



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

How Much Fuel?

During a mid-afternoon scheduled recovery time, while conducting flight operations off the U.S. coast, a carrier encountered fog which had been hidden by haze and some low clouds. The weather had been 8,000 feet scattered, 20,000 feet broken with five miles visibility in haze. It quickly deteriorated to an estimated 300 feet obscured, one and a half miles in fog and haze with some pilots reporting the ceiling at the carrier as low as 150 feet. Recovery was delayed because of the time required for traffic control center to switch from visual to instrument approaches. In addition, the flow of weather and divert information to the aircraft was affected when traffic control center lost some of its radios.

A decision was made to divert eight aircraft (six A-7's, a KA-6D and an F-4) to NAS Divert. The latest weather the ship had for the NAS was 800 scattered, 1,500 broken, 8,000 overcast; four miles visibility with thunder-showers in the vicinity; but now communications between the station and the carrier were unreliable. All the aircraft had sufficient fuel for the divert except the F-4 which was refueled by the KA-6D en route.

At approximately 50 miles out, all the aircraft attempted contact with NAS Divert. The F-4's radio failed shortly after the initial contact, but the pilot was able to descend VFR, locate himself, and proceed to the field where he circled until he received the green light. As he landed on the wet runway, the increased tire pressure (for carrier landing) caused the F-4 to hydroplane so the pilot elected to use the field arresting gear. The *Phantom* had 2,000 pounds of fuel remaining.

The weather, during this time, varied from 600 to 1,300 feet overcast with visibility restricted by heavy rain.

Immediately behind the F-4 on a



GCA final was one of the A-7's which, due to a low fuel state (350 pounds), landed behind the F-4 on the same runway. After landing, the A-7 pilot, seeing the F-4 take the arresting gear, engaged his nosewheel steering and guided around the F-4. The next aircraft to land, an A-7 experiencing radio difficulty, landed on the parallel runway and also engaged the arresting gear (its fuel state was 600 pounds). The next three aircraft landed on one of the other parallel runways (one set of parallel runways was now closed because of aircraft in the arresting gear) following circling approaches; they had 300, 300 and 100 pounds of fuel, respectively! The remaining A-7, after experiencing difficulty in being located by radar, landed on a "special VFR" with 300 pounds of fuel.

The final aircraft, the KA-6D, had more fuel than the other aircraft and held at an approach fix until all the others had landed. He then declared

an emergency (low fuel state) and was given a GCA approach landing with 800 pounds remaining.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Well I'll be a monkey's grampaw! Some folks can get away with anything. It makes it mighty tough on an NAS when you suddenly saddle it with eight unexpected, low-fuel-state flyin' machines during IFR weather. The fact that communications from shore to ship were inadequate didn't help the problem any since our NAS was unable to pass the change in weather to the ship. With all our modern communicatin' equipment you wouldn't believe this could happen in this day and age — now you've seen it! Mighty easy solution to this one — get the radios fixed! I'm afraid to add up the total fuel remaining in all of these birds; it would be bad for my ulcers!

Unscheduled Touchdown

Two pilots manned their C-117D *Gooney Bird* for a flight from NAS Southcoast to NAS Northcoast. Forecast weather for the planned flight of six hours and fifteen minutes was mixed VFR and IFR conditions en route. The arrival forecast was for 2,500 feet broken, 5,000 feet broken, 12,000 feet overcast, seven miles visibility, with light rain, snow showers and ice pellets in the vicinity.

Flight altitude was initially 8,000 feet with a later change to 9,000 feet where the aircraft cruised for the remainder of the flight. Flight conditions were in and out of clouds at various times en route, with no unusual conditions encountered. Favorable winds enabled the flight to progress more rapidly than planned.

Descent to 6,000 feet was initiated by the control center in the vicinity of the final fix. The altimeter setting was given at this time as 30.39. The aircraft

was now shifted from center to local approach control. The pilots were informed by approach control to expect radar vectors to the TACAN final at destination.

They were given clearance to descend to 3,000 feet, followed by numerous vectors around traffic, and then cleared to descend to 2,000 feet. The pilots discussed their concern over rapidly approaching the final course radial while still 90 degrees off heading.

Approach control informed the pilot that he would pass through the approach course slightly to gain separation from traffic landing at satellite airports. Control directed him to turn left and cleared him for a TACAN approach, stating that he was 12 miles from destination.

Shortly thereafter, the pilot asked approach control for clearance to switch tower frequency. He was cleared

and informed that radar contact had been lost.

Attempts to contact the tower were unsuccessful. The tower received the initial call and transmitted landing information on both primary and guard frequencies but could not establish direct contact.

While descending on final TACAN approach, the pilot noted "green" in his peripheral vision, looked up and saw a tree ahead; he pulled back the yoke and added a sudden burst of power; the crew felt the *momentary* impact with the trees and then the aircraft was airborne!

The pilot informed approach of his impact and declared an emergency. He ordered his crew into their parachute harnesses.

Investigation by the crew indicated hull damage, starboard engine feathering line severed and various dents and scrapes near the starboard engine.

The aircraft was vectored to a nearby field with better weather. An uneventful landing was made. The aircraft sustained major damage.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sufferin' succotash! I don't believe it! These boys must'a been thinking pure thoughts all their lives. Would you believe that this was this fella's first flight as a plane commander — almost his last, too! This lad's NATOPS check "was not in strict compliance with NATOPS" and, additionally, the copilot's instrument card had expired four months before the accident! Yet, in spite of this, the accident board assigned "no supervisory responsibility" for this fiasco.

To further make my ulcer ache, one of the pilots listed five ways to prevent this accident in his statement. But he forgot one. Don't descend below minimum prescribed altitude during an approach. It's that simple!

