



# grampaw pettibone

## Harrier-Kari

The routine AV-8A training mission involved a fire support exercise with four aircraft operating from an auxiliary landing field (ALF) and a secondary confined area landing (CAL) site. The pilot in this incident was the second pilot to execute a vertical takeoff (VTO)/accelerating transition from the CAL site. He had completed two successful VTOs into the VFR pattern. His third VTO was normal and he began to "nozzle out" without noticeable difficulty.

Outside observers noted a nose-low aircraft attitude as he accelerated seaward, however. Over a bay, at 100 feet altitude, 120 knots airspeed and one-half to three-fourth nozzle aft, he moved nozzles abruptly full aft. Consequently, the aircraft, with the low angle of attack, pitched sharply nose down and descended rapidly.

The pilot countered with aft stick and selected nozzles to the hover stop. At this point the pilot considered ejection. He rejected this alternative as he saw his control input becoming effective in arresting the altitude loss. Unfortunately he could not prevent the tail of the aircraft from impacting



the water. Still, he managed to complete recovery, regain altitude and perform a vertical landing on the ALF runway. Damage was classified as substantial category C, and consisted of

dent in the bottom of the fuselage near the speed brake, plus creases along the horizontal stabilizer.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy Harrier-kari! This gent is one lucky man. The near miss was labeled pilot error, resulting from an inadequate transition from vertical to horizontal flight. The angle of attack was low, causing the aircraft to have inadequate lift for wing-borne flight at the time the thrust was vectored completely aft. The pilot had over 400 hours of experience in AV-8As and perhaps through complacency became a passenger in his own aircraft. He was looking out of the cockpit and had not monitored the angle of attack closely enough during the critical phase of transition to conventional flight.

Once he recognized the dilemma, the flyer's rapid corrective action saved the airplane and perhaps his life. The correct decision was probably to eject as he came too close to the water, but ejection may or may not have been successful, depending upon the phase of the pullout when it was initiated. The pilot could not be faulted for not ejecting because of an established sink rate but he did accept a near miss with water entry.

Being what some might call the fastest nozzle-out man in town resulted in wet tail feathers, a bent bird and near disaster. Nuff said!

## From the Mailbag:

### Workin' on a Chain Gang

Dateline CV. Pre-dawn SH-3H launch into Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, for a routine pickup of the local harbor pilot to bring the ship and a tired crew into port. Sweet smell of liberty lingering in the air! Snappy preflight, engine starts, cockpit systems check, smooth rotor engagement. With "nuthin to it...let's do it" aplomb, the SH-3 smartly displays its steady launch-me position lights. Not to be outdone by a machine, the landing signalman enlisted (LSE) immediately signals for re-





removal of all chocks and chains. A quick and confident visual count by the line crew ensues, LSE and both pilots. "Yup, two chocks an' four chains!"

The bright red rotators cut the darkness as the LSE's arm circles, then points like an arrow toward the faint lights of Honolulu. It's up, up and away...but wait!! An emergency hold signal comes from somewhere, and the pilot complies by gently lowering the collective. All are thinking, "Yeah, what is it?" as the night-check maintenance chief runs frantically to the LSE with fist clenched tightly. He thinks, apparently, that he has seen something and requests permission to enter the main rotor arc for an inspection. Permission granted, the chief disappears under the aircraft in the vicinity of the starboard main landing gear. Moments later, he is seen exiting and dangling something long. You guessed it — a tie-down chain!! Three linemen, three aircrewmembers and two pilots had all miscounted ye ol' tie-down chains!



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy terminated liberty! In this business, like most others, it's the little things that count, like four tie-down chains 'stead of three. We really get ourselves into trouble when the big things in life (people) don't take time to count.

Old Gramps has heard this "unchained melody" far too many times. In this case, disaster was averted thanks to the eagle eye of the maintenance chief. Can't say too much for the alertness of the rest of this crew, however!

Stop the fiddlin' around, gents, and get

on with some decent travelin' music, like "Take these chains from my parts and set me free." Play it again, Sam! And again, and again!

### Dead Wrong

An A4D pilot had been scheduled for a cross-country trip from his East Coast air station to MCAS Yuma. Purpose of the trip was to establish advance liaison with scheduled refueling stops for a full A4D squadron, all set to follow him in a few days. He was carrying starter probes and miscellaneous maintenance items in a converted drop tank, and each planned fuel stop for the squadron movement was to be provided with the equipment and instructions necessary for proper servicing.

The first leg of his trip was uneventful, but as the pilot made the necessary liaison contacts at a Midwest base, rough weather was rapidly building up to the north and west. Two teletype severe weather warnings had been issued, and the local air base had issued one as well. All the weather was between him and El Paso, his next scheduled stop.

Base weather personnel informed him that severe thunderstorm activity was forecast, surface winds to 65 knots in gusts, very large hail and tops to 55,000 feet. To the north of his course, tornadoes were forecast. Not a very pretty picture to contemplate. The weather at El Paso was excellent and forecast to remain so.

On the strength of the destination weather and being a real get-it-done

type, he didn't secure, but haunted operations and meteorology for the next seven hours hoping for a break in the weather.

The forecast weather developed as predicted and kept moving eastward in waves, with new buildups continually forming. Extreme turbulence was now reported.

He filled out a DD175 after the first four hours, but threw it in the trash can after observing the thunderstorm activity on the base radar.

Finally, about 1730, he filed IFR at 35,000 feet to El Paso, straight through the middle of the storm belt, got another weather briefing, had another quick look at the radarscope (no change) and took off, fueled to maximum capacity, at 1856 CST.

At 1911, he reported breaking out on top at 35,000 feet and followed this up with routine position reports up to 1931 CST. At 1935, a preliminary call by him to Fort Worth radio was abruptly terminated; and at 1937 the A4D dug a 30-foot crater in the ground, evidently striking in a near-vertical dive. The pilot rode it in. At the time of the crash, the area was being deluged by a severe thunderstorm.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! Whatever possessed this man, an experienced pilot with over 4,900 flight hours, to push into a solid wall of thunderstorms and hope for a hole to appear magically will never be known. We've lost four planes and three pilots to storms in this same area in 60 days and stressed quite a few surviving aircraft to the maximum.

One man, who ejected successfully, died of loss of blood caused by hail punctures before he was located by a rescue party. Today's aircraft cannot consistently take what old Mother Nature can dish out in severe thunderstorms. Even if you disregard the intent of CNO that deliberate flight into published severe weather areas not be attempted or permitted, even if you disregard your almost total inability to maintain heading or altitude, and disregard also the fact that this renders IFR altitude or directional separation worthless, the personal risk and odds on the need for ejection or bailout are too great. It's not a game of "chicken" you're playing, it's for keeps. (February 1963)