

Feline Frequent Flyer, Or The Cat's Meow

By 1stLt. Bryan E. Trinkle, USAF

On the afternoon of Sept. 12, 2002, an instructor and two VT-31 students just had completed a routine T-44A instrument-training hop in the South Texas area. The three-hour flight included approaches and touch-and-goes at NAS Corpus Christi, NAS Kingsville, Kleberg Co. and Alice.

When all the training objectives were completed, the aircraft commander full stopped at Corpus Christi. As the props were winding to a stop, the Raytheon lineman heard a loud and uncharacteristic sound. The crew completed the secure checklist and began the aircraft postflight, with the lineman in search of the problem.

The flying and ground crew uncovered the problem, and it wasn't an unknown mechanical failure. The strange sound the lineman had heard was the terrified "meow" of a greasy brown and gray kitten in the left, aft wheelwell of the Pegasus. No one knows when or why the kitten found the landing-gear crossmember to be a suitable place to pass the time. Perhaps the most amazing thing is the kitten avoided falling to its death from the wheelwell—considering the open gear doors and approach speeds of 150 knots. The kitten survived seven touch-and-goes, a max reverse, and a full-stop landing. If cats could talk, we only can imagine what this one would say. This story shows even a good preflight cannot cover all possibilities

or mitigate all risks.

The student pilot now has a new pet. When asked about it, he remarked it was the best flight he'd ever had and wanted to keep the cat for luck.



1stLt. Trinkle flies with VT-31. The student pilot keeping the cat is Ens. Brian Williams.

