



Visions of us sliding down the runway on our belly danced in my head.

*by Lt. Teague Swalm*

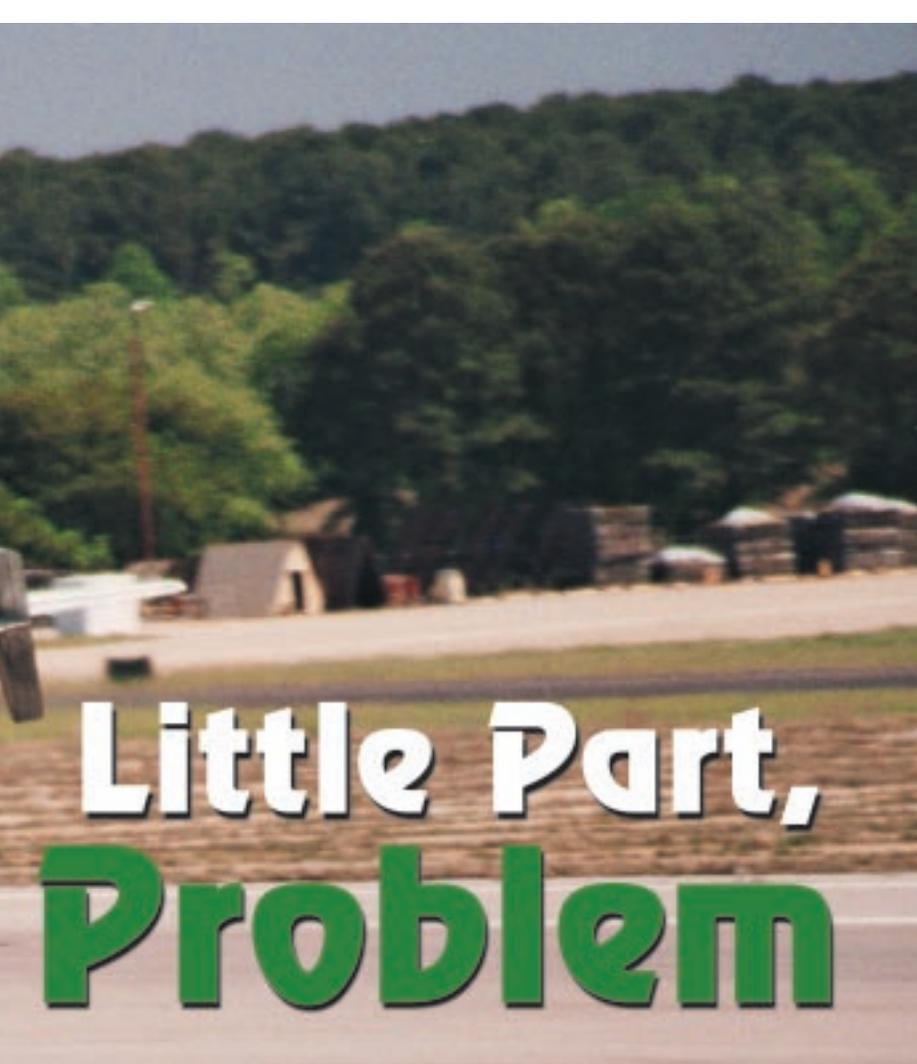
We were out for a leisurely two-hour flight. I was getting my annual instrument check along with a bit of proficiency flying. It was one of those days when Mother Nature couldn't make up her mind. We flew in and out of broken layers on multiple trips around the GCA box. We would have liked more pure instrument work, but all in all, a good day to fly.

We were on our fourth GCA, practicing a dual emergency: a no-gyro approach and a pitchlock on the port engine. The prop portion of the emergency simulated a power setting for which NATOPS recommends landing with the engine on-line. This, in conjunction with the required descent as we turned dog-leg to final, kept the aircraft just outside the limits of a configuration change until three miles from touchdown. With some out-of-balance flying, we managed to slow ourselves sufficiently, and

I reached for the gear handle. I called, "Gear speed," tugged on the handle, and, much to my disbelief, nothing happened. I gave another little pull, and again, nothing. My immediate response was to check between my ears for some forgotten big-ticket item when lowering the handle. Could it have been a locking spivot, a portable flamph, or a diverging sfetser valve? It had to be something I had done on so many other occasions when I dropped the gear. I couldn't figure out why it wasn't working. The handle, and hence the gear, weren't moving—so much for a relaxing evening.

The controller repeated his request: "Three down and locked?"

"Knock it off," I called throughout the aircraft and then told approach that things were rotten in Denmark. We now were reaching tower's airspace, so we told them of our predicament. Not wanting to say the "E" word



# Little Part, Problem

was free and seemed to work as advertised. Still, there was no way of knowing whether the same jam that prevented normal operation might inhibit emergency ops, and since the system is a one-time, all-or-nothing process, we didn't want to place all our eggs in that basket just yet. Back to the main handle we went.

The Hawkeye has rubber buffers in the track which protect the gear handle from FOD. Unfortunately, these

and have a flood of help, we simply stated that we required an overhead delta to troubleshoot a slight mechanical malfunction.

Visions of us sliding down the runway on our belly danced in my head. We broke out the big blue NATOPS, dialed up maintenance on a back radio, and with half-dozen airframers, set about finding a solution and coming home without incident. Through the pages of our PCLs, maintenance manuals, systems chapters, and the cobwebs of our minds, we searched for information that would settle our stomachs, but to no avail. NATOPS doesn't address this situation. What we needed was a competent mech and bag of tools to provide some hands-on help. What we tried was a few well-placed whacks, but the handle would not move. It was time to delve into uncharted territory: the workings of the handle itself.

One thing that did emerge quickly was that we might still have a usable emergency-blowdown system. Even though the main-gear handle was unmovable, the emergency handle

buffers also prevent putting eyeballs on the working mechanism of the handle. After minor surgery with my trusty knife, we finally got a visual on our nemesis. The trigger that prevents inadvertent lowering of the handle had broken off within the handle itself, preventing release of a spring-loaded latch, and hence the gear. Now things were looking up. Everyone at maintenance control listened as we passed, "Stand by, we may have a solution." We scoured the aircraft for something to gain some leverage. We settled on the male end of a grounding wire, tucked snugly within the ground-lock bag. I pried the latch, unlocked the handle, and, to everyone's relief, reported three down and locked.

Upon shutdown we were met by many an interested squadronmate. The piece that had failed is no bigger than a dime and simply failed due to fatigue. Upon inspection, the emergency system should still have been operational had we decided to play that card. 

Lt. Swalm flies with VAW-115.