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12 Semper Paratus

Ltjg. Timothy Kinsella

Running through hoist-failure scenarios pays off for this H-46 crew.

14 Creatures of Habit

Lt. Loren Romeus

The old interrupted-preflight bugaboo haunts these aviators, and dramatically interrupts their flight.

16 Is This How They Do It in the Fleet?

Lt. Ralph Smith

Damn the fog banks, full speed ahead – we’ve got to get this helo back to the squadron.

18 Dual-Piloted Partial-Panel

Ltjg. Paul Desaulniers

You’ll always have at least one good set of instruments, right? No. And when you find that out, it will probably be under a low ceiling, on a very dark night.

20 Suspicion Becomes Reality

Lt. Ben Hewlett

S-3 swallows an APU exhaust, diverts, and hook-skips the short-field arresting gear. Then things get colorful.

22 Silent Night

Lt. Chris Petrock

Hornet goes NORDO just after a night launch.

24 My Day on the Deck

Lt. Andy Collier

They can’t possibly be that dumb. Can they? Yes they can.

26 Roll Out the Barrel, We’ll Have a Barrel of...Yikes!

Lt. Mark Lucas

Botching a barrel roll and bottoming out at 1,800 feet. It does get better than this.

28 OK, That’s Enough ACM...

Lt. Chris Baumstark

A Tomcat departs three times below 5,000 feet.

31 Getting into the Zone

Ltjg. Dwight Clemons

VAQ-136 bans paperwork during the final 30 minutes before a flight so the aircrew can concentrate.

departments

32 On the Cat

IBC Air Wing Milestones

Convertible Mentor

by LCdr. Sean Clark

We took off out of NAF El Centro on a beautiful day. The first order of business was a takeoff roll at less than 700 feet. “What were the winds again?” I wondered. “Oh well, as long as they’re straight down the runway, who cares?” Just another great day to be flying VFR in our high-performance T-34.

My copilot and I had briefed with the strike lead that we were going to low-safe while we were in the Chocolate Mountains. We mounted up for the 20-minute flight to the restricted area.

We climbed to our VFR cruising altitude of 7,500 feet and contacted Yuma Range to check into the target area. Everything about this flight reminded me of the hundreds of similar flights I’d flown during the past three years. . . until we started to enter the Blue Mountain Airfield area.

We cruised comfortably into the area, started to cross the Chocolate Mountain ridge line, and promptly ran into a little turbulence. I’m talking the normal turbulence that we

I looked in my rearview mirror to see my copilot pulling his head back into the cockpit. His inertial reel had failed, and his head had burst through the canopy.

feel almost every day out here in the West flying our T-34s, but that’s where the similarities stopped. Reaching the downwind side of the ridge, the aircraft felt like it was falling out of the sky.

“This can’t be happening to the Mentor,” I thought. “It’s too high-performance for that!” My next thought was that the wind blast was odd. Then I wondered what this plexiglas was doing in my lap.

No sooner was the aircraft flying again than I looked in my rearview mirror to see my copilot pulling his head back into the cockpit. His inertial reel had failed, and his head had burst through the canopy. I asked the obvious questions: “Are you OK? Did you get cut? Can you still move your head?” I began to slow down the aircraft to minimize the wind blast; 120 knots seemed to work well. I figured we’d better turn around and go back to El Centro.

The flight back seemed to take an eternity, no doubt due to the 40 to 50 knots of wind now in our faces, combined with the 120 knots we maintained to keep down the wind blast. Let’s see, that would be a total of 70 knots ground speed. Kind of like driving down the freeway with your convertible top down.



photo composite by Yvonne Dawson

The approach and landing back into NAF El Centro were uneventful, albeit extremely slow. Our ground speed on approach was a whopping 65 knots! Once comfortably back in the ready room, I began to research mountain flying and light aircraft. As a jet aviator, I hadn't thought much about the effects of wind. But as a light-prop aviator, I realized that I'd better start thinking again. I hit the books and went to work. Interestingly, the Federal Aviation Administration has dedicated a whole section to mountain flying in the FAR/AIM.

Here are some of the highlights and recommendations:

- Don't fly a light aircraft near mountains when the winds at your proposed altitude exceed 35 miles per hour.
- Expect winds to be of much greater velocity over mountain passes than reported a few miles from them.
- Approach mountain passes as high as possible.
- Don't fly near or above abrupt changes in terrain. Expect severe turbulence, especially in high winds.

The FAA also suggests that when you approach a mountain ridge, you should fly a 45-degree angle to the horizontal direction of the ridge. You'll find it easier to retreat from the ridge with less stress on the aircraft if you run into severe turbulence and downdrafts. If you encounter severe turbulence, reduce power and adjust pitch until your aircraft approaches maneuvering speed, then adjust power and fly away from the turbulence.

We learned a lot of things the day we created the convertible Mentor. The main thing was to respect your environment. Something as simple as wind can wreak havoc on your otherwise beautiful day. Had we been just a little closer to the ground, we could have crashed. 🦅

LCdr. Clark was attached to VMFA-101 as an instructor when this incident took place. He flies with VFA-201 as a reservist.