

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE



A Forced Landing Epic of Selfless Heroism

The following are the highlights of an OS2N-1 forced landing at sea. The combination of personnel errors and selfless heroism mark it as of special interest and instructive value to aviation personnel.

When his engine lost power at 1,200 feet, the pilot devoted all his efforts toward locating the trouble, to the extent that he neglected to prepare to land. The pilot was knocked unconscious as a result of the hard, downwind landing. The airplane remained afloat approximately 2 minutes.

The pilot was *not* wearing his life jacket. It was stowed in the map case.

The radioman used the two minutes before the plane sank to the fullest advantage; he got the pilot out of the plane and located and put the life jacket on the pilot. The pilot regained consciousness shortly after the plane sank.

Due to his efforts in caring for the pilot, there was insufficient time for the radioman to get the life raft out of the plane before it sank. This was very serious for they were 70 miles from shore.

The pilot of the accompanying plane circled the crash and saw the two men in the water after the plane sank. He radioed the news of the crash and, noting that the survivors did not have a life raft, prepared to drop his raft.

There was considerable difficulty in extracting the raft from its stowage space, however, during which period the circling plane drifted downwind so far that the pilot could not again locate the men in the water. (The error in this case was in not dropping a smoke float or dye-marker to mark the scene of the crash.)

Meanwhile, the radioman had pulled the tabs on both life jacket dye-markers and had tied himself to the pilot with the dye-marker cord. (Searching planes did not fly near enough to see this dye before it dispersed.)

For some reason (probably because they hampered his movements) the radioman had removed his trousers and was swimming in his white shorts. This seemingly unimportant detail proved to be a great error when they were later attacked by sharks. The white legs and white shorts seemed especially attractive. On one attack the dye-marker cord was pulled loose, separating the two men.

[This report indicates that sharks, like other fish, may be attracted and may attack as a result of sight stimulus. Personnel are advised to remain fully clothed; particularly keep legs and arms covered.]

Further proof of the radioman's selfless heroism, if such be needed, is had from his attempt, after being attacked by sharks for six hours, to give his own life jacket to the pilot on the theory that by using two jackets the pilot could float completely on the surface and thus avoid attack. What a shipmate! What a man! [The Radioman has been recommended for a posthumous citation.]

Fortunately the position report sent back to base by the accompanying plane was so accurate that a VP boat, sent out to assist in the search, got close enough to the pilot about midnight to be attracted by his shouts. To the pilot, a lifetime had passed between the crash and his midnight rescue—it was exactly 15 hours.



Get a Snug Fit

A few pertinent remarks from the statement of a pilot involved in a mid-air collision in an F4F:

"As I had no control at all, I opened the hood and unfastened the safety belt. I had a tough time getting out, but finally succeeded in leaning out and grabbing the trailing edge of the right wing and heaving myself out. I guess by the time I had done this and pulled rip cord I was about 5,000 ft.



"There was one heck of a jolt as the 'chute opened, then I looked around and saw the plane crumpled on a hillside, and also that I was going to land in a nice hayfield. Then I noticed my leg was bent very funny, and it began to hurt like blazes. *The left leg strap had been too loose*, and had snapped my left thigh bone just below the pelvis. Every time the 'chute would oscillate, the leg would swing and I could feel the bone ends scraping each other. Boy, I don't think I've ever had a more agonizing ride.

"Then when I landed I fell right on the busted leg, and it was doubled under me. Luckily, there wasn't any wind, so the 'chute just collapsed there beside me. Then a bunch of civilians came over and did everything they could for me, but we were so far out in the wilds that the ambulance couldn't reach me for an hour, so I clawed up quite a bit of hayfield by the time it arrived."

Fixed Machine Gun Danger

"I entered an overhead run on a towed sleeve and fired my mid-guns," says an F4U-1 pilot. "At that moment I saw a distinct flash beyond the leading edge of the port wing and upon pulling out saw jagged metal protruding beyond the muzzle port of my port mid-gun. Finding the guns and the plane functioning normally, I completed my firing runs without incident. Visual

examination of the wing upon landing revealed the following damage: The aperture in the leading edge of the port wing through which the mid-gun fires was blasted open by an explosion. The blast tube was broken loose and the two adjacent ribs were badly bent."

COMMENT—It was fortunate that this pilot didn't shoot his own wing off and that the blast didn't rupture the wing fuel tank, bringing him down in flames. With 2,414 hours flying time, it would seem that the pilot was "old" enough to know the danger of firing his guns in this condition, unless absolutely necessary.

'Command' Performances

Marine Base Defense Air Group 43 reports that two intermediate student pilots with 20-odd hours each in F4F types recently turned in very creditable performances. The instances were cases of wheels popping out on an F4F and FM-1 respectively, from an overhead gunnery run.

In the first case the main compression strut was broken, allowing wheel and struts to dangle beneath the fuselage. The pilot was directed to make a water landing which he executed perfectly, escaping without a scratch. The Group Service Squadron, with the cooperation of NAS personnel from Sandy Beach, Calif., had the plane at NAS, San Diego, undergoing major overhaul in 24 hrs.



In the second case, the chain broke on one wheel of the landing gear but the compression strut and drag link did not appear to be actually broken. The pilot executed a one-wheel landing on the good wheel, allowing the weight of the plane to settle on the damaged gear. The landing was done so smoothly that the gear did not buckle, although it was held only by the force of the compression tube spring. Total damage to the aircraft was one broken chain and one compression strut changed as evidence of strain found at the weld.

COMMENT—Cases of wheels "popping" out are being investigated for possible structural defect and/or cockpit trouble. It would expedite correction of many defects if more details were included on ATR'S, or if a complete report covered all details.



Both the pilot and passenger walked away from this wrecked SNJ-4 which spun in from 100 feet—not because they were lucky, but *because* they were both wearing shoulder harnesses.

Blind Landing

While coming in for a night landing, an SBD pilot was momentarily blinded by the beam of the wheels-down signalman's flashlight. Instead of taking a voluntary wave-off, the pilot continued his approach and dropped in hard, causing extensive damage to the airplane.

The trouble board was of the opinion: 1 That the pilot was at fault for attempting to continue the landing after his vision had been impaired; 2 That the wheels-down signalman did not use the proper caution to avoid blinding the pilot with his light.

Canadian Custom Distresses Grampaw Pettibone

 I was very upset recently to learn of the brutal and inhuman treatment meted out to pilots at certain Canadian air stations. Naturally, some of their pilots, like ours, forget to lower their wheels when they come in to land. These hard-hearted Canadians, however, don't realize that this is merely a bit of tough luck which calls for sympathy and understanding; they arbitrarily claim it is pure negligence and proceed to haze the poor pilot.*

When the unfortunate crash victim has finished shaking his head over his wreck, he is presented with a "twin brother"—a

* To RCAF: This is Grampaw's ironic way of indicating approval of your system for preventing belly landings—Editor.



large rubber tire. They also give him a paddle with which to roll it. For a period, set by the Chief Instructor, this pilot and his new "relative" are inseparable. He must roll it with him wherever he goes; to classes, to the mess hall, to drills and side of his bed at night. And they insist that since the tire must remain on the station—the pilot must also stay aboard and look after it. The Canadians have a quaint idea that this barbarous treatment and the mental cruelty involved is a kindness and will prevent the pilot from ever again forgetting to put his wheels down when he lands and that this example will also act as an object lesson to prevent anyone else from doing it.

I know a lot of Canadian officers and they are all fine fellows. That's what makes this so hard to understand. But I'm mostly worried that some of our stations will pick up this idea and subject our pilots to these same indignities. I shudder when I think of it; the mental anguish these spirited, high-strung youngsters would have to endure! And the worst of it is, it probably wouldn't end there; pilots who forgot to shift gas tanks would be forced to run around with a spare gas selector valve, or a wooden one, showing everyone how it worked, and things like that.



I try to reason and reassure myself that it could never happen here, but I'm worried. Such things as forcing pilots to wear Jackass and Whale Banger medals are a bad omen. And just recently an ATR from OTU #2 at Jacksonville mentioned that a student who had made a wheels-up landing was being given "extra instruction" in the A&R shop every evening, helping to repair his plane. This sort of thing can grow! The next step will be to pin a Jackass Medal on the victim and make him roll his tire along, as he goes to his extra duty in A&R. And I'll bet the poor chap at Jax didn't get time-and-a-half for overtime.

I can only hope that the better nature of those in command positions will prevail to control this dastardly thing. Think not only of the poor pilot, but also of BuAer's spare parts list. It is based on a continued percentage of belly landings. To stop them suddenly would throw everything out of adjustment and create a terrific upset in planning.

And to you poor chaps under the gun, I can only give this advice: At the first indication that any such punishment is being considered, get together and nip it in the bud; double-cross it in its infancy! Here's the inside dope on how to do it—

DON'T LAND WITH YOUR WHEELS UP!