

Into the Valley

The pilot and aviation observer (AO) of an OV-10 were scheduled to fly a mission in support of a Marine ground unit. When the unit cancelled the support requirement, the *Bronco* crew requested they be allowed to fly a local flight. They also requested a 30-minute extension of flight time with a takeoff at 1130 vice 1200 as originally scheduled. The mission changes were approved by the C.O.

At about 1030 the pilot called his mother who lived near the base and told her he would fly over her house. The crew did not leave planned route information with the duty officer. During preflight, the plane captain overheard the pilot and AO talking about flying over a mountain range in the area.

The pilot made a wider than normal turnout after takeoff and rocked his wings over his mother's house before continuing the climbout.

In the next hour and a half, witnesses sighted the OV-10 at various points and at low altitude over the mountainous area. About an hour and 45 minutes after the *Bronco's* takeoff, a passenger in an airliner saw black smoke emanating from a mountain-side at a point about 1,000 feet from the top of a canyon.

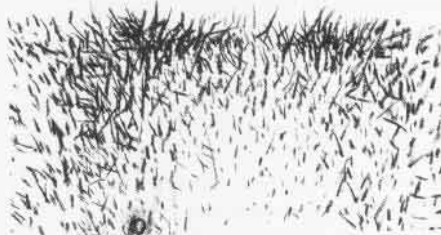
The smoke dissipated before initial search aircraft arrived and there were no signs of wreckage. The aircraft was declared missing and a major search effort got under way. Two weeks later, a civil air patrol pilot spotted the wreckage. Both crew members were dead. Recovery and investigation of the mishap began.

The OV-10 presumably became entrapped in a box canyon. The crew had ejected but both men died of thermal burns, apparently having descended into the fireball caused by the crash of the aircraft into the mountain.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Recipe for death: Begin with timeless desire to flathat; season with a measure of carelessness! Seems the *Bronco* was flyin' low and the floor of a canyon rose up at



'em. The crew ran out of power and ejected too late.

Looking into the past, investigators learned that the mishap pilot had had bitter marital problems which took a lot of time to resolve. His relatively poor flight and job performance were, in part, attributed to them. He was known to remove himself from the flight

schedule with regularity. He ended up with less flight time than counterparts.

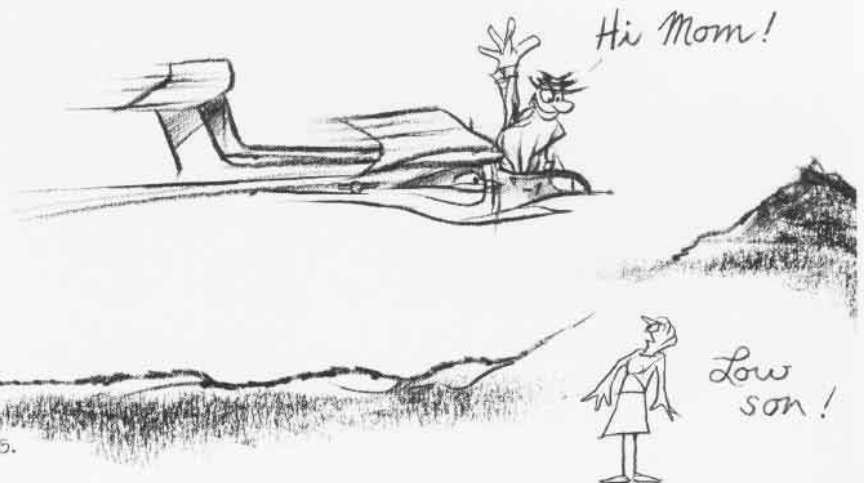
On the "rough" write-up following one NATOPS (Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization) check flight, his performance was considered weak, but the "smooth" form didn't reflect the deficiencies. One officer admitted he refused to fly with the mishap pilot but said nothing until just before transferring from the squadron. There seemed to be no written documentation to many of the criticisms directed at the pilot, although he was counseled by seniors.

Occasionally, he did fly a good hop and stayed with the program. For a period prior to the accident, the pilot seemed to have turned things around. Marital difficulties had subsided and his overall performance improved significantly.

The night before the crash, the pilot had remarked to his roommate that he was "stressed out" about his ground job, but investigators did not deem this a factor in the accident.

Maybe not. But somewhere along the line the higher-ups shoulda taken a tougher stand on this aviator. He was often marginal at best in the air, even with the improving performance toward the end.

In Naval Aviation, as elsewhere,



we are our brother's keeper.

Seniors have got to understand that.

But Ole Gramps has known for years that no power on earth can stop some people from the cardinal sin of flathatting.

Lights, Rumbles, Action!

A flight of three TA-4s was on an air combat maneuvering training flight. The first three air-to-air engagements were uneventful. But prior to the fourth, noting a 20-percent oil light with oil pressure decreasing from 30 to 0 psi, the instructor in the third aircraft transmitted, "Knock it off." The pilot noticed the oil pressure decrease about three seconds after he saw that the low oil light was on. Because he and his student Naval Aviator were looking out of the cockpit, it is uncertain how long the light was on before oil pressure decreased. The pilot left the power at 88 percent.

Prior to illumination of the light, neither the instructor nor the student pushed the oil test light to check oil quantity.

The flight leader detached the solo student in the second *Skyhawk*, told him to orbit five minutes, then to proceed directly to home base about 50 miles away.

An outlying field, closed for normal operations but equipped with E-28 arresting gear in battery for emergency use, was 34 miles distant in the general direction of home base.

Number three turned toward home base and asked the student to read off procedures from the checklist for oil malfunctions and for controlled ejection.

The flight leader declared an emergency and requested to proceed directly to home base. Number three was at 9,000 feet, the flight leader in three-mile trail, closing toward the *Skyhawk* in trouble.

Number three radioed his intentions to shoot a straight-in arrested precautionary approach at home base. Moments later, the flight leader was in parade position on number three and told number three there was oil on the TA-4's tailpipe. Number three reported zero oil pressure but engine exhaust temperature OK.

A little later the flight leader reported



that oil appeared to be leaking from the aft hell hole. The flight was now just under 8,000 feet.

A couple of minutes later, at 7,000 feet, the flight leader radioed that the outlying field was just off to the left, about seven miles away. Number three told approach control he was now proceeding to the outlying field.

At about 6,000 feet, number three heard a rumbling sound emanating from the engine. He continued the descent and was on centerline at 5,000 feet, in the precautionary approach, when the flight leader saw that number three was on fire. The flight leader also saw a compressor part depart the aircraft just above its right wing. Number three felt a thud.

The descent continued. Two miles short of the runway, with gear and flaps down, 200 knots airspeed, thrust deteriorated and rpm rolled back through 50 percent. Number three was now at 600 feet.

At no time did either number three or his student Naval Aviator notice an engine fire light on.

At about one mile from the approach end, the pilot initiated command ejection, with his left hand pulling the lower handle and his right hand on the control stick. The survival equipment functioned properly. Once on the ground, the survivors got together and communicated with the flight leader using their PRC-90 radios.

The *Skyhawk* exploded on impact

and was destroyed.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Oil starvation, possibly caused by a problem with the engine gearbox drain hose, caused the engine to quit and forced the *Skyhawk* out of the sky. Not much a pilot can do about that. Power plant failures are rare nowadays, but they do happen. And when they do – when warnin' lights light and rumblin' sounds push your heart up your throat – you best be ready.

The trusty TA-4, in this case, mighta been saved. It wasn't until four and a half minutes after the problem began that number three decided to go for the outlying field. The flight leader also failed to direct number three to the nearest suitable field – which was the outlying field – at the beginnin' of the emergency. Which is what the book calls for!

Think about it! All they needed was an extra mile! A little change in course early on coulda made the difference between egressin' the machine by way of a boot in the behind a few hundred feet up in the sky, or climbin' out nice and easy while the bird was on the ground.

Ole Gramps is happy as heaven that the fliers made it, though!