



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

The Last Roll

Two Marine Aviators in a TA-4F completed the second leg of their cross-country flight at a southwestern AFB. Two A-4Ms from another Marine squadron were also remaining overnight at the same AFB. The pilot in command of the TA-4F, Capt. Little Experience, and the flight leader of the two A-4Ms, Capt. Break Therules, had been friends for many years. That evening, at the officers club, a decision was reached that the TA-4F would accompany the two A-4Ms on their low level navigation flight the next day.

The following morning, the four pilots met at operations; Capt. Break Therules briefed the flight and filed a

flight plan. Start, taxi and takeoff were normal. The flight proceeded to a published entry point for the route. At the initial entry point, a 360-degree right turn was executed to descend to the proper altitude and then accelerate to the proper cruising speed. During this turn, Capt. Little Experience, overtaking the other two members of the flight, executed a barrel roll at 2,000 feet to slow his aircraft. During the roll, he allowed the nose of his aircraft to fall through and scoop out. Capt. Break Therules observed the maneuver and broadcast that this would not have happened if Capt. Little Experience had used top rudder. One of the other pilots answered back that "they were a little too heavy for that anyway."

The flight proceeded with the low level to a point just short of the next checkpoint. Then they checked the weather of three local military fields by radio. Two were reporting winds out of limits for the A-4M and TA-4F.

Capt. Break Therules instructed the flight that the route would terminate at the 57-minute checkpoint and divert to the field reporting the best conditions. At this time, the positions of the three aircraft were: an A-4M leading at 500 feet altitude; Capt. Break Therules on his right, 2,000 feet behind and 500 feet stepped up; Capt. Little Experience to the left and generally in the trail of the leader.

Capt. Break Therules started to cross to the left of the lead and accelerated to facilitate join-up prior to



proceeding to the airfield, Capt. Little Experience's angle of bank was excessive and, as he passed behind Capt. Break Therules, he started to reverse the turn while still descending.

The roll to the left continued to the near inverted position with positive G loading applied. The pilot in the back asked Capt. Little Experience "what the heck?" A snap roll to the right with full aft stick was then executed in an attempt to recover. By this time, the aircraft was approximately 200 feet AGL, in an incipient stall condition, still descending.

The pilot in the back ejected at an altitude of approximately 50 feet with a sink rate of 100 to 200 feet per minute and the aircraft in a ten-degree nose-up attitude. There was no apparent attempt to eject by the pilot in the front seat. The command ejection control was set for front seat command only — in accordance with squadron SOP. The aircraft impacted a wooded section of a hill with approximately a 20-degree slant. Initial impact was near the bottom of the hill, and the aircraft continued for 2,700 feet as it disintegrated. The pilot received fatal injuries.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sufferin' succotash! What a waste — I got so goldanged mad when I read this here report, particularly when one endorser tried to "sea lawyer" the work of the accident investigatin' team. Sure there were some errors in the accident report but, as one gent put it, "They did not substantially alter the facts." Bravo!

This whole mess "reeked" of supervisory error — including the flight leader and the supervisor of our passed-away cocky pilot. What in tarnation goes on in the mind of a young lad who executes a roll at a low altitude when he has had only three hours in type in the last 90 days! There is just no way we can legislate against stupidity. I can't go on, my ulcer hurts!

The Knowns and Unknowns

Two pilots arose at 0700 for an 0900 departure to return to their ship. They had diverted the previous evening because of a cockpit lighting discrepancy in one of the F-8s. The *Crusaders* were scheduled to fly back to the ship as a two-plane section led by a lieutenant commander with a lieutenant as the wingman. Following

brief, filing, preflight and start, the aircraft taxied to the head of the duty runway for takeoff.

After receiving the wind information, which indicated a slight right crosswind, the *Crusaders* lined up on the runway with the wingman on the right side of the leader. The section leader briefed for a 1,000-foot interval between aircraft on takeoff roll. At approximately the 3,000-foot runway marker, witnesses observed the wingman's aircraft landing gear either collapse or retract. The markings on the runway indicated that the vertical fins and underside of the fuselage made contact with the runway surface at 3,270 feet.

The *Crusader* continued skidding along the runway, shearing the arresting cable and then catching fire. The pilot initiated ejection shortly thereafter and was fatally injured. The aircraft became airborne, made a gentle left climbing turn and impacted the

ground 1.5 miles southeast of the airfield.

Investigation revealed the cause of the accident to be premature retraction of the landing gear. Additionally, the pilot's fatal injury was attributed to his torso harness not being attached to the parachute!



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! What a needless loss of life and flyin' machine. Many a birdman has gotten away with one mistake in the flyin' game — but two, in this case, was one too many. Not fastening your harness to your parachute and then bringin' the "rollers" up early can ruin your whole day!

Doin' a little checkin' with the Safety Center, I found we've had five *known* instances of pilots ejecting without having their upper Koch fittings attached! Are you one of the "unknowns" who haven't yet had to eject? Your days are numbered.

