook, but it did not engage. Hard braking was employed but there was no appreciable deceleration. They heard a loud noise outside the aircraft, and it began to swerve to the left. Engagement of nose gear steering brought them back toward the center line; however, continued hard braking failed to stop the *Phantom*. It continued into the overrun, across 300 feet of rocks and sand, and then down a 40-foot embankment – into the ocean surf where it stopped with nose and forward cockpit immersed in the sea.

One of the engines was still running and the lights were on. The sergeant opened the rear canopy and climbed out. The lieutenant was unable to extricate himself and called to the sergeant who disentangled the pilot's broken leg and helped him out and through 25 yards of surf to the beach. The aircraft was a total loss.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Zounds, lads! This poor boy might'a got himself kilt. Neither of those "passengers" was strapped into the aircraft, and there wasn't even a seat in the rear. They kind'a bit off more'n they could chew. The first lieutenant was still a fam student in the F-4 with only 28 hours of time in type and had never even taxied the bird at night. The *Phantom* rolled ⅓ of the runway length before he secured

ILLUSTRATED BY Gibbon



the afterburners. No wonder it wouldn't stop!

The briefing given by both the maintenance control officer and the maintenance duty officer specified that the taxi test include everything for a normal hop *except* taking the runway. Why the sergeant thought it necessary to check the generators in afterburner is beyond me. It's a cinch they shouldn't be lit off unless the machine is either tied down or ready to roll for takeoff.

I know that surfing's great sport, but the *Phantom* doesn't make a very good surfboard.

Not Prepared

After an evening twilight launch from one of our newest CVA's deployed overseas, an A-7B *Corsair II* pilot rendezvoused with his flight leader and proceeded on a night surface search mission. The two aircraft were separated by their controller to search independently, using their radar in conjunction with vectoring by an E-2B *Hawkeye*.

About an hour after launch, the twilight became a clear moonless night. The search was being conducted at an altitude of 1,000 feet without use of the automatic flight control system or the radar altimeter warning light. The A-7 pilot, a junior lieutenant, was focusing his attention on the fine tuning of the radarscope. Suddenly he noticed a reflection off the water, at cockpit level, through the port windscreen. He immediately went to 100 percent power and pulled up, simultaneously feeling the aircraft impact the water. The wet *Corsair* began to climb, then the engine started to unwind. The lieutenant radioed his wingman that he had hit the water and was ejecting. As the A-7 decelerated through 160 knots, still climbing slightly and with the engine unwinding through 40 percent rpm, he punched out.

Once in the water, and using his PRC-63 survival radio, he established radio communications with his flight leader who soon arrived overhead. The carrier was some 80-90 miles away; however, a supply ship with her UH-46 helicopters was much closer. A *Sea Knight* was launched for SAR and was vectored to the scene by the orbiting *Corsair II*.

The next hour and a half was spent in various attempts to rescue the downed lieutenant. Although the water and air temperatures were slightly below that required for wearing of an anti-exposure suit, he was not so equipped.

The H-46 spent some 40 minutes trying to drag the horse collar attached to the helo hoist cable close enough so the downed pilot could reach it. Failing that, a young UDT officer aboard the helo entered the water to assist. He went down on the hoist and, while swimming to the survivor, turned the horse collar around backwards for better swimming. He was not familiar with the hoist ring on the pilot's torso harness and was therefore unable to attach them both to the hoist at the same time. The two ended up holding on to each other while being lifted to the helo. At the door, the survivor got caught on the hatch and could not be brought into the helo. After several futile attempts he became so weakened that he lost his grip and fell 50 feet back into the water.

By this time there was a motor whaleboat from the ship standing by, so, tail between its legs, the UH-46 departed the area and the bedraggled lieutenant was brought aboard the boat and returned to safe surroundings.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy Hannah! This sounds like the first helo rescue ever attempted. When are we going to quit biting off more'n we can chew? If the machine isn't equipped for it and the crew isn't trained for it, best leave ol' Dobbin at home in the barn. It's about time we required these people to be trained and ready.

The problem is well recognized at the head shed, and a standardized rescue training program is in the mill. All helo crewmen will receive SAR training and those crews assigned SAR missions will have a specially trained rescue crewman and wet man. It's gonna take time though; won't happen overnight, particularly unless the fleet gets behind it 4-square.

Why was that inexperienced lieutenant out there at night, 1,000 feet, head up his scope, and no autopilot or radar altimeter warning? Don't blame him 'til you make sure he knew better. Why wasn't he properly trained for this hop, and checked out in how to keep from bustin' his ol' hide on a dark night? Skippers, if you don't teach 'em right, you're gonna lose 'em, one way or another.