

### Tigercat Tangle

*This mishap report was discovered adrift in some old Naval Aviation History Office files and comprises an account, circa January 1948, involving Grumman F7F-1N Tigercats. Following is a statement by Marine Corps Aviator MSgt. D. R. Francisco, who ferried one of the Tigercats from NAF Weeksville, N.C., to NAS Atlanta, Ga.*

Lieutenant Commander McCollum, MSgt. Castles, and I test hopped our planes on Monday. We took off for Atlanta but had to return because one of the engines on LCdr. McCollum's Tigercat was cutting out. McCollum said he would fly my aircraft to Atlanta while I stayed behind for repairs to his plane. Castles and I would then proceed, assuming weather was clear.

On Tuesday, Castles and I took off for Knoxville, Tenn., but after 30 minutes in the air had to come back because of rain and instrument conditions. Plus, my beam receiver was noisy and garbled. Castles' plane required a plug change.

We couldn't launch on Wednesday due to bad weather.



Thursday morning, Castles and I took off for Atlanta but had to return because of lost oil pressure. I extended my wheels but had to use both hands

to push the stick forward for landing. I got the aircraft down OK but when an inspector checked the baggage compartment, he could find no reason for the controls to bind. Later, I had a new battery installed because the plane wouldn't start. I also told Castles that my beam receiver wasn't working. He said his was, so that same Thursday we took off for Atlanta via Goldsboro, N.C., and Columbia, S.C., to avoid a front moving in from the west.

Southeast of Columbia we turned west. We passed over Athens, Ga., and I still had about 60 gallons of gas, flying at 1,500 rpm and 26 inches of manifold pressure. I figured Castles and I would reach Atlanta in about 20 minutes.

We kept on the lookout for Stone Mountain and when my gas gage read 30 to 35 gallons, I started to look for a place to land. Visibility was restricted due to smoke. Since a mountain loomed ahead of me, I made a 20-degree right turn to avoid it. But the weather looked bad ahead and I saw a town to the right, though I didn't recognize it from my chart. I descend-



*The sit down Comic!*

ed and dragged the town for an airport but couldn't find one. I then dragged a highway north of town and decided to set the plane down on it. But there was a car on the road so I did a 180 to land on the road going the other way.

I set the F7F down under power. I turned all switches off on the roll-out, got tangled in some telephone lines, and took them across the highway with me. The telephone poles were about 15 to 20 feet on each side of the highway.

I applied brakes and after about 100 yards, a tire blew. The *Tigercat* swerved to port and I hit the right brake hard, trying to keep it straight. But the plane then swung right and skidded sideways until I went off into a three-foot dip.

I got out of the airplane and waited for help. The State Highway Patrol arrived and stood by the aircraft while I called NAS Atlanta. Then I stood guard until the National Guard arrived. The Navy representative from Atlanta got there about midnight. We met at the police station where MSgt. Castles and myself were waiting. We returned to NAS Atlanta, arriving at 0700.



#### Grampaw Pettibone says:

Old Gramps can only assume the *Tigercat* lived to fly again. Seems to me the MSgt. did OK, 'though I'm awful curious about why the stick wouldn't go forward with the landing wheels down.

Anyway, once in a while it's nice to look back and see how it was in the good old, gentler days. I guess LCdr. McCollum made it. We know Francisco pulled through. But did Castles also land on the road?

#### Gramps' Mailbag

*The following letter is from retired Commander David C. Shelby.*

Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! Yesterday, I picked up the January-February 1992 issue of *Naval Aviation News*. This is the first one that I have gotten my hands on since retiring in 1984. I immediately turned to your section. You've lost some of your fire! I think that you're getting mellow in your old age. During my 23 years in Naval Avia-

tion, you were always very feisty and intolerant about human errors in aircraft accidents/incidents.

I thought you were especially easy on the "Orion Ordeal." I flew P-3s for 10 years and understand what the crew was doing.

I remember an old sea dog named Captain "Tex" Coleman, my patrol wing commander, saying that the reason the Navy had a flight demonstration team was to do just that. No other unit had a demonstration mission of any kind! The rest of us

were there to carry out our unit's mission to the best of our abilities. Static displays and fly-bys were OK, because they are not demonstrations. How many people would have been impressed if this accident had taken place during the scheduled "...official demo at an air station."? How many times must we repeat this type of folly?

Where was this aviator's supervisor? Was the copilot blind or asleep? Who authorized the official demo in the first place?

