



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Guess Where the Fuel Is?

Following a briefing, two lieutenant commander aviators manned A-4 Skyhawks for a combined low level navigation and instrument round-robin flight. Each aircraft was configured with two 300-gallon external fuel tanks. The first portion of the flight, which was low level navigation, proceeded without incident. At the turnaround point, the leader executed a climbing turn to begin an IFR return to home base. Passing through an estimated altitude between 8,000 and 10,000 feet, the pilot of the lead A-4 "heard and felt an engine chug." Initial engine indications reportedly appeared normal but the engine flamed out within seconds.

After several airstart attempts, which ultimately proved unsuccessful, the pilot attempted a flameout approach to a nearby civilian airport. The aircraft impacted an earth overrun 250-300 feet short of the intended runway. The gear and flaps were down and speed brakes closed. The main gear sank approximately two feet into the overrun and folded aft, ripping loose from the aircraft. The nose gear similarly sank into the earth and was torn loose from the aircraft. The external fuel tanks hit the earth and ruptured approximately five feet past the first point of contact of the main gear.

The aircraft continued up a shallow incline onto the runway with the rup-

tured external fuel tanks releasing a large amount of fuel — which ignited. The forward sections of the external tanks veered to the left, streaming fuel and coming to rest approximately 600 feet from the point of first impact.

The aircraft came to rest in a level attitude on the right edge of the runway and 700 feet from impact point. It continued to burn.

The pilot jettisoned the canopy and exited the aircraft. The A-4 continued to burn beyond repair. Airport firefighting facilities were inadequate for extinguishing the flames which were later put out by the local fire company. The investigation revealed the fuselage tank had less than one gallon. The accident board did not find any material failure.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great gallopin' ghosts! What a mess! When all is said and done, it looks like this fella just plain allowed himself to run outa gas. Gas he had — in the drop tanks! He just didn't monitor his fuel indications to ensure that the "go juice" was transferring.

However, this wasn't the driver's only sin. He used improper relight procedures, executed a flameout approach in violation of NATOPS, and others. And I believe there's definite supervisory error here. Why didn't this guy know the correct procedures? Smells like unit training smells! I believe this outfit better shape up their NATOPS program lest lightning strike again.



Nostalgia

When the engine of an SB2C-4 momentarily cut out immediately after take-off, the plane settled back on the runway. However, instead of landing on its wheels, as it should have, it settled on its belly because the pilot already had retracted his landing gear. The plane required a major overhaul before it could be flown again.

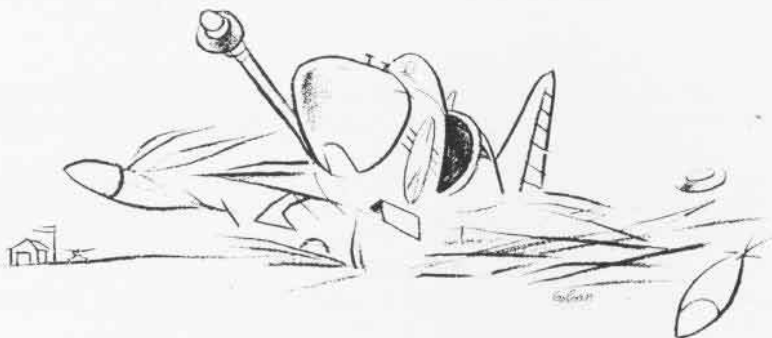
The accident board reported that although all pilots had been advised and instructed not to retract wheels until they were sure that a landing could not be made on the same field, there was a noticeable tendency among pilots to pull up wheels as soon as planes became airborne.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Let's look at the record. It confirms the board's observation about pilots raising their gear prematurely — to the extent of approximately 100 accidents a year. Taking into account the strikes, overhauls and repairs involved, it is estimated these accidents cost the Navy an average of \$25,000 each [1945]. Add that up on your abacus!

The parade of alibis explaining these embarrassing exhibitions includes everything from slipstreams and bumpy runways to misinterpretation of signals by flight crews. Needless to say, none ever satisfactorily explained the necessity for such ultra-



snappy raising of the landing gear.

Some pilots evidently don't take kindly to the "instruction and advice" referred to by the board. It shouldn't be too hard, however, to find a cure for this sort of foolishness. All that is necessary is for commanding officers to convince themselves that there is absolutely no reason for raising the landing gear the instant planes become airborne (which is practically self-evident), then to issue a one-sentence order on the subject, and then to dish out the right kind of medicine to make it effective. And don't wait until you have one of those accidents in your squadron before taking action (June 15, 1945).

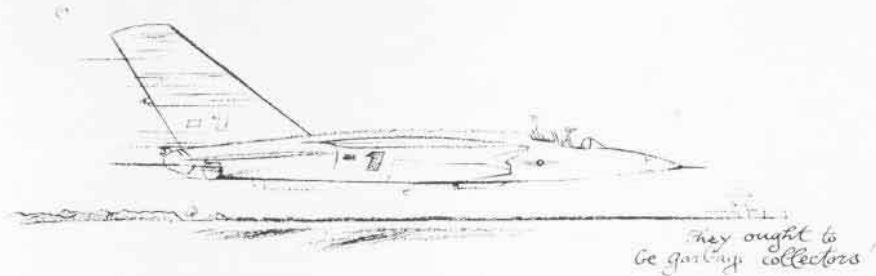
The Big Assist

A senior Naval Aviator and his junior Naval Flight Officer (NFO) manned an RA-5C *Vigilante* for a training mission which included a bombing exercise. The brief preflight and departure from home plate were uneventful.

During the exercise, the RA-5C developed radio problems and joined on the wing of another aircraft en route back to base. The flight leader informed the tower that his wingman had radio problems and would require a green light. Upon arriving at the field, the *Vigilante* regained radio communication and so informed the tower.

The flight made a normal approach to the duty runway. The interval was extended due to a wet runway and the pilot reported at the 180 with gear and flaps down. At this time, the aircraft reported 3,200 pounds of fuel remaining. When the RA-5C was on short final, the aircraft ahead of him reported he was taking the arresting gear. The pilot, hearing this, waved off and was cleared downwind to another runway.

Fuel state at this time was getting low but sufficient; however, no long delays would be possible. A landing check was again made with the NFO in the rear seat who acknowledged that the *Vigilante* was ready for landing. As the aircraft approached the 180-degree position with fuel at 2,600 pounds, the flaps were lowered to the 50-degree position and the landing checklist was again repeated. The NFO reported "all set for landing." A normal approach was made and lineup was left because another aircraft was rolling out on the right side.



The aircraft touched down, wheels up, near the approach end and came to a stop 3,500 feet from the approach end.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

'Thunderin' tarnations! I can't believe it! Every time we have a minus-the-rollers landing all the same conditions appear: distraction (pilot waved off because aircraft in front took the gear); non-NATOPS (pilot didn't utilize challenge and reply).

And, in this case, the gent in the back was no help at all—in fact he "assisted" the wheels-up landing by assuring the driver that the machine was ready for landing!

Would you believe that we had 12 unintentional wheels-up landings last fiscal year—**TWELVE!** Would you also believe that the majority of wheels-up landings are made by multi-placed aircraft—and this means that at least two people have their "heads up and locked."

Every pilot has the preventive medicine readily available—the **checklist**. Use it!!

Hooded Caper

A lieutenant junior grade was scheduled for a morning daylight radar navigation flight in an A-7 *Corsair II*. The chase pilot was a lieutenant with considerable experience in the *Corsair*. The briefing, which was very thorough, included altitudes, check points and terrain features. In the event of lost communications, the lieutenant junior grade was briefed to climb and go contact. Additionally, the chase pilot was to fly in front of the hooded aircraft, causing it to fly through the jet wash as a signal to go contact.

Following preflight, start and taxi,

the two A-7s launched as scheduled. Leveling-off at assigned altitude, the lieutenant junior grade lowered his instrument hood and went "on the gauges."

Approaching a checkpoint, he did not respond to radio instructions from the control center; however, all later transmissions were properly acknowledged. Passing another checkpoint, the chase pilot observed that the lieutenant had drifted right of course toward rising terrain.

The chase pilot added power to overtake the lead aircraft and broadcast instructions to "turn left." This was followed by a call to "turn hard left." Seeing no response, he transmitted "turn left and up," followed by "pull up!" No change in aircraft attitude was observed and the aircraft impacted the mountain approximately 50-75 feet from the top of the ridge. The aircraft disintegrated and was scattered over a two and one-half-mile area. Total elapsed time from the point where the chase pilot noted the error in track to the impact was approximately two minutes. No ejection attempt was observed.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! Unfortunately, we will never know exactly what happened—radio failure or pre-occupation in the cockpit or both. Either way, we lost the young lad and the flyin' machine, to boot.

Seems to me that this route of flight at the altitude this lad was operating didn't allow much deviation from the old course line. Now, after we lost the driver and machine, this particular route is being "reviewed" to increase the lateral clearance from the high rocks. Sounds like a little "closin' the barn door after the hoss escaped."