

# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Missed The Boat

Two Commanders who had flown an SNB-1 from NAS QUONSET POINT to NAS ANACOSTIA finished their lunch at the Ship's Service Store, and headed out toward the plane for the return trip. They hoped to get back to Quonset Point in time to catch the 1530 boat to Newport. To save time, one went in for the clearance, while the other went out to warm up the plane and check on repairs to a malfunctioning radio.

The radio trouble was found to be entirely due to a very weak battery and the plane was started with the aid of a battery cart. Neither pilot nor copilot noticed that the plane had not been refueled.

After take-off the pilot was unable to communicate with Anacostia by radio. At this time he also noticed that the plane had not been gassed, and decided to return to Anacostia.

When he arrived in the vicinity of the field he circled the tower for visual contact with the operators and attempted to lower the landing gear electrically. He states that: "The wheels were not visible, so I operated the wheel switch to raise and lower the wheels. It was evident from the feel of the plane that the wheels went down. While checking the landing gear, the tower gave me a green light, and the touch and go landing circle of reserve flyers around the field gave way. My gasoline gauge read "empty" on all tanks. I considered it important to get into the field immediately while the traffic pattern permitted and before I ran out of gasoline over a populated area."

A few seconds later he made what appeared to be a normal landing, but as the weight of the plane shifted from the wings to the wheels the landing gear slowly collapsed. The SNB slid another 500 feet down the runway and was damaged to the extent that it will require a major overhaul.

When this plane first landed at Anacostia the pilot filled out (but forgot to sign) a written request for fuel and for repairs to the radio or electrical system. He did state that he wished to take off on his return trip in about 30 minutes.

When the plane left Anacostia it had sufficient fuel for only 45 minutes of flight. When it was inspected after the crash, three tanks were found to be empty and there was only enough gas



in the No. 1 tank for about 25 minutes of flight.

The pilot makes no mention of the position of the generator switches during any of the time that this accident was developing, from the initial starting of the engines until the wheels-up landing, but they were found in the OFF position immediately after the crash.

The accident board is of the opinion that the sequence of events was as follows:

- (a) Copilot started engine with aid of battery cart.
- (b) Following starting of engines the battery cart was removed, battery switch turned ON and generator switch remained OFF.
- (c) Neither pilot checked the quantity of fuel on board prior to take-off.
- (d) When the pilot discovered the lack of fuel and returned to Anacostia, he energized the wheel-lowering circuit. There was probably sufficient "juice" in the battery to unlock the wheels from the "UP" position and to cause them to come partially down, but NOT lock.
- (e) The heavy load on the battery caused by energizing the wheel-lowering circuit probably caused complete failure of the other electrical gear, including the fuel gauges. This would account for the zero reading which the pilot reports observing as he circled the tower for a landing signal.

After the crash the plane was hoisted and the wheels were lowered by hand using the emergency system, which functioned in a normal manner. The battery switch was turned on and the battery, free of all other loads, had sufficient voltage to make the fuel quantity gauge work and indicate 3/10ths of a full tank in No. 1 tank of the now-damaged plane.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Looks like these fellows missed the boat in more ways than one.

It's right hard for me to understand how both these high priced aviators could forget anything as important as finding out whether the plane had been gassed. But I guess each one thought that the other was taking care of that very important item on the check-off list.

After discovering the loss of electrical power there was little excuse for trying to lower the wheels electrically. When the pilot couldn't see the wheels, he had even more reason to know that they were not locked down. By this time, however, with three empty tanks and the gauge reading zero on the tank that he was running on, I can sympathize with his anxiety to get down to earth in a hurry.

This is a real example of the cost of not taking the time to do things right. The line maintenance crew slipped up in not gassing the plane promptly, but this is something that can and often does happen at a busy air station. ALWAYS USE THE CHECK OFF LIST. IT WILL SAVE YOU SOME MIGHTY EMBARRASSING SITUATIONS.

## Nice Work, Son

The story that follows is taken from the statement of a Marine Corps 2nd Lieutenant following the ditching of an F4U-B.

"When climbing to rejoin my formation after completing my second strafing run I was notified by radio that my plane was trailing smoke. I immediately checked for signs of a fire but found no indication of one. A check of the instruments showed only 10 lbs. of oil pressure remaining. As soon as I realized that my oil system had failed I leveled off and left my power settings unchanged. No oil was leaving the wing, which eliminated the possibility of an oil cooler failure.

"I was instructed by my flight leader to head for the airfield on San Clemente Island which was about 9 miles distant. While headed for the field the engine began to lose power rapidly and I could not maintain altitude. At about 2000 feet it stopped completely. Seeing that a water landing was necessary I turned on the emergency IFF and disconnected the radio cords after notifying the flight leader of my intended point of landing. I lowered full flaps before I lost hydraulic pressure, opened the canopy, and checked my safety belt and shoulder straps. Before hitting the water I turned off the gas and switches and lowered my seat.

"Being on the leeward side of the island there was no wind and the sea was smooth. Since it was difficult to judge altitude I did not attempt a stall landing but flew onto the water instead. The plane slid along the sur-

face of the water and came to a smooth stop, remaining afloat for 30 to 40 seconds. I dimbed out of the cockpit, inflated my Mae West and life raft and began paddling for San Clemente Island which appeared to be about a mile away. At 1019 an SC-1 picked me up."

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

This lad had only 529 hours of flight time but he certainly handled this ditching like a veteran. He knew his emergency procedures and made excellent use of the safety equipment provided. I wish every pilot could do as well when confronted with an engine failure over water.

## Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

This sounds so much like one of your stories that I decided to cut it out and send it to you. It appeared in a recent Flight Safety Report submitted by the C.O. of an Air Ferry Squadron.

"A pilot flying an F7F departed Quonset Point, Rhode Island, estimating two hours flying time to Norfolk, Virginia. After burning out the auxiliary tank he switched to the reserve tank and ran it down to forty gallons. Turning to the main tank, he burned the tank dry and then started worrying about his destination. He remembered the plane captain at Quonset Point telling him that there was an extra one hundred gallons in the reserve tank that did not register on the gauge.

"Nevertheless, when two gas gauges read empty and the other close to empty he began to perspire. His time in the air at that time had been two and one-half hours. Due to a 40-knot head wind the pilot's estimated time en route was considerably underestimated. About this time he was approaching the Norfolk area so he called in for a straight in approach. The tower gave the pilot an affirmative. After landing the pilot taxied to the ferry line, parked the aircraft, and before he retarded the mixture control both engines quit cold.

"This is just one more case of a pilot not familiarizing himself with existing weather and range of his aircraft. One circle of the field at destination might have found this pilot not available for comments."

Sincerely,  
Lieut. —, USN."

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

Many thanks for this story which, because of its fortunate ending, might not have reached my desk. Every month I read about 200 accident reports, but I'm awfully anxious to hear about close calls as well as accidents. Any of you fellows who want to "get it off your mind" can write me about your boners and close calls. If it appears that some one else is likely to make the same mistake, I may give them a little publicity—but never names and tales at the same time.

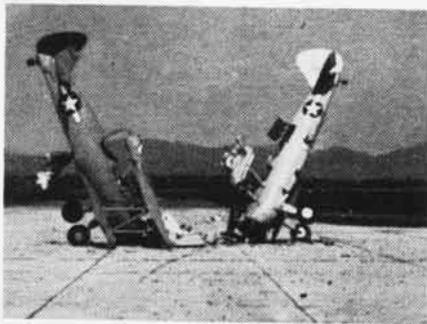
## Generator Trouble?

While returning from a routine cross country flight in a JRB-5, the pilot, who incidentally had 4750 hours, noticed a gradual loss of radio strength and finally a complete electrical failure.

Arriving over the field just as it began to get dark, he attempted to lower his wheels electrically. When this failed, he and the co-pilot and passenger all attempted to lower the wheels manually by use of the hand crank, but were unsuccessful. At this time one of the passengers stated that he smelled smoke, so the pilot elected an immediate wheels up landing.

Immediately after the crash landing investigators noted that the master switches were in the "on" position and the generator switches were in the "off" position. When the plane was hoisted up the landing gear was cranked down by hand with no undue exertion. A complete check of the electrical system disclosed no discrepancies other than low batteries. No discrepancies were found in the landing gear system.

The accident board was of the opinion that the pilot failed to turn on the generator switches in flight and that consequently the batteries were exhausted. Upon arrival over the field, the pilot was unable to see his airspeed indicator, and it is believed that he was flying at too great an airspeed to permit cranking the gear down.



## Ready, Get Set, Crash!

The pilots of the two N2S's pictured above landed simultaneously at an uncontrolled airport using runways 24 and 36. As can be seen from the wreckage, they arrived at the intersection in a dead heat. Both planes are recommended for strike and salvage of spare parts. Fortunately there were no injuries to personnel.

Each pilot observed the other after it was too late to avoid a collision, and each tried to turn inside the other to avoid personal injury. In so doing both aircraft collided almost head-on, bounced back a few feet, and then stopped in a nose down position.

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

For my money that's a down right unsafe maneuver. The blame for this accident goes to the second pilot to enter the landing circle, since he failed to observe the local traffic landing on runway 24, and didn't notice the other Navy N2S which had completed a circle of the field and was preparing to land on runway 24.

## Fatal Show

Late in the afternoon of March 27th a flight of three FG-1D's took off on a local tactics flight. The pilots were all members of the Organized Reserve out for a regularly scheduled drill.

One plane remained over the airport due to battery trouble, while the other two flew on a southerly course heading over San Francisco Bay. As the two planes came over a small town about 40 miles south of the field, the lead pilot pushed over in a formation dive. His wingman pulled out at 1500 feet and climbed back to about 2500 feet. From this vantage point he watched his teammate do a few shallow wing-overs and surmised that they were over the section-leader's home.

After a few minutes the wingman observed the other FG roll into an inverted position from which the pilot attempted to pull through in a half-loop. There was insufficient altitude to complete this maneuver which was started at about 1200 feet. The FG crashed into the ground with wings level at an angle estimated to be 20 degrees. The aircraft was destroyed in the crash and fire which followed and the pilot was instantly killed.

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

Seems like somebody has to do this just about once every six months to prove to the rest that flatbating and unauthorized low altitude acrobatics don't pay.

This chap violated Local Flight Rules, Safety Bulletins, CAA Regulations, and Navy Regulations and, like many before him, he paid for this spree with his life.

## Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

In the April Issue of NAVAL AVIATION NEWS you mentioned that any one flying the F4U type aircraft was slightly balmy if he didn't know everything in Technical Order 20-46. Now, being an old Corsair Hotshot myself, I whipped right into the office and demanded a copy. Imagine my surprise when this Tech Order turned out to be all about the installation of the parachute release mechanism in an airborne life raft. When I told them I wanted to read up on Spin Recovery in the F4U, they broke out *Technical Note 20-46*.

Sincerely

Lt. (jg) .....

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

The Doc's been telling me for a long time that I could use a new pair of specs, and this seems to cinch it. Anyway I'm pleased that so many of my readers caught this error, and I'm glad that some, like you, had sufficient perseverance to find the correct reference—"SPIN RECOVERY CHARACTERISTICS IN THE F4U," TECHNICAL NOTE 20-46.