

Final Final

A tandem-seat aircraft on a NATOPS check flight was climbing through 800 feet after takeoff when the copilot (NATOPS instructor) initiated a simulated single-engine emergency by reducing power on the left engine. The pilot in the front seat undergoing the check called the tower and was cleared for low key entry to a simulated practice precautionary approach (PPA).

The pilot had full power on the number two (right) engine as he turned right for the downwind leg. He reached a modified abeam position at 1,300 feet with 116 knots climbing slightly. He reported "low key with gear, for touch and go" and was cleared to proceed. He lowered the wheels and, at the 135-degree position, commenced descent to intercept the final half of a PPA.

At the 90, the pilot and instructor confirmed that landing gear were down and stipulated that a centerline landing would be made rather than one on the left side, which would be proper if the emergency were real.

The aircraft passed a road located 1,300 feet from the runway threshold and at approximately 110 knots the pilot felt a momentary rudder shaker. He lowered the nose and added power to the right engine. At this point, he still "felt comfortable." The plane was about 125 feet above the ground.

A second later, the pilot began to transition to a landing attitude and sensed a yaw to the left. He added military power to the number two engine and "felt a sinking sensation."

The aircraft hit the ground left wing down in a 35-degree angle of bank, at 95 knots, in less than 500 fpm rate of descent, about 125 feet short of the runway threshold. The left main gear collapsed, the aircraft struck the edge of the threshold and continued onto the concrete runway. The nose wheel sheared and the external fuel tank ruptured, spewing ignited fuel down the runway. The plane slid through the fireball and began disintegrating as it departed the runway.

The pilot initiated ejection. The instructor was ejected from the rear cockpit, but the low mode of his ejection



seat failed. He was killed on impact. The pilot tumbled once and got seat-man separation but partial canopy deployment just prior to hitting the ground. He suffered broken bones, contusions and a separated shoulder, but survived.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Woe is us! The pilot, who was a squadron department head, had demonstrated good aerial skills before the mishap. He was under some stress or preoccupation due to his involvement in the forthcoming deployment of a detachment and an upcoming inspection. He asked to be removed from the det assignment in order to concentrate on other duties, but was turned down. Also, he and his wife were expecting a child.

The instructor, though in good spirits, tried to give away the hop to another NATOPS instructor before the brief. The mishap board felt that his concentration may not have been completely focused on the flight.

Regardless of the above, this accident is an open and shut case. The front seat man let the plane get away from him and the instructor made the crucial errors of

not staying ahead of his student and not taking timely, corrective action.

Any aircraft in our inventory demands every ounce of attention that flyers can muster. That means from start to finish and all points in between.

Midair Mania

A P-3C *Orion* was flying at 1,000 feet through heavy rainshowers and fog, executing a radar run-in toward a ship. Visibility was nearly zero straight ahead and a half mile laterally. The crew, wisely, tracked inbound offset from the surface contact by about a mile.

Unable to make visual contact on the initial pass, the *Orion* descended to 500 feet for a second offset run. This time the crew spotted the target a mile away, abeam, as the P-3 sped by. The contact was an ocean tug towing two oil derrick towers 1,000 feet astern. The tip of the highest tower was 400 feet above the water!

In another case, an A-6E *Intruder* entered a military training route (MTR) at point alpha and three minutes later heard a pair of F-4 *Phantoms* check in on the same route but at point delta. The *Intruder* advised the *Phantoms* as to its position. Five minutes later, *Phantom* lead reported two USAF A-10s on the MTR flying the course in reverse direction at 500 feet. The A-10s corroborated this. All aircraft were on frequency 255.4. The *Intruder* adjusted its altitude to 1,500 feet and crossed over the A-10s at point delta, with 1,000 feet of separation.

The *Thunderbolt IIs* were actually proceeding to home base, VFR along the MTR, at 250 knots in consonance with FAA regulations. They were practicing low-level navigation work after an ordnance training session at a bombing range.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

A sight that'll twang any *Orion's* nerves: tall towers risin' from the mist like a pair of goal posts for Paul Bunyan. An A-10 with its big, twin turbines on either side of the fuselage comin' at you ain't no balm for nerves either. Head on,

the Thunderbolt II looks like Bunyan's binoculars.

The point is NMACs (near midair collisions) are on the rise. The sweat beads of worry on my brow won't go away. The Orion guys did it right, using offset techniques. Even so, there's always somethin' new in Naval Air, like oil derricks that move on the sea and can get in your way if you're low enough.

In this case, the Intruder didn't know it at the time but there was a flight of four, not two, A-10s that passed below the A-6E. No telling what would've happened if the friendly Phantom hadn't warned the Intruder. Low visibility paint schemes and multiship flights make NMAC matters worse nowadays.

May I Have a Light, Please

An EA-3B *Skywarrior* was on final of a Mode II approach and reported, "Ball." Paddles responded by flashing the "cut" lights. As the aircraft drew nearer to the ship, the pilot noted an unusual, dim red glow in the vicinity of the lens. "Are they

wave-off lights?" he wondered. "But wave-off lights are unmistakably bright and flashing," he thought.

In close, the crew was still looking at a ball and the curious dim red glow. Confused and uncertain, the pilot initiated his own wave-off. As the *Skywarrior* passed overhead, the crew gazed intently at the mysterious glow. To their collective surprise and with a degree of horror, they realized the wave-off lights *were* on. The plane landed safely on the next approach.

There had been a mix-up in the recovery order. Primary expected an EA-6B *Prowler* on the approach, not an EA-3B. The LSO recognized the *Skywarrior's* distinctive sound and light pattern. After initially signaling "Roger, ball" with the cut lights, he flashed the wave-off lights since both the lens and arresting gear were set for the *Prowler*. Detecting no response as the *Skywarrior* bore in, the LSO and Primary broadcast "Wave Off! Foul Deck!" Unfortunately, these transmissions were made on the frequency assigned to the *Prowler* two miles behind the ship.



Gram paw Pettibone says:

Balls of fire! That's what we mighta had if the *Whale* kept a comin'. Pat on the back to the pilot for going around.

But what happened to the wave-off lights? Well, they worked as advertised according to the LSO NATOPS manual. First, they flashed at full brightness but then shifted down to the present position which, in this case, was at the lowest level. Result: a dim red glow or pulse.

A flyer on final could easily miss that first bright flash if he's on the gauges for a second or two. He might only see a dim red glow like these fellas.

Advice: LSOs, consider using a brighter setting on the wave-off lights. Also, have backup methods ready to wave off a customer if the lights and radio aren't doing the job. Pilots, if doubts circulate in your brain when tryin' to trap, tell somebody. Ask questions. Get answers. If you still don't feel right, wave off and try again. We don't need any fireballs on the flight deck or in the drink!

