



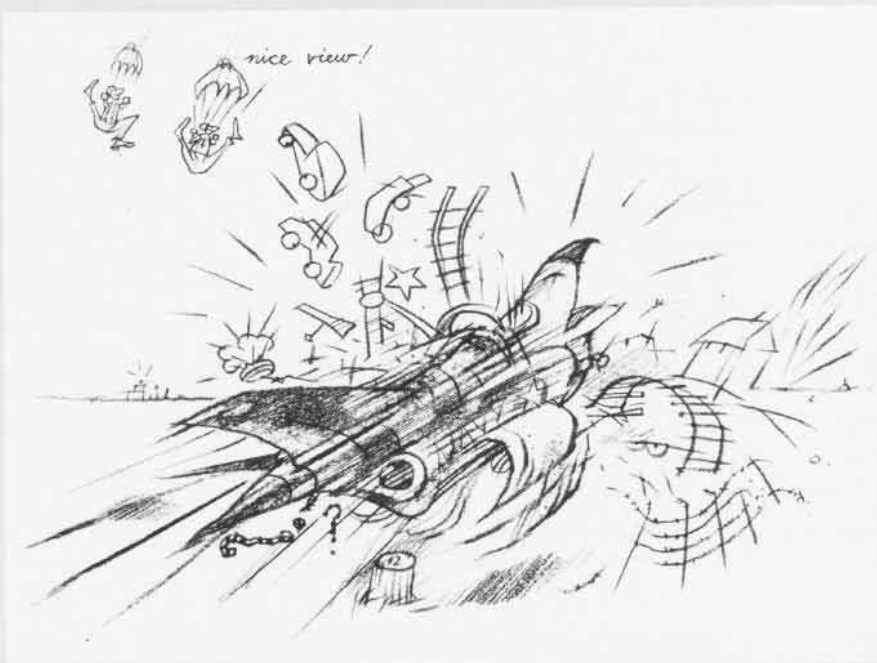
Neither Rain nor Sleet nor. . . .

A pair of *Phantoms* were returning to NAS West Coast after static display duty. When they first filed, the weather at their planned third-leg, stopover point, a southwest civilian airfield, was

3,000 broken, seven-miles visibility with a chance of rain. Bad weather was massing to the north and, on their arrival, the field was 500 feet obscured with one-mile visibility in light snow and fog. The TACAN-only F-4s were to fly an ASR approach to the field's 11,000-foot-long southwest strip. The flight split up and the lead started down.

The pilot set half-flaps at 12 miles to prevent closing on a commercial airliner up ahead. The F-4 began a slow right roll, corrected by the pilot, followed by illumination of a BLC (boundary layer control) malfunction caution light. He informed the RIO who responded, "Full flaps, now we're committed." The pilot extended the gear and reportedly set full flaps.


About 150 feet above MDA (minimum descent altitude), at the one-mile point, the pilot pushed the stick forward, reduced power and, passing the threshold, retarded the throttles to idle. He flared to arrest his sink rate, decelerating to a slow AOA chevron at touchdown, 1,000 feet from the threshold. Due to the crosswind and wet runway he delayed deploying the drag chute until the *Phantom* was tracking down the centerline. After the chute was deployed, airspeed remained at 130 knots for a considerable time. The lack of illuminated runway distance markers, coupled with poor visibility, prevented the crew from judging how much runway remained. The pilot maintained full aft stick but later stated he did not apply brakes



during rollout. As the *Phantom* slowed to 100 knots, the aircrew noticed a color change in the runway lights to amber, unaware that this meant they were on the last 1,500 feet of runway. The aircraft yawed right and drifted left. The pilot advanced the throttles to light the afterburners. The RIO saw the runway end lights and said, "Hook down." The pilot swiped at the hook handle, unsure if it went down. The port tire blew as the F-4 departed the left-side overrun.

Noting 80 knots on the indicator as the afterburners cut in, the RIO ejected. The *Phantom* traveled nearly 2,000 feet over unprepared terrain, struck a set of railroad tracks, a heavy-gauge wire perimeter fence, another set of railroad tracks and a pole 12 inches in diameter — after which the pilot ejected. The F-4 continued across a four-lane highway, smashed into a small building and exploded about 120 yards from a housing area. The pilot suffered minor injuries, the RIO none.

The second *Phantom*, unaware of lead's problems, was waved off but eventually landed on the 9,000-foot west runway. Its drag chute failed (it had been drenched on a previous leg stopover and froze at altitude) but the pilot brought the aircraft to a stop after blowing the tires and departing the left side of the runway at 35 knots, ending up 60 feet from the runway's edge. The aircrew didn't realize that 3,000 feet more of runway were available to them. Neither aircraft had a wheel brake antiskid system installed.

 Grampaw Pettibone says:

What a brain-basher! These fellows should have stayed home, or at least at their last stopover point. The wingman didn't lose his bird but he gets no points for wasting 3,000 feet of runway. Among lead's miscues: the flaps were found at the one-half setting, indicating that they weren't fully down; he was high and fast close-in and landed beyond NATOPS' 500-foot limit for wet runways; he used improper stick position on rollout while NATOPS says full forward for wet runway directional control; he failed to execute judicious braking at air-speeds above 100 knots (he didn't



brake at all); and he made a poor decision to take off with insufficient runway left even with afterburner which burned out the drag chute panels.

There's more, but the real problem here was continuing to the civilian field with weather turning to worms. Although this base had a reputation for providing fast turnarounds, it had neither arresting gear nor distance-remaining markers, needed items when it's dark, wet and hard to see.

The *Phantom* flyers had had a hard day, experiencing frustrating delays on previous stops, plus losing tanker support at the outset, which led to the planned and exhausting four-leg return trip. Clearly, "get home-itis" was a factor. En route to the civilian field they pressed on despite worsening weather, electing not to divert to a more suitable field. When the mishap occurred the crews were completing the third leg. Although they hadn't yet violated the 3-flight/6.5-hour guideline in OPNAVINST 3710.7K, they did intend to return to home base that same day, which would have exceeded the limit. The slow right roll when extending the flaps in the approach was not considered abnormal. Illumination of the BLC light was distracting but not viewed as a causal factor in the mishap.

These were experienced airmen but they put on a poor and costly show. Professionalism took a holiday.

B/N to the Rescue

A flight of four USMC A-6 *Intruders* was proceeding in loose cruise formation at FL290 from Lajes AFB (Azores) en route to Rota, Spain. The pilot of the port wing aircraft had removed his oxygen mask to take a drink of water. In the process, he accidentally bumped the cockpit cabin pressure switch, dumping cockpit pressurization to altitude of 29,000 feet MSL. Before the pilot could replace his oxygen mask and restore oxygen, he lost useful consciousness. He was actually still conscious but

physically unable to move.

The B/N had been observing the other formation aircraft out the starboard panel when the incident occurred. At 29,000 feet, the decompression was a mildly explosive action, accompanied by a loud whooshing sound and moderate discomfort to the ears. Startled, the B/N looked at the pilot who was staring straight ahead with his arms hanging at his sides. The B/N asked the pilot if he was okay, but received no response. He quickly checked the instrument panel but could detect nothing wrong. He then pushed the pilot's knee aside to check the cockpit pressure gauge and verified 29,000-foot cabin altitude pressure, but could not determine the cause.

Acting quickly, the B/N reached across the pilot, took control of the aircraft and pushed over into a 15-degree dive. The airspeed built up quickly to 480 KIAS, at which point the B/N leveled off to bleed off some excess airspeed. A few seconds later he executed a second 15-degree dive and leveled at 10,000 feet altitude. After a short time, the pilot recovered and was able to resume control of the aircraft.

As he descended, the B/N radioed the flight leader and explained the situation. The flight leader passed the lead and directed the other aircraft to proceed to Rota. He joined the distressed wingman and escorted the flight back to Lajes for a safe recovery.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great sufferin' eardrums, this could have been very depressing had it not been for the timely action of the B/N.

This incident occurred during a period when the A-6 aircraft had experienced random cockpit pressurization problems. The B/N, unable to immediately assess the cause of the decompression, took positive action in getting the aircraft down to safe altitude. B/N's calm, corrective action during the incident is reflective of professional aircrew knowledge and coordination, and possibly saved the Corps one A-6E *Intruder*.

Old Gramps passes to this B/N, 1st Lieutenant (now Captain) Joe Baez, USMC, VMAT(AW)-202, a very proud "Well done, Marine!"