

Paddles Partners

An A-7 squadron landing signal officer (LSO)-in-training was relaxing in the ready room after working on the platform. After a time, he looked up at the television monitor and noted that the PLAT (pilot landing aid television) crosshairs were on the screen. The LSO proceeded to air operations where an officer told him that a *Corsair* was returning to the ship with total fuel transfer failure. The incoming bird had 1,200 pounds of fuel available. Calls rang out for the air wing LSO — CAG Paddles — to assist in this emergency recovery. Realizing that the platform was unmanned, the LSO-in-training hurried topside to help.

En route, he joined up with his LSO team leader, an F-14 pilot, in the latter's ready room and the two were soon on the platform. Neither were technically "air wing qualified." They turned on equipment, checked NATOPS for necessary information, established communications and adjusted the lens.

They verified the incoming *Corsair's* final approach speed and fuel state and determined that the A-7 was safely below max trap weight.

Still, there was concern on the platform because CAG Paddles had not arrived. They could not "legally" bring aboard the ailing bird. The air boss inquired if the platform was manned and ready. The LSO-in-training explained who was on the platform and advised that an extensive search was under way for a wing qualified LSO. Weather was clear with 10 miles visibility.

The incoming A-7 pilot called at the eight-mile point with intentions to dirty up at three miles. The LSOs on the platform triple-checked the lens settings, ensured that they were targeting the *Corsair* for the correct wire (number two, with no four wire) and that they had a green (clear) deck. The two officers briefly discussed the use of the informative and mandatory calls should the A-7 go high and/or fast.

The *Corsair* reached four miles and just as the LSO-in-training picked up the phone to advise Primary that CAG Paddles had not yet arrived, the air wing LSO emerged onto the platform.

CAG Paddles took the pickle and the A-7 flew an OK pass to the number two cable.

Atlast, the deep-freeze is ending!



Grampaw Pettibone says:

The younger LSOs were relieved to see CAG Paddles arrive on the platform. At the same time, they were disappointed in not being able to complete the recovery. Ole Gramps likes this attitude. It's a little like team sports. If a first-stringer goes down, the sub must fill the gap. And if he fills it well, the team holds its own. If not, the team might very well lose.

These LSOs were willing and able to handle the emergency aircraft because they were well prepared, knew their stuff and had the right amount of "I'm gonna get the job done!" spirit, which is what Naval Aviation's all about.

It's not a bad idea, now and then, for each of us to look deep down within himself or herself and double-check the level of that Naval Aviation spirit — and the readiness to move up and forward when the call comes to do so.

Corsair Collision

Two A-7E pilots, a lieutenant and a lieutenant (jg), launched from NAS West Coast on a low-level navigation training flight as part of the fleet readiness squadron syllabus. Weather was relatively clear throughout the

route except for a forecast ceiling of 1,400 feet at the coast-in point.

The initial high-altitude portion of the flight was uneventful and about 45 minutes after takeoff the flight began its descent for the low-level phase. The *Corsair II* pilots terminated the IFR (instrument flight rules) segment of the flight plan while at 14,500 feet with the junior pilot in the lead, the instructor in trail, as briefed. The cognizant air traffic control center lost radar contact with the A-7s when they were at about 800 feet. The aircraft followed the coast northbound about two miles offshore and 500 feet above the water.

According to observers, the lead aircraft appeared to be flying straight and level. Number two, the lieutenant, was maneuvering side to side behind it. Number two commenced a left turn toward number one, starting from the right and slightly aft. The trailing A-7 then struck the lead aircraft at a high "angle off" of about 45 degrees from slightly underneath the lead. Both aircraft exploded simultaneously and plummeted into the sea offshore. Apparently, neither pilot attempted to eject.

Rescue helicopters were on the scene in minutes and although oil and debris were sighted, the pilots and the aircraft were lost.



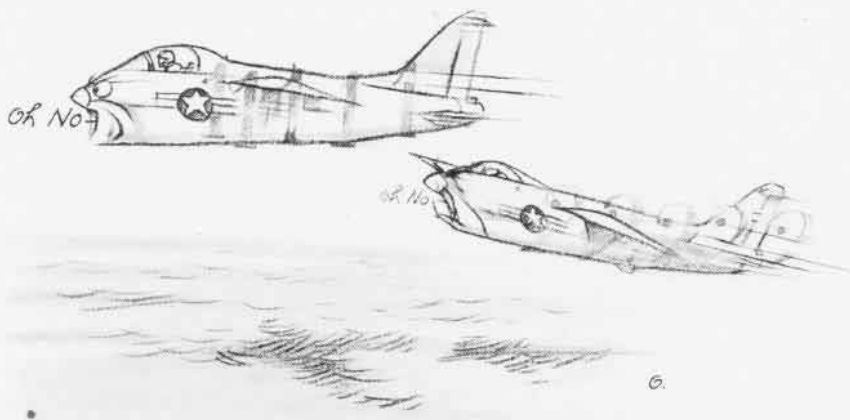
Grampaw Pettibone says:

Goldang it! It busts me up bad to lose two tough, dedicated flyers like this. The lieutenant, particularly, was known as a highly disciplined and professional instructor. He had flown chase on the same training route several times.

We don't know the precise cause of this awful midair collision. But it appears that the lieutenant might have momentarily lost situational awareness. Maybe he was doing something in the cockpit, lost lookout on lead and misjudged his closure rate.

No matter how professional, disciplined and skilled we get, human bein's make mistakes. And when you're in a fast movin' jet, down low, in company with one or more machines like your own, there just ain't room for mistakes.

Ole Gramps doesn't know what wisdom King Solomon would put out



on this one. All I can recommend is: remember what happened to these two men and, as best you can, guard against lettin' such a midair happen to you.

Lament of a "Turn Qual" Petty Officer

From a letter to Gramps:

"We need you to turn and spread 616." With due consideration to varying side numbers, this is a familiar command to a turn qualified sailor assigned to maintain H-3 *Sea Kings*. I keep trying to fix in my mind the warning the NATOPS (Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization) officer gave us in the quiet learning environment of the cockpit trainer. He said, "Don't let anyone rush you on a turn or talk you into doing something against NATOPS!"

We all know that life in the hectic real world of flight operations can make this a difficult tenet to abide by. Once my flight deck chief told me we had to "fold" an aircraft immediately and that we must use the battery start procedures to do so since no external power was readily available. As diplomatically as I could, I explained to the chief that battery starts were not permitted by turn qual personnel. The chief ordered me to battery start. I complied, of course.

On another occasion, prior to the start sequence, the LSE (landing signal enlisted) said that because the fire bottle was way across the flight line, we could use the aircraft's fire extinguisher instead. Another no-no. Another order to start anyway, without the proper fire bottle.

I also remember the maintenance chief who said, "You WILL spread the bird where it sits!" Well, where it sat was right beside an F-14 *Tomcat* which was directly in the blade path.

I realize that these are hard-working supervisory personnel but there are times when their only concern is "getting the job done" without regard to

the consequences. I think they're going to be with me in front of the investigation board trying to explain why an engine fire consumed a whole aircraft or why a rotor blade sliced through an F-14's canopy.

The turn qualified petty officer is in charge of the aircraft. It's his or her call in deciding if a procedure is safe or not. There are times when the operational tempo will cause someone to override proper procedures. Still, to my way of thinking, there is no substitute for good judgment, knowledge of procedures, a thorough preflight and, above all, a focus on safety.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Good points, well taken. Cuttin' corners is as mean a temptation as that rosy apple in the garden. Truth is, you can get away with hurryin' and skippin' certain procedural steps. But when such mistakes catch up with you, there's all kinds of fire and brimstone. It ain't worth it. All hands should take up this young writer's message. The rules have a purpose and that purpose is safety.

It makes you sweat to read it!

