

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Moonlight and Roses

Many and varied are the pilot statements attached to accident reports, but few wax so eloquent as this Ensign who became lost while flying from Norfolk to Washington, D. C. with an attractive WAVE in the rear seat of his SNJ:

"As will become apparent, I planned within too limited a range. First I should have been airborne from Norfolk earlier. (He had departed with only an hour and fifteen minutes of daylight remaining.) Considering my limited experience, it would have been wiser to have departed Norfolk at 1530. At 1655 the sun set to my port and twilight fell beneath the scattered clouds above us.

"I received my last beacon signal shortly thereafter . . . with but thirty miles remaining I radioed Anacostia—but received no reply, although I could hear them calling other aircraft. Needle-ball was my primary instrument reference from then until my planned ETA. During this time I first veered to the East and later to the Northwest, passing between Washington and Baltimore. By 1710 I knew that I was off plan and that total darkness would set in within a matter of minutes.

"My flight experience of the past six months had been highly irregular. Comparative isolation from consistent practice in flying had been my fate . . . for concentrated scientific endeavor cut me away from that feeling akin to day-by-day flying which every experienced pilot refers to. I know that my relatively limited experience did not justify the risk I felt for my passenger's life . . . were I to take any other course of action than that which I now describe. I had made a mistake. I feel a strong responsibility for the lives of those who fly with me . . . because I've seen others killed in training for a lack of this responsibility. So it was clear cut. There was no doubt in my mind. Everything that I did from 1710 to the time of contact with the deck was directed to the best of my ability towards the safe delivery of the one passenger entrusted to me. This was my trend after realizing that my initial mistake could definitely become dangerous to someone besides myself. The surrounding ridges convinced me.

"I had hopes of sighting lights on



Stevens Field (7 miles north of Frederick). When I did not sight this field, I turned South and picked a field which presented the best visible appearance. This was almost two minutes before blackness. After making one pass at an altitude of five feet and approximately 60 knots airspeed, I turned North and then to the East from whence I made a power-on approach. I had put wheels and flaps down and opened the canopy before dragging the area and the wing and tail lights were turned on at sunset. The reflections from the running lights and exhaust lit the scattered snow of this field and aided depth perception materially. Obstacles on the downwind end of the field required a high approach. A cattle fence of wood and wire ran crosswind to the landing path. I knew that I would hit it, but was sure that no one would be injured. The landing was normal in all respects until the fence was intercepted."

 *Grampaw Pettibone says:* And as the first soft rays of moonlight break through the evening clouds and illuminate the wreckage, we find our happy survivors trudging hand in hand across the snow covered meadow. The friendly lights of a nearby farmhouse beckon to them. She pauses for a moment and whispers softly: "I will always remember this night. Even if they put you in hack, you will still be my hero." CUT.

All kidding aside, son, you're a hero in Grampaw's eyes too,—because you didn't pile one mistake on top of another. That's the thing that kills a lot of pilots. When they first find that they are lost, there may be a dozen ways out, but they are overcome by panic and make a series of wrong decisions from there on out. I think you sized up the situation pretty well. Certainly, in view of your limited flight experience, you had little to gain from wandering around in the dark and a lot to lose. Your decision to land and your selection of an emergency field were good;

however, you would have added one additional safety factor if you had landed wheels up.

Determined, That Is!

An Ensign was making his final approach after an hour of field carrier landing practice in an F4U-4B when he was given a wave-off by the landing signal officer. He took the wave-off came around again and made a normal approach and landing. During the landing roll-out, just prior to turning off the runway, he tried to move the landing gear control lever to the 'up' position. Being unable to do this, he engaged the manual emergency override switch, whereupon the tail wheel immediately retracted. At this point the pilot woke up, realized that he was on the ground and that it was flaps and not landing gear that he wanted to retract, and managed to get the landing gear control lever back in the 'down' position before the main wheels retracted.

 *Grampaw Pettibone says:* Sweet dreams of "Jeannie with the light brown hair" or was it a red head this time!

I notice from the Aircraft Accident Report that you have a total of 445 hours flying time with the last 150 in F4U's. That's just about the spot where a fellow begins to feel that it's all so easy. "Why she practically flies herself," they say until the rude awakening.

Those big leather chairs in the ready room are a mighty safe spot for day-dreaming, but, son, when you climb into that F4U you've got to be on the ball all the time.

A Costly Error

Returning from a routine squadron training flight a PBM first pilot found that the conditions in the landing area were considerably rougher than at the time of takeoff. Swells were running 4 to 5 feet high and wind was 15 to 20 knots. The aircraft was cleared to land on the northeast course, and the approach was normal. The inexperienced pilot elected to attempt a normal power landing with 20 degrees of flap.

After a smooth initial impact, the co-pilot cut the throttles and a second later the plane hit a swell and bounced into the air. The plane next hit in a nose high attitude and on this bounce went about 30 to 40 feet in the air. The pilot tried to stall the plane back

onto the water but flying speed had been lost to such an extent that the elevators had little effect. The nose fell through and the PBM hit the water at a very steep angle—estimated by several witnesses to be as much as 30 degrees.

The bow was crushed and, although quick action on the part of the pilot and the crash boat personnel prevented the plane from sinking, it was buckled so badly that it will never be flown again.

 *Grampaw Pettibone says:*

Well, son, that was a mighty costly error or series of errors. In the first place you should not have attempted a normal power landing with 20 degrees of flap in such rough sea conditions. A semi-stall or power stall landing with 30 degrees of flap would have been a much better choice. Secondly, when you bounced into the air, you should have added throttle for a wave-off, or at least enough to cushion your next landing. When a PBM gets too slow on the top of a bounce, the nose will fall through no matter how hard you pull back on the yoke—as you have learned from bitter experience. There simply wasn't sufficient air flowing across the elevators for them to be effective. However, if you had applied power in the early stage of that second bounce, the prop blast would have helped you maintain control of the plane and get the tail down.

All Set Up for Trouble

Here's one from Grampaw's mail bag on near accidents:

"Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

"I was making practice landings in an SNJ not long ago and rolling to a stop between each landing. As I taxied back after the fourth landing, I put the flap control lever in the up position but forgot to depress the hydraulic lever.

"After checking the mags and getting permission from the tower, I took off with the flaps down. As soon as I got in the air—and it was darn soon—I retracted the wheels and, of course, the flaps came up too as the flap control handle was still in the up position. This caused the plane to mush and even though I applied full power I came within a very few inches of crashing into the runway.

"I said to myself, 'That was a pretty dumb stunt, but after all, nobody will know about it, I hope, I hope, I hope.' Then I read your request for near accident stories and my conscience began to bother me—so here it is.

"Your loving grandson,
"ENS. JOHN DOE"

 *Grampaw Pettibone says:*

Thanks, son. I hope your experience will serve as a warning to other pilots to use their check off lists.

Something Stinks

Two recent accidents indicate that Dilbert, Spoiler and several close relatives are enjoying their Spring vacation at a certain auxiliary air station in the sunny south.

Case No. 1. Night Field Carrier Landing Practice. Pilot forgot to lower wheels; spotter stationed to check wheels-down doesn't check; L.S.O. gives pilot a cut; crash truck driver proceeding to scene of belly landing fails to turn on truck headlights and runs into the plane destroying the entire tail section.

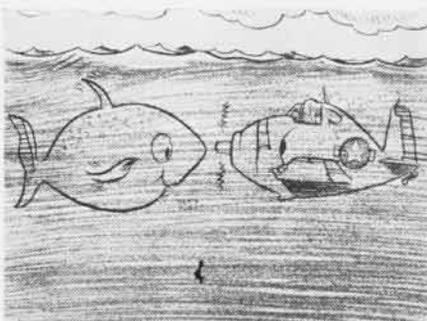
Case No. 2. Same location—three nights later. Pilot flew into the water on the up-wind turn of landing pattern due to relying too much on his pressure altimeter. Crash boat supposedly standing by but cannot be contacted by radio. Station crash boat is then towed to the water's edge on a trailer, but cannot be started.

Meanwhile the pilot who managed to get out of his FOR with quite an assortment of survival gear finds that his Mae West provides insufficient buoyancy and the snap fasteners will not hold, so he inflates his raft and climbs in. When the planes leave the traffic pattern and start searching for him, he fires a red flare. Then mistaking some searchlights on the beach for the crash boats, he fires three more flares at appropriate intervals. Finally deciding that no one is going to come out after him, he paddles towards the shore. Just before reaching the shore he sights a glow through the trees, whistles, and receives an answering hail. He paddles in and meets the Air Group Commander who gives him a ride back to the station in his jeep.

 *Grampaw Pettibone says:*

"Does anybody have a clothes-pin? I need it for my nose.

Frequent inspection of crash and rescue equipment and regular drills for personnel who man these facilities are the answer to preventing SNAFU operations like these two above. In the second instance the pilot might very easily have drowned if he had suffered only minor injuries. Fortunately he got out of his sinking plane, uninjured, and with enough gear to effect his own rescue.



Don't Try This Again

A student pilot in a TBM3E was entering his fifth dive in a syllabus glide bombing flight, when he realized that he had not lowered his landing gear. In his haste he inadvertently lowered the landing flaps instead of the landing gear. As he was applying forward pressure on the stick and forward tab he did not notice the lift effect of the flaps coming down, and continued in a 40 degree dive during which a speed of 200 knots was reached. Recovering from the dive (lucky chap), he tried to retract the wheels and realized his mistake. The ribs and skin of both right and left outboard flaps were buckled and numerous rivets were popped.

The pilot made a careful check in the air to determine that there was no loss of control or radical change in the flight characteristics of his plane and effected a successful landing without further incident.

 *Grampaw Pettibone says:*

Come up and see my pictures some time and you'll realize just how fortunate you were. You exceeded the allowable speed limit for flaps down operation in the TBM by more than 70 knots, and you're mighty lucky that one or both did not collapse completely. Next time go over that bombing check-off list carefully before you go into your dive.

Vest Must Be Modified

After taking a wave-off an SB2C was observed to spin in while making a steep turn into the crosswind leg some 500 yards ahead of the carrier. The plane sank but the pilot was sighted floating face downward in the water. He was picked up six minutes after the crash but died due to drowning. His Mk-2 life vest had been inflated but the chest snap fasteners were undone. It is believed that the moderate injuries received by the pilot in the crash caused him to lose consciousness after freeing himself from the plane and inflating his life jacket. With the chest snap fasteners undone an unconscious man tends to float face downward in an inflated Mk-2 life vest.

Comment:

As a result of this tragic accident a new Technical Order No. 45-46 has been promulgated concerning the inspection and modification of the Mk-2 life vest. In tests it was discovered that the chest snap fasteners were often not strong enough to hold when the CO₂ toggles were pulled. As a result, it is now necessary that all Mk-2 life vests in service be modified to incorporate stronger fasteners. Instructions for the above modifications are now included in T.O. 45-46 and the supply department stocks the necessary material.