grampaw pettibone

Melee

Ten F8U-2 *Crusaders* were scheduled to return to their carrier from a Far East naval air station. They had already started engines when the word was passed to stand by for a later overhead time. They shut down and waited. Late in the afternoon, all air group planes ashore were ordered to proceed to another station further south and there await overhead times for the next day.

They refiled IFR and departed by divisions for their new destination. No problems were anticipated, since the reported destination weather was light obscuration with 5,000 broken, 8,000 overcast and two and one-half miles in light rain and haze, with little change forecast.

While en route to their new destination, the flight leader of one four-plane division had a TACAN failure and passed the lead to the leader of the second section, taking the No. 4 position himself.

Arriving overhead at 21,000 feet, they were cleared for a division penetration with latest reported weather as light obscuration, 2,800 broken, 7,000 overcast and two miles in light rain and fog.

The overcast was entered at 19,000 in a finger-four formation under GCA control. At 3,000 feet, still descending, they dirtied up. When they were at 2,500 feet, GCA directed them to level off. They were given a climbout heading and told to report on top. The field was temporarily closed, because a preceding aircraft had missed the MOREST gear and engaged the chain gear, and had fouled the runway.

During the climbout, the substitute flight leader's compass was obviously grossly in error, so another

lead change was made as they orbited in the clear, and the second penetration commenced by sections.

The first section made it this time, the No. 2 plane picking up the MOREST wire after a section touchdown. They reported the weather to Approach Control as 800 overcast and one mile in rain and fog as they taxied off the runway.

Meanwhile the second section had taken a missed approach at minimums – no field in sight – and climbed back to 10,000 to be boxed around by GCA for another shot at it.

On this pass, they broke contact at about 400 feet and one-half mile, and made a section touchdown, No. 2 man to take the MOREST. The section leader landed long, as planned, but the wingman hit fast and flat and porpoised, missing the MOREST, and waved off. He reported 1,500 pounds of fuel remaining, getting tighter by the minute.

GCA picked him up again and brought him around at 3,000 feet, starting and stopping all turns, since he wasn't picking up or flying the headings given; and lined him up for a 12-mile straight-in for the runway.

The pilot's glide path was erratic. He came over the runway lights high and fast, dropped the *Crusader's* nose and touched down flat again. It porpoised wildly, the hook missed the MOREST, and he waved off again.

With 500 pounds of fuel remaining, he had two choices: pull up and eject or do a fast 80-260 and come in downwind, taking the MOREST from the back side. He picked the latter course and swung 60 degrees left, staying low, and then in a 90-degree bank and with full power, swung back to the right, calling GCA for clearance to land immediately.

He was close aboard and had to chop the power to idle and drop the nose to make the runway. But he did make it, setting the plane down about 2,500 feet along the runway at 150 knots. Again the hook missed the wire! He shut down the engine, for the brakes were ineffective on the wet runway.

Suddenly, with about 2,500 feet of runway remaining and still rolling fast, he saw another F8U touch down ahead of him, coming from the opposite direction, then pull up and leapfrog over him, touching down again behind. Whew!

Unfortunately, a stream of crash-rescue trucks were chasing the first unfortunate. So, the second plane again went into full power and lifted off, screaming over the first of the trucks with no room to spare – with a somewhat shaken pilot aboard as it disappeared in the soup, climbing out for another GCA pass!

Meanwhile, back to our hero. He couldn't stop and ran off the end of the runway, ending up in four feet of

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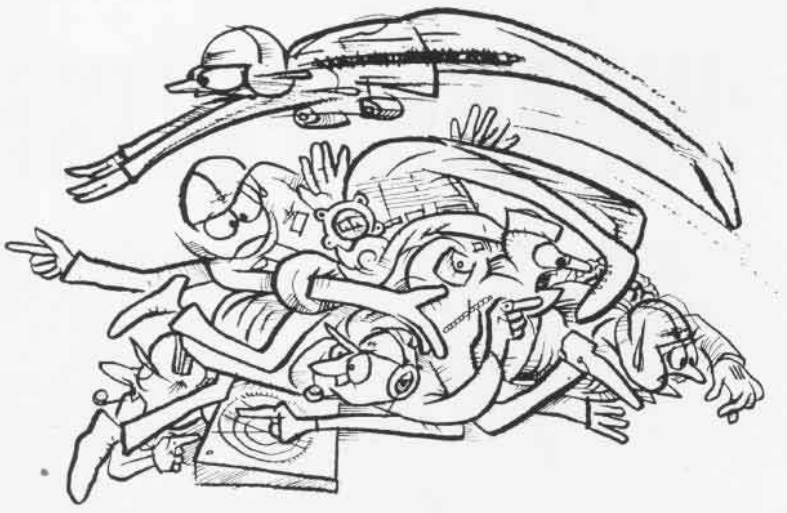

water, but uninjured. It had been a rugged day!

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great jumpin' Jehoshaphat! This was a real weirdy! The combination of lousy weather reporting, complete failure to accept preceding pilots' reports of actual weather, no apparent interchange of info between Approach Control and GCA, and a pilot who flew his GCA approaches as hot as a two-dollar pistol and never told a soul of his instrument difficulties makes this as near a multiple disaster as you can get. This guy's guardian angel must be in a dead faint from exhaustion after this mad whirl!

How many do we have to smash up before controllers accept and pass on pilot reports of terminal weather?

No more than *one* man should ride down the glide slope with bum dope. After that, it's a matter of *passing* the word! (Reprinted from Aug.1962)

The Fight is on!

"Guns!" – called the A-4 adversary pilot as he slid into firing position 1,000 feet aft of the F-4N *Phantom*. To counter the attacker, the *Phantom* pilot, a fleet replacement trainee (RP), pulled into a four-G level break turn to the left in order to execute a high-G barrel roll. He reduced power and extended the speed-brakes, forcing the A-4 to overshoot.

The *Phantom* pilot observed the A-4 coming into view, fed in bottom (left) rudder, rolling the F-4 to the left with the nose falling through the horizon. The F-4 RIO called for more bottom rudder. The RP responded with full left rudder and, as the roll rate increased, he saw the A-4 at the top of his canopy. From his near inverted position, the RP felt he was rolling too rapidly and thought he should reduce the roll rate. Suddenly, the F-4 departed violently to the left.

Observing the departure, the adversary pilot called, "Knock it off, knock it off!" The F-4 sliced to the left at a high yaw rate and immediately entered a flat spin – altitude 17,000 feet. The pilot neutralized the control stick, then pushed it forward as he reduced power to idle. He then pulled the drag chute. The chute extended, but it only streamed vertically behind the aircraft.

The RP initially noted 26-28 units angle of attack (AOA). Seconds later he observed the AOA fully pegged at 30 units with the turn needle all the way to the left. The spin was now very smooth with no pitch or roll oscillations. Application of antispin controls had no effect. Passing 10,000 feet, the RIO initiated successful command ejection. The aircraft crashed into the sea. The crew was rescued.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy falling *Phantoms!* This young lad, the unfortunate victim of inexperience, fell prey to a classic F-4 departure in his attempt to reduce aircraft roll rate through improper lateral control inputs – aileron vice rudder. Although he had been briefed, this pilot did not fully appreciate the results of cross control applications during high AOA maneuvers. In this instance, the aircraft did not display the familiar postdeparture gyrations; instead, it quickly entered a flat spin. The pilot's lack of departure/spin experience resulted in delayed extension of the drag chute and application of antispin controls.

It is well documented that successful recoveries from F-4 flat spins are rare, regardless of the pilot's experience. Old Gramps thinks this was a mighty expensive lesson! A wise man learns from his mistakes, but a wiser man learns from the mistakes of others. We can't afford to buy this kind of experience – or aircraft. Nuff said.