



grampaw pettibone

Play it by Ear

The missile intercept flight was to be conducted at 30,000 feet and under ground-controlled intercept (GCI) at all times. The two *Crusader* pilots agreed on a 3,500-pound fuel bingo and an alternate military airfield. Since the section leader had experienced a previous generator failure, he briefed this as the "emergency for the day."

In the event of a generator failure, the plane experiencing the failure would fly wing on the other for an instrument approach to the home field. After the pilots obtained approach clearance and had begun descent, the ram air turbine (RAT) signal would be given. They would dirty up above the cloud layer and continue down in section.

Completing the 20-minute brief, they signed out for their respective aircraft, accomplished the preflights and starts and performed a section takeoff. The twosome entered the overcast at 800 feet and broke out on top at 2,800 feet. After reaching 31,000 feet, the section split and completed several intercepts, alternating as bogie and interceptor. As they approached bingo fuel, the section leader informed GCI they had to depart for home plate and advised his wingman to join up.

As they commenced the rendezvous, the wingman in the six o'clock position noted the gear indicators barberpoled and resigned himself to an impending generator failure. The wingman, now without a radio, visually signaled the generator failure to the leader and the flight commenced their homeward en route descent.

At 23,000 feet and 20 miles from home-plate Tacan, the leader request-



ed a shift to approach control frequency. He checked visually for his wingman and discovered he wasn't there. The wingman, tired of pushing the stick over without trim, had popped the RAT and so had dropped back from the lead. The RAT gave him back the UHF receiver, but no transmitter or RMI. He switched to approach frequency in time to receive the manual frequency assigned, closed up on his leader and assumed a wing position for the descent.

The flight leader informed approach control of the nature of their predicament but, when interrogated, declined to declare an emergency.

Well along in the descent, approach control again asked the leader if he wanted to declare an emergency. After considering the fuel state and nature of the situation, the leader replied in the affirmative.

The section approached the top of the clouds at 2,800 feet and the leader gave the speed-brake signal after which

they slowed to 220 knots. The leader then gave the gear signal. The wingman placed his gear down and brought the wing up. However, he was slow in the transition and eased out ahead by at least two plane lengths. Looking over his left shoulder to keep the leader in sight, the wingman became IFR in the clouds. He looked at his instruments; the gyro horizon had tumbled 60 degrees right wing down and his airspeed was down to 140 knots.

His first reaction was to bring the right wing up; he pushed the stick to the left and booted left rudder. There was no reaction in the gyro. At this point, he noted the gyro off light was glowing and his airspeed was down to 120 knots. Once more he tried to bring the right wing up while the altimeter read 2,200 feet and the vertical glide indicator showed a 500-fpm descent.

The frustrated jockey moved the stick in all directions without getting a response. At 1,000 feet, he remembered the mountains below and, without further deliberation, pulled the face curtain. The Martin Baker performed beautifully. The abandoned *Crusader*, as expected, exploded on impact.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great horned toadies! This is a perfect example of how *not* to handle an emergency. These fellas had all kinds of VFR weather above that 2,800-foot undercast to get set up properly for a well organized, safe descent. I'm durn sure approach control would'a blessed any request for a level-off to join up and get configured properly for a precision approach to the field. Secondly, no one would have questioned a decision to proceed to their VFR alternate under these terrifyin' circumstances. (November 1967)

Basic Fundamentals

A section of A-4 *Skyhawks* departed NAS Home Plate on a routine cross-country instrument navigation flight. The en route portion was uneventful and flown as filed. A section penetration with individual final approaches to the destination airport was requested and approved. The descent was made at 75 percent power with speed brakes extended. Weather was clear with three to four miles visibility in haze.

Passing 7,000 feet, the flight was split up. The wingman followed vectors and altitude instructions until he retracted the speed brakes, leveling his A-4 at 1,200 feet. The controller issued the wingman a heading and instructed him to reduce to approach speed. Speed brakes were actuated and, passing through 220 knots, the gear and flaps were extended.

Power was added to maintain level flight at 150 knots. As the power was advanced through 80 percent, a popping noise was heard. Power was momentarily reduced to idle and then advanced to full throttle. As rpm increased, the popping returned, more pronounced than before. Again power was reduced. The pilot attempted several more times to increase power. Each time the popping resumed he reduced power until it stopped. Engine instruments indicated normal at all settings.

The pilot lost 600 feet of altitude during this evolution. Airspeed was allowed to fall to 130 knots with the aircraft in a nose-low attitude. At 500 feet AGL the pilot selected manual fuel but popping accompanied increased power. Now *in extremis*, at 125 knots and 200 feet AGL, the pilot reduced power, transmitted on the UHF that he was ejecting and pulled

the face curtain. Ejection went as advertised and the pilot was rescued.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy mackerel! This is so fishy it stinks. A real setup for a nylon approach. The three basic fundamentals of safe flying are: (1) maintain flying speed, (2) maintain flying speed, (3) maintain flying speed. Preoccupied with a strange popping noise and becoming totally absorbed in solving that problem, this lad forgot to fly his aeroplane. A wise man learns by his mistakes. A wiser man learns by observing the mistakes of others. This lad lost his cool and lost his flyin' machine. Don't you miss the point! Always fly the aeroplane first!

I'm being a suspicious cuss but the popping symptoms here sound like a pressurization system problem to your old Gramps. We'll never know for sure. But I do know this was not any immediate action emergency – not with an engine developing good power and indicating normal readings. What a kettle of fish!

