



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Taxiway Takeoff

A C-117D arrived at its destination on a scheduled logistic flight which was uneventful in all respects. The aircraft commander was a "senior type." Following a one-night RON, the crew arrived at operations to find the crosswind was so severe that the C-117D could not depart. The same situation existed the following day. On the third morning winds were still too strong for the C-117's 15-knot crosswind limitation.

The aircraft commander elected to attempt a takeoff from the perpendicular taxiway angling towards the approach end of the runway. The operations officer was contacted to check the length of the taxiway. He was unable to find blueprints or accurate charts depicting the exact length.

The aircraft commander estimated the taxiway to be 2,000 feet, but a vehicle odometer measured it at .2 statute miles. The operations officer okayed the takeoff with the understanding that no passengers were to be taken and that the aircraft commander took full responsibility for the consequences.

The pilot estimated he could be-



come airborne in 700 to 900 feet. The weather was 3,000 broken, visibility seven miles, with winds at 16 gusting to 23. The pilot had stated he must return to home base "today" because he had another trip to fly the next day.

The departure path had a large mound of earth and coral that rose 10 to 15 feet, 50 to 100 feet after the pavement ended. The taxiway contained a dip approximately 200 feet from the end, with a slight upgrade. A weight and balance form was filed with the aircraft weight given at

31,806 pounds. Nine passengers plus crew were aboard.

The C-117 was positioned at the "approach" end of the taxiway and the pilot commenced takeoff roll. He used the entire portion of pavement, became airborne and commenced a very steep climb after liftoff. He was observed to have cleared the hill by "maybe ten feet." He continued on to his destination with no apparent problems.

Upon inspection it was found that the aircraft struck two approach lights on the end of the runway at its liftoff point and left a long skid mark where it apparently became airborne over the dip in the taxiway and then touched back before finally becoming airborne. Later the taxiway was measured and found to be 1,340 feet long.

The aircraft sustained no damage and landed safely at home base.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Thunderin' thunderin's! I couldn't believe my eyes when I read this report. This is by far the grossest violation of common sense I have heard about in years.

The part that really gets to me is that not only was the pilot jeopardizing his own life but that of his crew and passengers also. The fact that this gent was a senior type is particularly distressing. What an example!

Unfortunately, Grampaw Pettibone found out about this incident "un-officially" by two separate letters from different people - with basically the same facts. Boy, would I like to see this pilot's head roll!!

Slight Crunch

Following an uneventful night training flight, an A-6 returned to the ship. The pilot and NFO both had considerable experience in the *Intruder*. The approach and trap were uneventful. As the aircraft was taxied forward, the pilot was directed to a



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spot on the starboard bow, facing aft and canted slightly inboard approximately five feet behind an F-4. In rapid succession the taxi director gave signals for stop (to the pilot), chocks/tie down (to the handlers), and engine shutdown (to the pilot). The taxi director then left the area.

The pilot stopped the aircraft with normal brakes, pulled the emergency parking brake handle and released the toe brakes. In his own mind, he now began to question the immediate shutdown signal, knowing that the aircraft was not yet tied down. He attempted to relocate the director on the port side of the aircraft. At this point, various deck personnel began inserting the port MLG chock, attaching tie-down chains and opening the pilot's boarding ladder to remove the landing gear safety pins.

The A-6 began to move forward causing the ground crew to quickly withdraw. The sailor at the pilot's boarding ladder attempted to signal the pilot using a single blue wand but was unable to attract the pilot's attention.

At the same time, the director looked back from his new position forward and starboard of the A-6 and noticed the movement of the A-6's white radome. The director immediately signaled emergency stop while running toward the starboard side of the aircraft, but was unable to attract the pilot's or NFO's attention.

It is undetermined if this signal was given in time to prevent the accident. The A-6's port intake impacted the F-4's starboard horizontal stabilator. Neither of the A-6 crewmen noticed the aircraft motion or felt the impact.

The pilot at this point noted the close proximity of the F-4, reapplied toe brakes, again pulled the parking brake handle and secured the port engine. Although both aircraft were damaged, there were no injuries to any of the deck personnel.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy Hannah! I have trouble with these – as with all – accidents involving taxi-and-secure operations. With the night as dark as it was, it is extremely difficult to tell if you're moving or not. This is by no means an excuse for the driver, but it just tees me off that he received such poor service from the taxi director. It 'pears to me that not only do we have hot pilots, but occasionally we have hot taxi directors – that is "Let me show this guy how fast I can run through these signals!" When you give signals, you ought to stick around to see that they're understood.

