



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Too Hot, Too Heavy

At approximately 1700, our Commander—with over 4,000 hours, 1,000+ in jet aircraft—filed his flight plan from Hot Sands AFB to NAS Coast. Our experienced pilot manned his A-4 *Skyhawk* with normal pre-flight and start procedures. The duty runway was over 12,000 feet long with a field elevation of 5,000 feet. The runway temperature was 90°F as the A-4 was cleared for takeoff. After rolling approximately 6,500 feet and reaching 145 knots, the aircraft became airborne. Acceleration was very slow and the rate of climb negligible; flap retraction speed was not reached and, at 135 knots, the aircraft was slightly descending. The pilot selected full flaps. He noted that the engine instruments were normal and decided he was on the “backside of the power curve.” Since a crash was impending, the pilot ejected at an estimated altitude of 300 feet AGL. Ejection was normal in all respects. The pilot landed just outside the burning area of the aircraft impact area. The parachute canopy collapsed on the burning area and the commander pulled it from the fire; an ambulance arrived and took him to the dispensary. He was treated for a left knee and ankle sprain. The A-4 was destroyed.

Post-accident investigation revealed that the aircraft weight on takeoff was approximately 1,400 pounds over maximum gross weight for the existing temperature and pressure!?! The pilot did not compute maximum allowable takeoff weight or takeoff distance as required by NATOPS!



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! I'm ready to blow my top! There is *no* excuse for a pilot knowingly taking off from a high altitude field on a hot day without knowing the capabilities of his machine under those conditions. It is even more inexcusable when it is



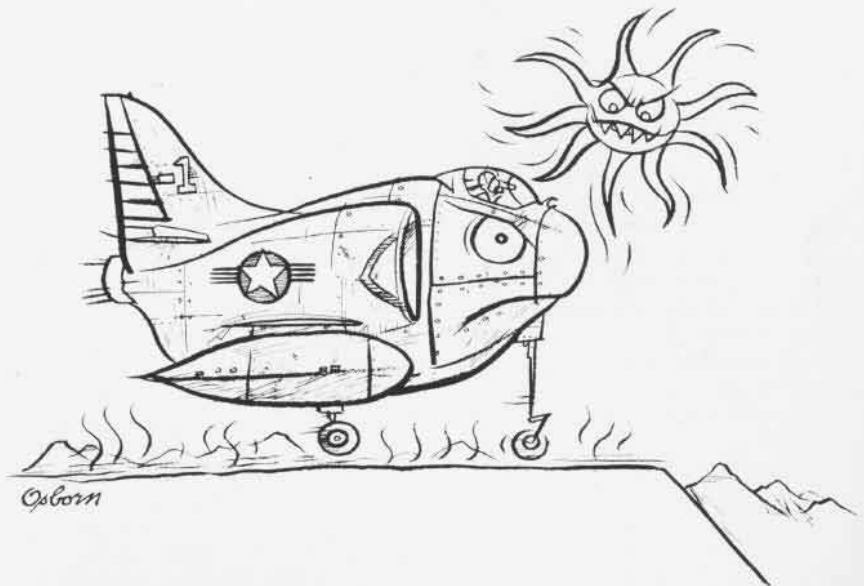
perpetrated by a seasoned, experienced pilot. This fella continued to act like an amateur, compounding his problem after takeoff by selecting full

flaps instead of reducing his aircraft weight (drop tanks). With full flaps, he increased the drag with no more go-juice available! Seems like this gent needs more training in aerodynamics—amongst other things!

Flying from our NAS's which, in the majority of cases, have field elevations near sea level, has a tendency to lull us into a false sense of security—or complacency! Give a fellow a 12,000-foot runway and you know he's sure his machine will leap in the air and fly—ain't so! So, take heed when flying from high long runway airfields and do the figuring before you go. All you “approvers” of cross-country requests—a word of caution on the approval chit won't hurt either!

Sauna Bath

At approximately 0900, 1st Lt. Hotphoot volunteered to replace Captain Nofly on a scheduled, local area, solo instrument flight. The schedule called for an hour and a half flight which would include an instrument departure to VFR on top and GCA approaches until landing weight was achieved.



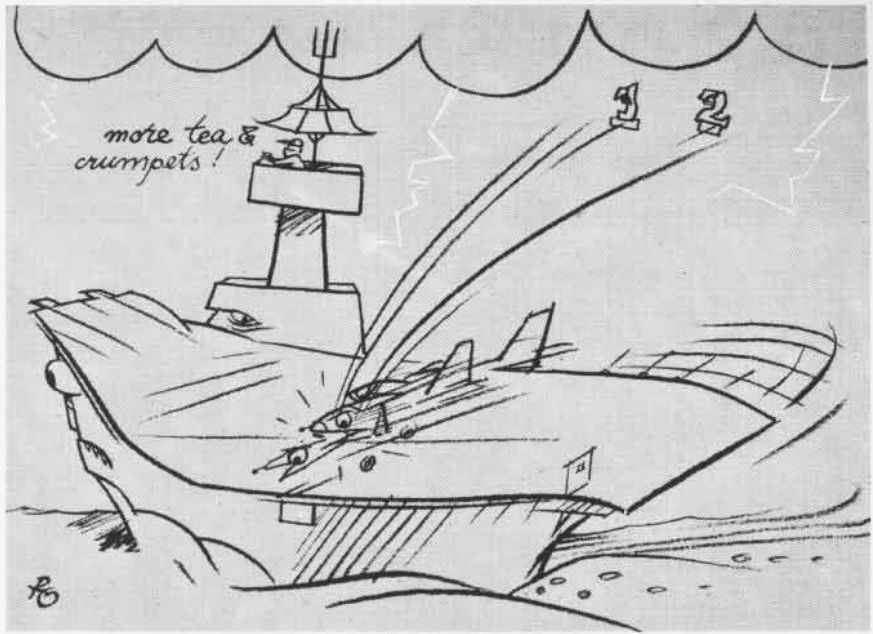
ILLUSTRATED BY *Osborn*

The pilot checked the weather and left the ready room at approximately 0930 to man an A-4F *Skyhawk*. After engine start, Lt. Hotphoot requested and received clearance for an instrument departure to visual conditions on top. After satisfactorily completing engine run-up, the young aviator requested takeoff clearance. The tower cleared him for takeoff and directed that departure control be contacted prior to roll. The pilot conducted a positive radio check with departure control and commenced his takeoff roll. After the aircraft rolled approximately 2,000 feet and had about 110 knots of airspeed, Lt. Hotphoot noted gray smoke filling the cockpit and his legs began to get extremely hot. He informed departure control that he was aborting and that he had smoke in the cockpit. Departure control instructed him to switch to tower frequency. At this time the lieutenant proceeded to complete several diverse actions. He loosened his oxygen mask — to smell the smoke; retarded the throttle — to idle RPM; switched to tower frequency and called the tower advising them that he was aborting; and then aligned the airplane on the runway centerline and dropped the arresting hook, initiating the drop some time immediately prior to crossing the arresting gear. It didn't engage. Realizing he had missed the wire, our young lieutenant secured the engine and, as he began braking, the left tire failed. The aircraft veered to the right, skidded sideways for approximately 200 feet and went off the runway on the right side, coming to rest on the grass between two taxiways. He was 15 feet off the runway with about 300 feet remaining to the end. Lt. Hotphoot egressed in a normal manner with no injuries, but the aircraft suffered substantial damage. Post-accident cockpit investigation revealed that the cabin temperature control knob was in a *maximum warm position* and the *eyeball diffusers were closed!* In that situation, at takeoff power, maximum heat was diverted to the foot warmers and even a trace of residual oil within the air-conditioning system was sufficient to cause gray smoke.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Dad blasted! Reminds me of the fellow back home who walked into his house, found it extremely hot and



ran outside without checking the thermostat!!! This lad continued to compound his problem after that first big mistake — missing the cabin temperature control knob on his checklist. Then he got involved in making his intentions known to departure control — control your machine first! Departure control was a “great help.” When they told him to switch to tower frequency, he should’a ignored them! It’s real significant that seven days after the accident this lad was still confused about NATOPS procedures for “aborting.” Furthermore, he was spending a considerable amount of time preparing for competition in athletic events. What about a sense of priorities? Jack of all trades — master of none? Lad, flying our modern day machines ain’t a part time job. Keep your eyeball on this one, skipper!

Tilt

It was a dark and stormy night; lightning flashed frequently from the low hanging clouds as two veteran *Skyhawk* pilots huddled in their cockpits on the flight deck. Aboard the small attack carrier, launching crews scurried back and forth on the wet deck readying the wing aircraft for their missions. Considering the thunderstorms and rainshowers in the area, the A-4F pilots, although scheduled as spares, were mentally and physically prepared to be launched.

The 0420 launch went as scheduled, however, and, after the last aircraft was catapulted, the planes parked aft were untied in preparation for taxi to the bow to clear the deck for the recovery. As the chains were removed from the spare tanker which was parked on the starboard side aft, the ship went into a starboard turn and heeled to port. The tanker started to slide across the landing area, hitting another *Skyhawk*. Both planes then continued sliding across the deck, striking an F-8 *Crusader*, manned by a plane captain, on the way.

As the planes dropped into the catwalk, both pilots ejected from their A-4's. All three aircraft remained on deck, but it took a helicopter an hour and a half to recover the two pilots from the ocean in the heavy rain which immediately followed.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

I sometimes wonder if the people on the bridge of these carriers are really aware of what's going on out there on the flight deck at times. Or is it just part of the game to drop one over the side once in a while? That they do, several of them every year, just because the ship turns and tilts the deck out from under the aircraft while they are being moved around on deck. Is it absolutely necessary? Captain, please don't rock the boat!