

Step and Stop

It was after sunset, there was a solid overcast, and the airfield was very busy with planes, especially P-3 Orions. Day-time construction was underway which reduced parking space. In fact, some P-3s were positioned between the hangars.

An Orion landed, taxied in and was assigned a spot between the hangars by maintenance control. A lineman signaled the aircraft to proceed toward the spot. A fuel truck, unattended, was parked near the hangar along the route. The lineman wanted the Orion to proceed past the truck but his supervisor on the ramp and the pilots in the cockpit decided this might be unsafe. The aircraft was halted short of the fuel truck. The crew shut down the engines. When the props stopped turning, the cabin door was opened and the ladder extended downward.

Crew members involved in the tactical aspects of the flight departed for the debriefing room while the others began a post-flight inspection. The station ground crew, however, had to move the P-3 because another Orion was coming in. The intent was to tow the first aircraft past the fuel truck and into another parking spot.

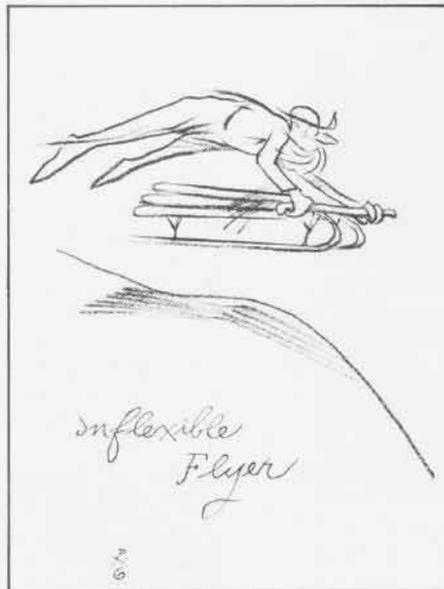
After two crew members descended the ladder, the ground crew, without communicating its intentions, folded the ladder back against the fuselage and prepared to tow the plane. From inside the P-3, looking out the door toward the dimly lit ramp, the ladder appeared to be in the proper position for debarking. A third crew member stepped on the top rung but noticed that the ladder was set at an unusually steep angle. He nearly fell out the door but caught himself at the last instant. He could have dropped 10 feet to the pavement and certain injury



Grampaw Pettibone says:

About 2,500 years ago, that Greek historian fella, Herodotus, put it down that "Haste in every business brings failures." (Once in awhile ole Gramps dusts off Bartlett's.) Imagine, all those years have gone by and we're still makin' the same mistakes from hurryin'!

Sometimes ya gotta hustle. But short of a fire igniting or some other catastrophe, why rush movin' planes around, 'specially when it's dark out? Just when you think you're runnin' outa time, that's the time to tarry, or at



least stop, look, listen and **COMMUNICATE!**

Wanna bet that crewman's next stop would be the dispensary, or worse, if he'd taken that first long stride straight down?

Missing Manual

A NATOPS manual was used by a qualified member of a squadron's maintenance department to troubleshoot the main electrical load center in

a P-3 Orion. Upon completion of the job, the technician returned to his work center. Another member of the shop noticed that the manual was missing from the set of publications. Personnel searched for the manual but couldn't find it.

The individual who last had the manual was asked where he might have left it. He said he did not know, but he "knew for certain" that it was not left on the aircraft. His shop supervisor accepted this statement but did not report the missing manual to his division chief or maintenance control.

Three days later, the manual was found on the floor in the main electrical load center by an aircrew member on a routine interior inspection.



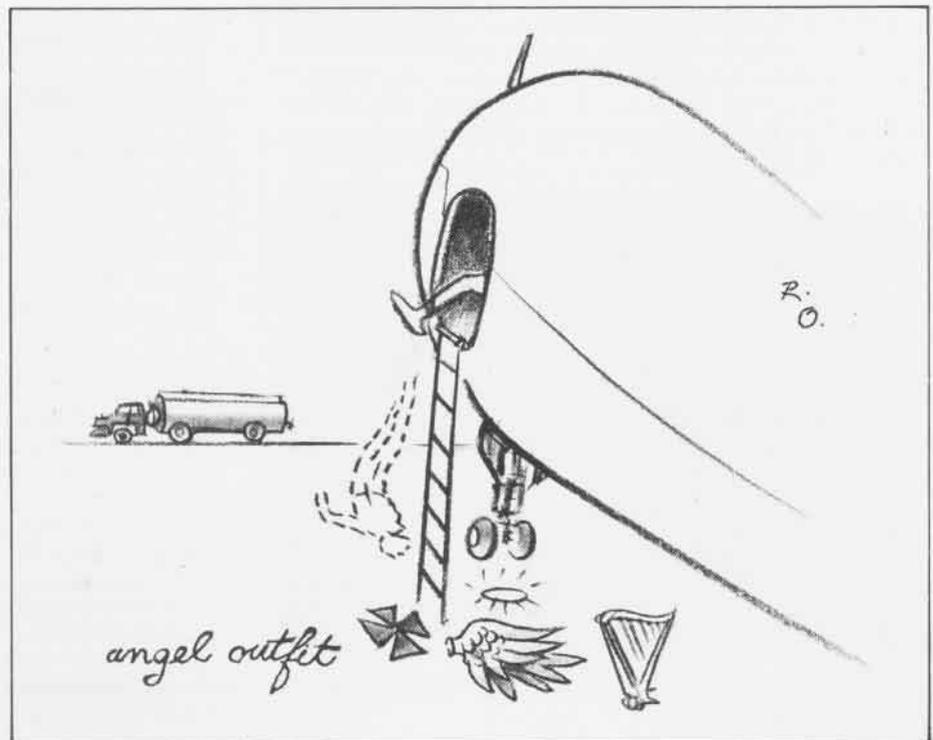
Grampaw Pettibone says:

No big deal, right? Just a book left adrift on the deck, right?

Wrong.

A book the size of a NATOPS or technical manual could be tossed about by turbulence in flight and do some damage. In this case, the bird could lose electrical systems, have a fire, or worse.

The division chief took responsibility for the missing manual and investigated the case. First off, the loser of the book should have reported it. So, too, the work center supervisor. Also, he



shouldna taken as gospel the person's word that the manual wasn't on the aircraft. I'm all for trust and confidence, but when it comes to aircraft, there are times when we go beyond those commodities. Follow-up is a must.

Others pointed out that the manual really wasn't a tool and therefore not subject to inventory. Maybe not. But common sense oughta have prevailed here.

Your ole Gramps doesn't want to make a mountain out of a mole hill but I know a few mole hills that can trip you up.

This squadron did the right thing. They looked at the problem, modified inventory control procedures and, as the C.O. put it, reemphasized "the vital importance of openness for the sake of safety."

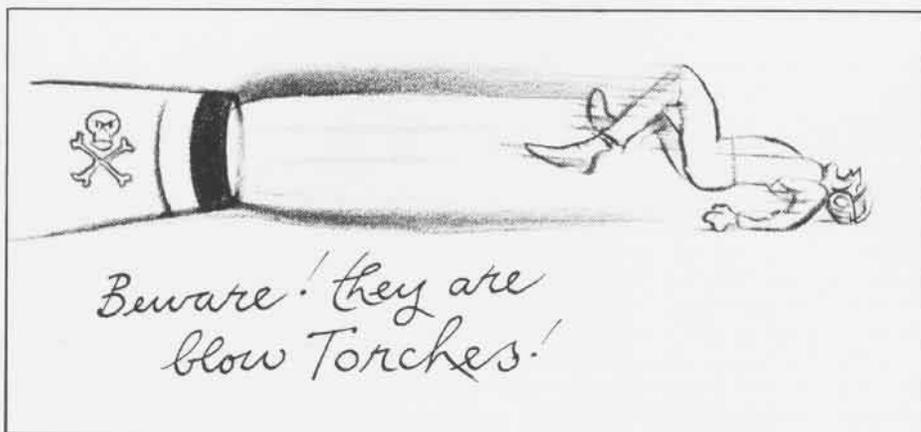
Danger Zones

On the flight deck, 11 aircraft were scheduled for a daytime launch. An A-6E was on catapult number four. On cat three was an A-7E and behind it and the jet blast deflector (JBD) was another A-7E. The *Corsair II* on cat 3 launched normally. The *Intruder* began final preparations to go into tension. The pilot of the *Corsair* behind cat three radioed primary control and signaled his flight deck director that he had a turbine outlet temperature gauge failure. Word was passed that this aircraft was down and was to be spun clear of the catapult in order to allow the launch to proceed.

The Fly 3 (the aft third portion of the flight deck) petty officer decided to spot the *Corsair* aft along the starboard side.

The director signaled the A-7* to taxi ahead a short distance, then gave the pilot a right turn signal. At the same time, the *Intruder* on cat four went into tension with full power. Two final checkers were on either side of the A-6, behind the wing tips and abreast of the tail. The right side final checker was in the standard final checker posture, facing the aircraft with his body lowered down on one knee and his other leg fully extended toward the JBD. He held a padeye with one hand. His other arm was raised upward with a thumb up, indicating the aircraft was ready to launch. His back was toward cat three.

The *Corsair* pilot added power above idle to complete his right turn. As the A-7 traveled through 40 degrees of



turn, the director passed control of it to the Fly 3 petty officer who was situated to the right of the A-7 just ahead of the number four cross-deck pendant.

As the *Corsair's* nose passed through 90 to 120 degrees of turn, tail exhaust swept across the area where the *Intruder's* starboard side final checker was positioned. The tailpipe was 25 feet from the checker. He was knocked down by the exhaust and began sliding on his back, feet first, toward the tail of the *Intruder*.

At the 120-degree point, the *Corsair* lost momentum and momentarily stopped. The A-7's exhaust was pointed at the downed checker for one to two seconds. The *Corsair* continued the turn, at which time the nose went out of limits. The aircraft jerked to the right about three feet.

The *Corsair's* director then saw the checker sliding and signaled the A-7 to stop. The checker continued to slide on his back directly toward the tail area of the *Intruder* awaiting launch at full power.

As the checker entered the exhaust flow from the A-6, he was accelerated aft at a tremendous rate, slamming into the JBD. The exhaust flow carried him up and over the deflector about 20 feet above the flight deck and over the side into the sea. He was retrieved within minutes by a whale boat from an escort ship, but CPR failed and the checker was pronounced dead after two hours of resuscitative efforts.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Ole Gramps has a special place in his heart for the men who work the flight deck. And it breaks that heart to lose one like this. The people who keep 'em flyin' are the very strength of Naval Aviation. We can't afford to lose a single one!

Communications were poor during this aircraft move, and one of the directors lacked the necessary experience to operate without supervision during high-tempo flight deck ops.

We talk about problems with "situational awareness" in the sky. Problems of situational awareness on the flight deck sure played a part in this awful loss. The hard, hot wind that comes out the blow torch end of jet machines is brutal, strong and merciless. If it's not vectored in the right direction, it can kill.

Some of the troops involved in this accident had to be tired. They were working on four hours of sleep and had been up for 10 to 11 hours straight. There ain't much we can do about this, except to appreciate the problem, help each other out, and remember that the flight deck is one big danger zone with a lot of smaller danger zones inside it.

ATTENTION TO BRIEF!

A Naval Aviator recently lost his wings because of a flathatting mishap in the helicopter he was flying. He deviated from the assigned mission to fly around a friend's house. The helo developed power difficulties, ran into power lines, and landed safely, although the aircraft was damaged (class B).

Amazingly, he told the flight leader during the preflight brief that he intended to proceed to the friend's house. The flight leader let it happen!

C.O.'s: Would the climate of professionalism in your outfit lead to such a breach of conduct? If there is any doubt, you had better turn those attitudes around, and fast!