

Buckeye Brake Failure

By Lt. C. A. Godlewski

Our division was scheduled for an early morning launch. We briefed the standard division-training flight, except that we would launch and recover as sections because of the weather conditions. The flight would join in the area via a TACAN rendezvous. The weather was 1,000 feet overcast, and the latest PIREP reported clear above 4,000 feet. The forecast called for degrading weather conditions an hour after our scheduled land time.

The division taxied as two sections to the duty

runway; I was lead of the second section. We conducted a section takeoff and broke out at 4,000 feet as expected. I gave my wingman a courtesy fuel-transfer check, then kicked him into cruise position. Atlanta Center cleared us into the MOA, and we conducted the TACAN rendezvous with the other section. The division leader then balanced the flight and began the training sequence.

We soon finished the sequence and headed home with 100 pounds of gas above our bingo. ATIS reported the weather had dropped to 700 and 2 with mist, 100

feet above TACAN-circling minimums. The weather was deteriorating sooner than we had anticipated.

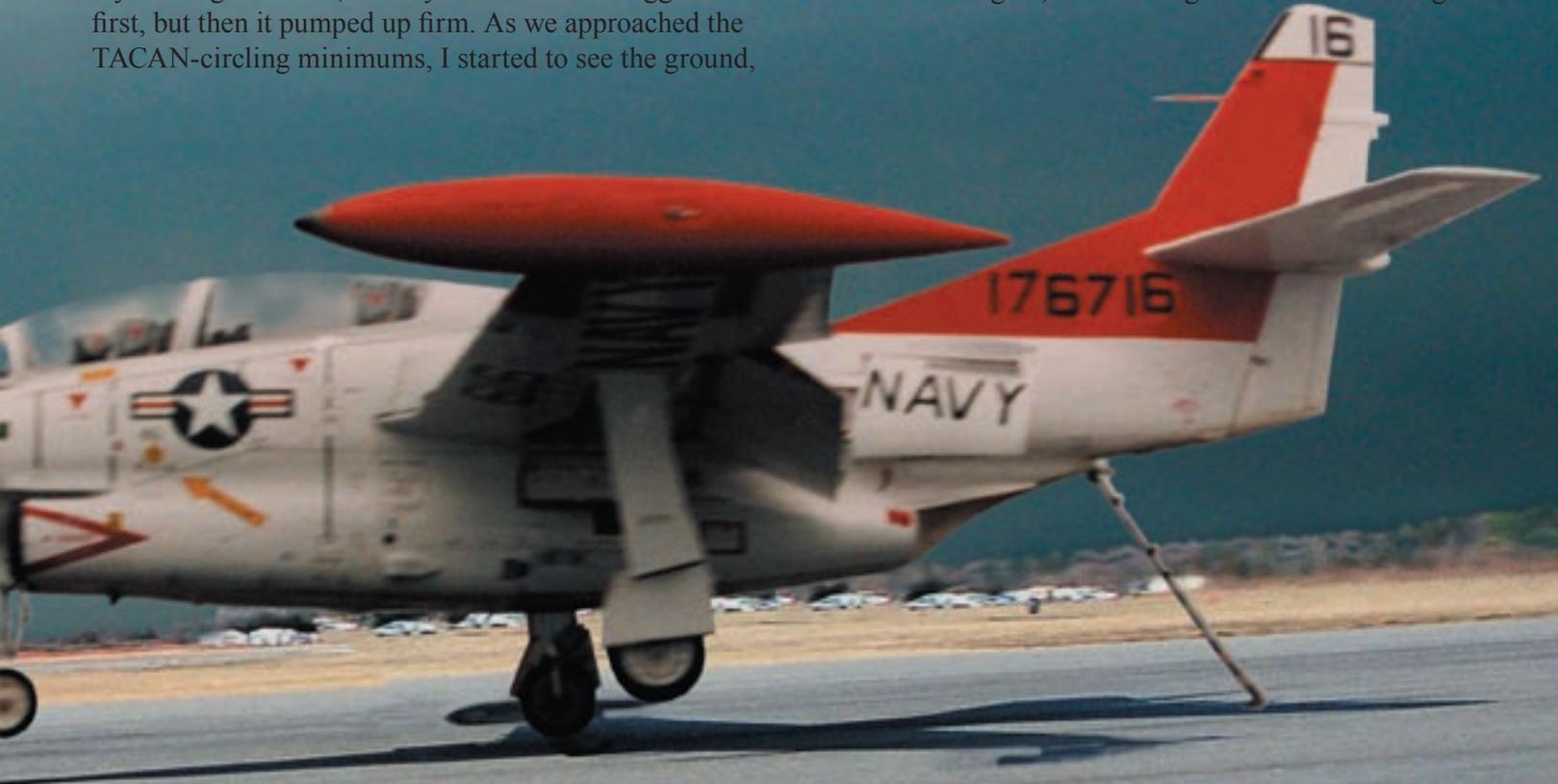
On our initial check-in with Atlanta Center, the division leader requested our clearance back to base. He told the controller we wanted to recover as two sections and requested an IFR clearance for my section. Our leader also wanted my section to recover first because I had the lowest fuel state. After Center passed the clearance to my section, the division leader kissed us off, and we headed home.

We checked in with Meridian Approach Control and were sent to a holding fix, with no expected clearance time—just hold as published. Holding was not what I wanted to hear with the degrading weather and getting low on gas. While heading to the fix, we heard a call that a T-45 was having an emergency, and they were clearing out the airspace for his approach. I hoped the T-45 soon would be on deck because a quick calculation of my fuel state revealed I would be at minimum after one turn in holding.

We entered and reported holding. On our first inbound leg, I called approach and declared minimum fuel. A few seconds later, the other section entered holding 1,000 feet above us and also declared minimum fuel. Moments later, Meridian Approach said my section was next for the approach and gave us a vector for base leg.

We dirtied-up above the weather after rolling out on a 12-mile final and descended into the goo. I ran my landing checklist, and my left brake felt sluggish at first, but then it pumped up firm. As we approached the TACAN-circling minimums, I started to see the ground,

I decided to go for the long-field gear and received clearance. I used my right brake to take centerline and, hopefully, to help slow me a little bit. I dropped the hook and checked my airspeed. The indicator showed 50 knots as I approached the long-field gear. My plan still was to ground loop the aircraft if I missed the gear. I also disengaged the idle stop, so the motors could be shut down to prevent FOD damage if I went off the prepared surface. As I crossed the gear, I felt the tug of the hook catching



and I knew we would break out soon. We broke out at 650 feet, and I had the field in sight, just 50 feet above minimums. I looked back to my wingman and signaled to see if he also had the field in sight—he did. I kissed him off and lined up on the left side of the runway. I tested my brakes on the rollout, and the left brake went to the floor. I pumped it to get pressure but to no avail. The right brake was working fine.

I didn't have many options, and only seconds remained to decide what to do. I could do a touch-and-go into the weather and come back around for another GCA to a short-field arrestment. Another option was to take my chances with a long-field arrestment—if my wingman could clear me for the gear. I was low on gas and didn't want to launch back into the worsening weather conditions. I could get back around, but it would be close with fuel. If I went for the long-field gear and didn't catch it, I could use my right brake and try a ground loop to a stop.

the wire, and the aircraft quickly stopped. What a relief.

When you only have a moment to decide what to do, you can rely on experience and training. Our NATOPS procedure for a brake failure discusses doing a touch-and-go and coming around for a short-field arrestment, or securing the motors and trying to stop or ground loop on the prepared surface.

In our squadron-formation brief, we discuss what to do in the event of a dual high-speed abort (or, in this case, a section full stop with a brake failure). Lead must pass up the gear to allow Dash 2 to use the gear, unless Dash 2 can stop short of the gear and allow lead to take the gear and centerline.

NATOPS and our squadron-formation brief covered this emergency and gave me (in a matter of seconds) two clear courses of action to choose from. Good training allowed us to accomplish our training mission and to get the aircraft and crew on deck and stopped. 

Lt. Godlewski flies with VT-9.