



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Unconstrained Melody

The mission involved an F-14, F-4J and TA-4J to evaluate R&D aircraft hardware. A secondary mission of air-to-air tactics followed the T&E data collection. Several one-vs-one-vs-one engagements were executed before the F-14 reached bingo fuel and returned to base, leaving the F-4J and TA-4J to continue ACM tactics.

The F-4J, with leading edge slats installed, exhibited greatly improved turn capabilities and energy maneuverability, giving it an ACM capability more like that of the TA-4J than a standard F-4J.

The two aircraft began a one-vs-one engagement which degenerated into a horizontal scissors after two minutes of vertical maneuvering. The first horizontal scissors commenced with approximately 1,500 feet of lateral separation with the F-4J at 140 kias, the TA-4J at 170 kias. The closest point of approach (CPA) on the first scissors crossover was 368 feet. Maximum lateral separation expanded to 800 feet before positive closure was established, commencing the second horizontal scissors. CPA at the second crossover was 400 feet with aircraft at co-speeds (100 kias). Separation expanded to 1,000 feet before a positive closure vector was established. The third scissors commenced with 100 kias closing velocity.

Both pilots recognized an imminent collision and maneuvered *in extremis*. The F-4J went low and the TA-4J went high. They collided, with the TA-4J tail cone striking the F-4J fuselage in the turtleback section.

Although neither pilot was certain a collision had occurred, a "knock it off" was called. Subsequent airborne inspection of the aircraft revealed damage to the F-4J. Both aircraft



returned to base without further difficulties where post-flight inspection revealed damage to the top of the TA-4J vertical stabilizer.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great jumpin' Jehoshaphat! Another eight bars of the ACM blues, the agony of it all!

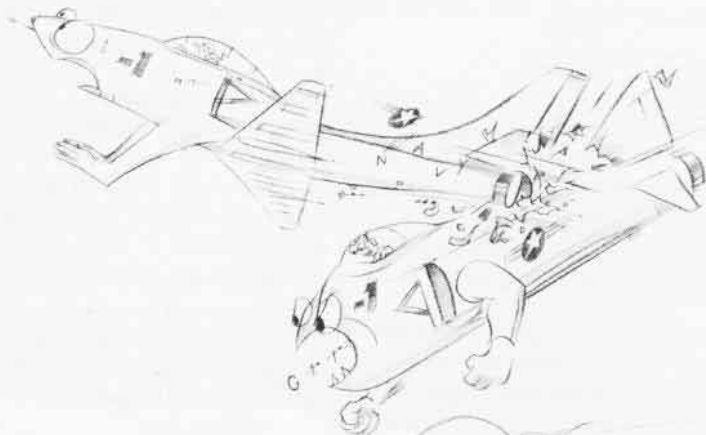
This accident was just plain stupid. It occurred because none of these

highly experienced crew members recognized the impending collision in time. Each participant allowed the dynamics of this ACM engagement to overcome his better judgment. These guys may have really been flying their aircraft but they dangd sure had lost control of the situation. ACM rules of engagement have been established which, when adhered to, promote realistic, yet safe, air combat training. They are not expected to replace common sense, sound judgment, or professional maturity.

Gramps is a firm believer in the philosophy of "train like you fight," but there'll be very little left to fight with if we continue to train like this. At no time should ACM flight be pressed past the point of beneficial training. That point is where teaching and learning stop – and irresponsibility begins, all too often with disastrous fanfare! These gents were fortunate by only inches.

Old Gramps has seen many more serious accidents of this sort when common sense and guidelines were ignored. However, it's dangd appalling when superior performance is overridden by unconstrained egos.

And that's the name of that tune. Please don't play it again, Sam.



ILLUSTRATED BY Osborne

Pettibone's Mailbag

Dear Gramps,

I am a Naval Reserve Officer and captain for a major commercial airline, with 23 years' aviation experience. On my drill weekends, I have access to *Naval Aviation News* and particularly enjoy G.P. The recurring accident themes I have read and continue to read prompted this letter. I sometimes wonder if we aviators will ever get it all together and reduce the accidents resulting from judgment, supervisory and pilot error. Specific recurring errors I have noted over my career cover a wide spectrum and include:

- supervisory disregard for Natops
- supervisors succumbing to the pressure of operational necessity
- supervisory disregard for aircrew fatigue

- aircrews flying low altitude routes with no idea of en route altitudes, topography or hazards
- aircrews who do minimum cross-country flight planning
- aircrews who consider only VFR conditions and are not prepared when IFR conditions are encountered
- aircrews who are in such a hurry to launch that they launch with a wingman who is marginally briefed
- aircrews who only nod in agreement with a flight weather briefer and do not ask questions about the content or significance of the briefing
- aircrews who, once away from home plate, perform flathatting or unauthorized flight maneuvers
- aircrews who do not use FSS metro en route
- aircrews who perform IFR section departures on cross-country flights with existing weather below minimums for a return landing should it be necessary
- aircrews who never question the pilot-in-command or flight leader just because he is senior or is the squadron Hot Rock
- aircrews who do not routinely use the takeoff, penetration or landing checklist
- aircrews who overstress aircraft and don't report it
- aircrews who won't admit when they are too fatigued to fly or emotionally upset by severe personal problems that make them safer on the ground
- aircrews who still suffer from get-home-itis
- aircrews who still confuse exceptional skill with faulty judgment
- aircrews who think a wave off or missed approach is a sign of weakness
- aircrews who fail to recognize the importance of reporting flagrant flight violations to proper authority

- aircrews who still fail to recognize SOP violations as indicators of poor pilot judgment vice superior piloting ability.

Hopefully, you can share this list with your readers and the minority it addresses will take heed.

I. M. Concerned



Gram paw Pettibone says:

Amen! Aircrews and supervisory types can use this list as a review of past and current problems. Read ye the list and heed this shipmate. He has spoken the truth! Perhaps it will be news to pilots and NFOs of recent vintage, but the aviation types referred to in this letter have been around a long time. Only their gravestones are different. Nowadays you gotta do more than kick the tires and twang the wires!



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