



# grampaw pettibone

## No Fuel—No Flame

Four A-4C drivers reported to the ready room for a night loft bombing hop at approximately 2230. The squadron was deployed at an NAAS for intensive weapons training. The flight leader briefed the hop, his third flight of the day and his sixth within 24 hours. The flight members then signed for their aircraft and proceeded to the flight line.

During preflight of his aircraft, the flight leader found that two fuel caps were not secured and questioned the plane captain. The plane captain explained that the truck had run out of fuel after pumping only 315 gallons into the aircraft and he was waiting for another refueler. The pilot checked the fuel gauge: it read 2,600 pounds. He figured the 1,900 pounds that had been added would give him around 4,500 pounds for the flight. He decided to take the aircraft, rather than hold up the hop waiting for additional fuel.

At light-off, he noted only 3,200 pounds on the fuel gauge, but as the other pilots were set to go, he elected to cut the hop short but continue as briefed. The flight taxied out, took off and, while in the rendezvous turn, the flight leader noted his fuel aboard to be 2,600 pounds. He decided he would bingo after three loft maneuvers or a low state of 1,200 pounds, whichever occurred first.

For the next several minutes, the pilot was completely occupied with the loft maneuvers and the position of the other aircraft in the flight. On the sixth loft at approximately 12,300 feet and 220 knots in an inverted position, the engine unwound. Recovery was accomplished by pulling the nose to the horizon and rolling out. The pilot immediately selected



emergency generator, manual fuel control and, with the throttle in the idle position, turned on the air-start switch. Relight attempts were unsuccessful, so the throttle was brought around the horn and the air-start switch turned off.

After several Mayday transmissions on guard and more air-start attempts, the pilot suddenly realized the flameout was due to fuel exhaustion — an "O" reading on the fuel gauge immediately confirmed this.

Altitude was 8,000 feet at this time. As he was over a desolate area, he prepared to eject. As the aircraft was turned toward an area considered safe for ejection, the pilot saw the runway lights of the air station. Since he was in good position for a flameout approach and realized that this predicament was totally pilot-induced, he made the decision to attempt an approach. Completely sold on the low-level capability of the seat he was riding, he elected to reserve a final decision on whether to eject or continue the approach until he was at the 90-degree position.

He made several more attempts to raise the tower on guard to inform them that a flameout approach was being made, but he couldn't get through. Passing through 5,000 feet msl, the gear was dropped and the pilot thought he saw three safe indications. Things looked good to the pilot as he passed over the threshold lights at 200 feet and 150 knots: a slight flare was commenced. As the sink rate seemed a little excessive, the flap handle was lowered in an effort to cushion the landing.

Initial touchdown felt normal, but shortly thereafter the right wing started to drop. The pilot was unable to hold the wing up and, as the wing tip contacted the runway, the aircraft porpoised again and became completely airborne. As the aircraft contacted the runway a second time, it started a severe swerve to the right. After leaving the runway and crossing a drainage ditch, it continued across several hundred yards of rough desert terrain before coming to rest against a pile of sand.

After coming to a stop, the pilot jettisoned the canopy, released his rocket jet fittings and abandoned the aircraft, uninjured.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Jimintiently! Some days you can't make a dime! Here is an experienced, well qualified flight leader charged with the responsibility of setting an example for the other lads in his flight and he accepts an aircraft with a partial load of fuel.

This conscientious gent had only four and a half hours of sleep the previous night. He had been occupied all day with collateral duties and this was his third loft bombing hop of the day. Mental and physical fatigue probably influenced his decisions throughout the entire flight. These actions — de-

Deciding to take the aircraft with a low fuel state, forgetting his fuel state, repeated attempts to get a relight before discovering fuel starvation, a decision to attempt a night flameout approach, not utilizing the emergency gear system after deciding to land and finally not noticing the unsafe gear indication – all combine to substantiate a fatigue cause factor in this accident.

The underlying factor associated with this accident is that the pilot accepted an aircraft short of fuel, and endeavored to complete the flight as scheduled. From that point until the little bird smashed into the desert sand, each decision became more complex and involved.

The decision to attempt a night flameout approach in an effort to bring the aircraft back is questionable to say the least. The pilot's decision was made after due consideration of his proficiency in the aircraft, an unpopulated approach path to a 14,000-foot runway, complete control of the aircraft, and confidence in the low altitude capability of his spring seat. Although not

recommended, this particular flameout attempt would probably have been successful had the pilot lowered the landing gear with the emergency system. Flameout approaches should not be attempted except under the most ideal "daylight" conditions – a long enough runway in an acceptable area – and only by an experienced pilot at

the proper state of proficiency.

We are all real clever and appear pretty bright when afforded the opportunity to make a wise decision based on hindsight and what might have been. I'm sure no one has said anything that this pilot hasn't repeated to himself several times since this fiasco. (April 1964)

## Record FOD Walkdown?

Sometimes, in the current environment of fiscal constraint, an uncommon approach to solving common problems arises.

Carrier Air Wing 17, Commander Metz commanding, took on such a problem last January at NS Roosevelt Roads. The air wing, using 150 men and several trucks, collected over 1,000 pounds of FOD consisting of runway chunks, rocks and other debris. The FOD sweep included the entire 11,000-foot x 200-foot runway, 11,000-foot x 75-foot parallel taxiway and various other taxiways and ramp

areas. This cooperative effort between air wing and station personnel was conducted prior to their aircraft arrival

in January, and again in May. CVW-8 duplicated the effort during its visit. Result – a good facility with increased utilization and, to date, no foreign object damage to aircraft engines. The folks at Roosevelt Roads are anxious to keep up their current pace of operations and, with this positive type of approach to problem solving, they can.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Oh, my achin' back! A thousand pounds of FOD! A lot of bending over and picking up paid dividends for everyone. A Well Done to CVW-17 and CVW-8 from Ole Gramps for showing what imagination, cooperation and an achin' back can do.

