



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Accidents Will Happen . . . ?

On his first approach for carrier qualifications, an F9F-6 pilot received a wave-off for overshooting the groove. The next plane landed and was taxied forward to the number one elevator to be struck below. The first pilot made another approach and was given a "high", which he answered.

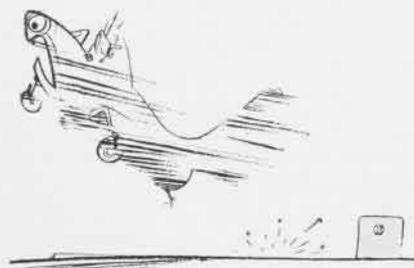
As he approached the "cut" position, he dropped the nose of the aircraft and started to settle rapidly. The LSO only had time to give him a frantic "low", which the pilot answered by pulling the nose of the aircraft up. The wheels barely cleared the deck, but the tail hook struck the ramp and broke off.

The aircraft continued up the deck in a very nose-high attitude. It started a gradual climb and, as it passed the



barriers, the main gear ripped out the nylon straps. The nose went over the top strap of the barricade, which severed the nose wheel. The aircraft touched down 60 feet forward of the barricade on the nose wheel strut and right wing tip and continued forward striking the F9F-6 parked on the elevator.

The first aircraft broke in two at the cockpit section and the pilot, still



strapped to the seat, was thrown out on deck fatally injured. Both aircraft, burning fiercely, slid forward to the bow of the ship. The pilot of the parked plane made a fast exit, when the planes stopped at the bow, and just in time. The two aircraft slid into a watery grave when the ship went into a high speed turn to clear the smoke for the firefighters.



Gram paw Pettibone Says:

Great Jumpin' Jehosaphat! What a waste of life and aircraft! The accident board assessed the primary cause of this accident as pilot error in that the pilot dropped his nose in the groove causing the plane to get low enough to strike the hook



on the ramp. The second error was his failure to get the nose wheel on the deck and hold it there so that he could have engaged the barricade properly.

Well now, that's a couple of mighty big assessments to make, especially when this poor lad isn't around to defend himself. Let's take a look at the record. He had a total of 90 hours, including nine FCLP periods, in the F9F-6. He had made 70 previous carrier landings in the *Corsair*. I may be getting old fashioned, but that seems to be a little on the short side for

the average pilot in a high-performance aircraft like a *Cougar*.

Apparently, he thought he could make it. His skipper and LSO must have thought he could make it, too, or he never would have been out there in the first place. But somebody was wrong as you'll see if you analyze the second error. He either got scared when he hit the ramp and froze up, or he was never told what to do in case he missed a wire.

If he froze up, it was because he didn't know what to do. If he didn't know what to do, it was because somebody assumed he knew and didn't take the trouble to make sure.

This reminds me of a fella who was standing on a corner with his four-year-old son. An eye catcher of a blonde in a red sweater undulated by, and the little boy gave her a passing glance. He was promptly whacked on the side of the head by his father. To the tearful query, "What did I do, Pop?", his old man said, "Your mother says you take after me, and I know what you were thinking." The moral being that you can get into all kinds of trouble



when others assume you know something that you don't know.

There is a way to beat this game. It's a sure bet you won't find one pilot who will admit he's not ready when it comes time to go aboard. Maybe he thinks he is as ready as he'll ever get, but rather than giving him an inferiority complex by pointing out his deficiencies, set the whole outfit down in the ready room and start from scratch.

Drill into them all the whys and wherefores of carrier landings. On the surface it will be old stuff to all of them, but you can rest assured a few will welcome the chance to talk it out.

The old saying "accidents will happen" is as outdated as knee-length bathing suits. Let's go beyond pilot error and find the real cause. Maybe some of the contributing factors will prevent your future accidents.

The Gun Wasn't Loaded?

Or "How to Start the New Year Off with a Bang!" It was Thursday, December thirty-first. The hour was 0910. I was in the ready room loafing. I'm a pilot.

A call had come in from the hangar. 405 was ready for a pilot's check of the ejection seat. The squadron duty officer approached me. I know he was the squadron duty officer because he pretended he was busy. Besides, he wore a brassard with SDO on it. His name is "Tex". He's from Arkansas.

He said, "I've got a job for you. Go down to the hangar and check the ejection seat in 405. You'll get a kick out of it." That boy has got to go. He reads palms. I said, "You mean inspect the eject?" He said, "Yeah, and make certain of the curtain." Man, that guy gets corny sometimes. They shoulda called him Missouri.

He said, "There are two mechs down there waiting for you. Tell 'em Smiley sent you." With that he did an about-face and stalked back to his cage. They oughta put guys like that away. The nerve of some people! Tear you away from your reveries of a girl whose New Year's resolution was to say yes to everything and make you go sit on a cold parachute. That's life.

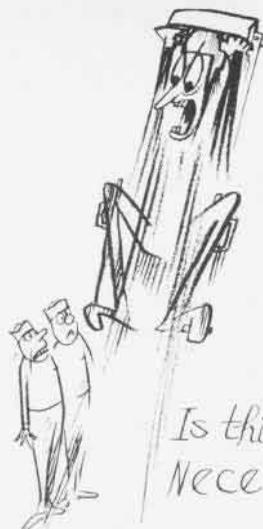
I approached the hangar from the north. That's the side the ready room is on. Everything on the outside was still. It was still raining, and the planes were still tied down.

Inside it was different. Nothing was tied down. Airplanes, cowlings, ejection seats all over the place. Looked like a hurricane had hit. There was 405, the tail section separated from the fuselage and parked about 20 feet behind it. It looked like a trap.

I eased around 407, slipped under the wing of 409 and found myself on the port side of 405. I woulda tackled it from the starboard side, but I'm a pilot. I follow the line of least resistance. Besides, I didn't have a ladder.

Up behind the cockpit straddling the fuselage was a sinister looking character. He had so much hair on his face you couldn't see his nose. Woops! It was the back of his head. I felt myself being pushed into the cockpit.

Something fishy was going on. I don't mind being helped, but I can't stand being pushed. I pulled my head out from under the seat. I sat on it. The seat. I asked if the charge had



*Is this trip
Necessary?*

been removed. They both nodded. I knew something was up and I was right. It was the pre-ejection lever. I pushed it down. Nothing happened.

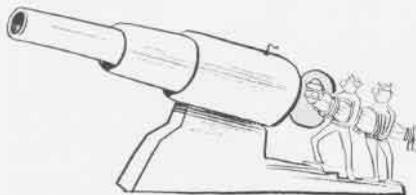
I pushed it down twice more. The knee guards came up and the seat bottomed. I grabbed the rings with both hands and jerked. It was curtains. Like taking a slug of Mountain Dew.

I was blasted. There I was on my back 60 feet in the air. I was still in the seat and riding high. I look down. Airplanes, cowlings and ejection seats all over the place. Sure looked like a hurricane had hit. I looked up. There was a rafter about three feet away. I reached for it and missed. This kills me. I did a split-S. There was the tail section of an airplane directly below. I think it was 405, but the number was blurred as I went through it. My memory failed me. I woke up in the hospital. This is the hospital, and I'm telling my story. I'm all broken up about it. Take my advice. If you don't want to get high, remove the charge. It's dynamite! Happy New Year!



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Dum, de dum dum! Shades of Caesar's Ghost! This lad was indoctrinated into the "Oh, My Behind" Club the hard way. You might almost say that he came out at the tail end of that deal.



Two days before, the seat had been removed from 405 outside the hangar. The seat was taken into the hangar and placed on the deck. The next day 405 and two other aircraft were moved into the hangar, and the seats were removed from the other two. The seat supposedly belonging to 405 was then de-armed. One of the other aircraft had the seat replaced the same day, but it later developed that it was the seat to 405. Through lack of markings on the seats, someone got his wires crossed and put an armed one in 405. My aching back!

What gets me is that after a poor unsuspecting pilot gets the heave-ho a foot short of the hangar roof, the squadron gets busy and initiates a fool-proof system for preventing a recurrence. Written directives are to be issued on safety procedures to be followed by all personnel. All ejection seats are to be marked with the same markings of the aircraft they belong in.

Charges will be removed if the seat is to be out longer than the working day. Seats will be tagged to indicate whether the charge is or is not installed. Pilots will personally check to see that the charge is removed prior to testing the seat. You bet they will! It's just too gosh-durned bad they didn't have enough foresight to do all this *before* the accident.

Somebody in each outfit has to think "accident prevention" all the time. It's a lead-pipe cinch that the second assistant to the Savings Bond Officer isn't the man for the job. He's too busy raising pennies to buy replacement aircraft. For my money, an Aviation Safety Officer on the same division level as the Operations Officer would pay the biggest dividends. He'd be the Skipper's right hand man and be in a position to put some teeth in that old saw, "Safety is a command responsibility".

With a safety program that anticipates trouble and acts immediately, there would be fewer pilots sacked out in some hospital waiting for broken bones to mend. There's an old saying that anticipation is greater than realization, but not in this flying racket. Maybe that is why there is so little of it.

Like the farmer said

*When the question was posed,
"That's easy, son,*

*I keeps the barn door closed.
"It's them as waits*

*Until the horses is stole,
Who finds theirselves*

A mite short on Fowl."

MEMO FROM GRAMP:

A hot landing is like trying to beat a train to an intersection. If you are able to wonder what would have happened if you didn't make it, you must have made it—but it was mighty close.