

Phantom's Final Landing

The F-4J *Phantom* crew briefed for a night field carrier landing practice (FCLP) sortie which was to be preceded by an instrument round-robin flight to an adjacent Far East air base. The flight to destination and return to NAS home base was uneventful except for a slow aircraft wing fuel transfer.

The *Phantom* entered the NAS WestPac FCLP pattern shortly after dark and was soon joined by another squadron aircraft. The two *Phantom* crews performed five touch-and-go FCLP landings, each under LSO control. As the fifth touch-and-go landing was completed, a flight of three A-7E *Corsair IIs* radioed the tower from the VFR initial point and requested entry into the FCLP pattern. The LSO and tower controller briefly discussed the need to have the two F-4Js make their next landings to a full stop or exit the pattern in order to make room for the scheduled A-7 flight. The lead *Phantom* had started its downwind turn as the A-7 flight reported over the approach end of the runway. Tower instructed the A-7s to take interval between the two F-4s — behind the F-4J, turning on the downwind leg and in front of the *Phantom* on short final. The A-7 flight maintained runway heading at 1,600 feet MSL for roughly 30 seconds. The flight then individually broke at established intervals and entered the FCLP pattern.

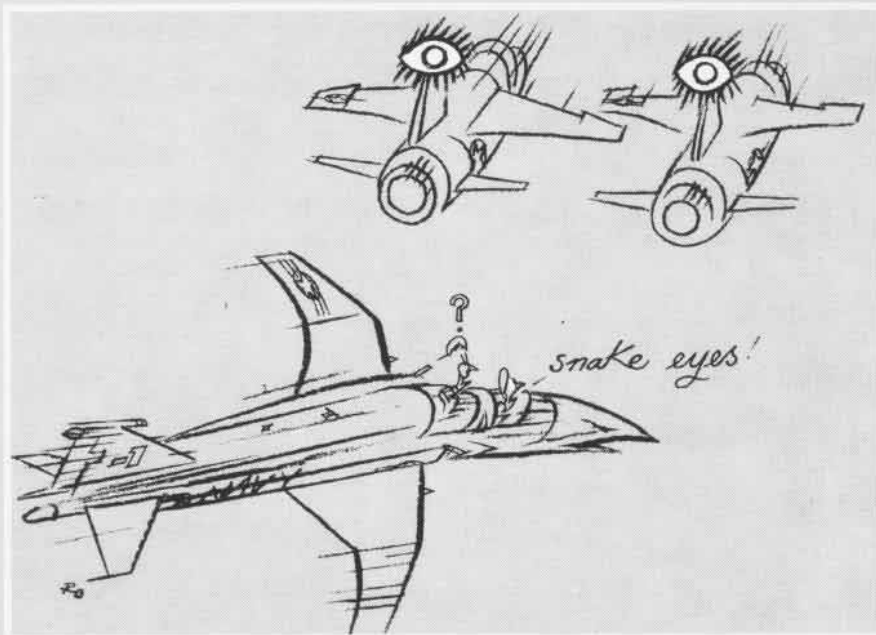
The *Phantom* crew which was on short final had now completed their sixth touch-and-go landing. Their next landing would be a final to a full stop. On lift-off, the RIO directed his attention outside to the left to gain sight of the A-7 interval.

The pilot had established the aircraft in a positive rate of climb and transitioned from the gauges to an outside visual scan passing through 400 feet. The *Phantom* was now in a six-o'clock-low position on the two upwind A-7s. Suddenly the pilot became concerned over what he believed to be a pair of wing lights closing at 12 o'clock, less than a quarter-mile away and level. As he keyed the radio mike to relay his concern to the RIO, the two wing lights ahead appeared to separate rapidly, indicating a rapid closure rate and pending midair collision. An

immediate evasive maneuver was initiated. The pilot felt that he had insufficient airspeed to perform a zoom climb maneuver. Therefore, he pushed the stick forward, rolled to the right and reduced power.

In the immediacy of the situation, the pilot did not tell the RIO what was happening. The RIO, busily looking for pattern traffic and anticipating a left turn to downwind, was surprised by the severe evasive maneuver to the right. He keyed the ICS mike button to ask the pilot what was going on. Neither crewman had selected "hot mike." The pilot never responded to the RIO as he was concentrating on regaining control of the *Phantom*, which had developed a significant sink rate and a 30 to 40-degree, right-wing-down attitude. Sensing slow airspeed, low altitude and sink rate, the pilot advanced both throttles to military. His scan remained outside and did not reference the flight instruments as he sought to control the aircraft. The pilot corrected the right bank with lateral stick only. No rudder was applied because he normally flew the FCLP pattern with his feet off the rudder pedals. The pilot overcontrolled and rolled into a 15-degree left bank. Back stick was applied to stop the sink rate, but nose response was sluggish. Afterburner was then selected to speed the recovery effort. The RIO, also looking outside the aircraft and seeing the ground coming up rapidly, was now gravely concerned about the violent attitude changes. He again asked the pilot what the deuce was happening, but received no response. The pilot, having difficulty getting the throttles into afterburner, directed





his attention inside the cockpit for a look at the throttle quadrant. The aircraft rolled into a right bank as the pilot was struggling to get the throttles into the afterburner detent. The RIO, unable to get a response and not knowing if the pilot had control of the wild *Phantom*, became increasingly apprehensive with the severe maneuvering, detectable sink rate and low altitude.

During the second right-wing-down maneuver, the RIO could clearly see the runway taxi lights and adjacent ground and felt positively that a collision with the ground was imminent. He waited a few seconds until the *Phantom* approached a wings-level attitude and initiated command ejection at 200 feet AGL. The crewless *Phantom* continued in a wings-level, descending flight for another 2,000 feet, then touched down on the parallel taxiway in a nose-low, slightly wing-down attitude. It crossed the taxiway, jumped a drainage ditch, and came to rest inverted and aflame approximately 900 feet from the initial touchdown on the taxiway. The two crewmen had escaped uninjured.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy falling *Phantoms*, gents! This tragic example of a failure to communicate almost cost these two young aviators their lives. Fortunately, the RIO's grave concern saved them from a potential real final landing!

Under the assumption that a mid-

air collision was pending, this inexperienced aviator maneuvered his aircraft into a situation where he apparently could not regain control, particularly when he wouldn't use all the parts of the aircraft provided. The pedals were put in there to push on for coordinated flight. Please use 'em! The pilot had a color vision deficiency which may have led to his erroneous interpretation of aircraft lights and unnecessary maneuvering which resulted in uncontrollable flight. His visual deficiency may have led him to think that the tail lights of the two A-7s as they split for interval were rapidly closing wing lights.

The RIO was not able to get his pilot's attention or response and, more correctly, was not willing to hang around to see what was going to happen next. However, the RIO or any other crew member who does not insist upon adherence to directives is equally accountable. Directives require that the ICS be on "hot mike" when maneuvering below 2,500 feet. Had he been able to communicate, the RIO possibly could have coached the pilot through a successful recovery of the aircraft.

Fortunately, the RIO's grave concern and quick action saved these lads from the finality of the dreaded "final landing."

Gramps is My Conscience

Last year a fleet squadron junior aviator passed on to Old Gramps a note which his Executive Officer had

published in the plan of the day.

The note read:

"I'm certain most of you have seen Grampaw Pettibone [articles] in *Naval Aviation News*. Well, Grampaw Pettibone is my personal conscience. Whenever I am stuck with *get-home-itis* or the temptation to do something I know is dumb, I can just see Gramps' comment in my mind's eye: 'Great Jumping Jehoshaphat! How a seasoned aviator who ought to know better can get himself in such a predicament is beyond me. Takin' a shortcut to save time...!' My imaginary notoriety at the hands of Grampaw Pettibone has saved me more than once. So, take the time and use your common sense — listen to your own Grampaw Pettibone. Don't assume someone else will stop it — he may be thinking the same thing! Let's keep our years of accident-free flying intact and, more important, let's have none of our people hurt or killed by doing dumb things on the job or at home. Be careful, be smart and be safe!"

Old Gramps wanted to share the X.O.'s note with the hope of recruiting more personal consciences to help make this new operating year one of the safest ever for Naval Aviation.

As we climb back in the saddle for another yearly run for the roses, we might profit from a brief look at 1982 which was an outstanding year — one of our very best, in fact.

However, we still experienced unnecessary loss of aircraft and aircrews due to violations of some basic Gs, such as:

Gas — Land before your last gulp.

Gear — Get 'em down 'fore the ground.

Goo — Avoid IFR conditions on VFR clearances.

Guts — Too much often have terminal *ground effects*.

We had four or five aircraft run out of gas. One other flamed out on landing rollout. We continue to land wheels-up and go aground in the goo while on VFR. And, can you believe we still have flathatters!!!

Let's recruit safety consciences from all quadrants and attempt to make this year an even better one than last.