



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Box Canyon

Two junior birdmen, diverted ignominiously to an overseas naval air station for duty while trained for and en route to a jet carrier squadron, were out one day along with an airman plane captain looking for some excitement in a C-45 *Navigator*. The aircraft, considerably older than either of the pilots, was still doing its duty as a general utility and proficiency plane whenever called upon.

After performing some high work (stalls, turns, simulated engine failures, etc.) and completing several touch and go landings, they decided to go sightseeing in the mountains and fly over a high-altitude resort city.

Both pilots had been there several times before and felt sure they knew the way. Entering a mountain pass at about the 3,000-foot elevation, they noted unfamiliar terrain and what began to appear to be a box canyon. Instead of reversing course and departing the area, they applied climb power and forged ahead. As the airspeed began to drop, they added full power but the terrain still seemed to be climbing to meet them. The airspeed continued

to drop and soon they noted a zero rate of climb. At this point, the pilots felt what they thought was a "vicious downdraft" and the venerable *Bug Smasher* seemed to "fall out of the



sky." When a crash seemed inevitable, shoulder harnesses were tightened and full flaps lowered. They hit the trees at the bottom of a ravine at about 60 knots. The *Beech* tumbled over onto its back, and smoke and flames filled the cockpit.

The pilot felt something under him which turned out to be the airman who had not been strapped in in the back. All three flyers were conscious and began wildly fumbling their way out through the smoke and fire to the cabin door. Emerging, they quickly retreated some 30 yards and watched as the wreck exploded into a final ball of fire.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

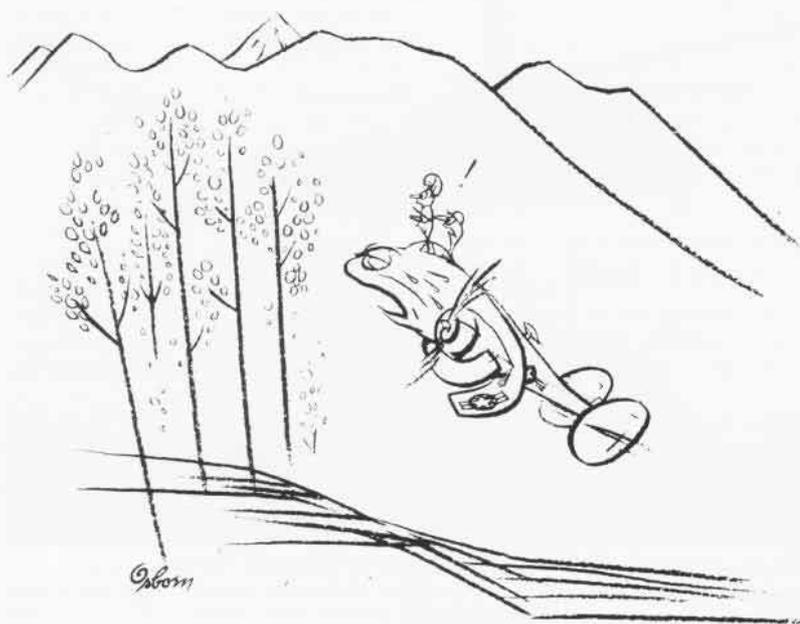
Great thunderin' herds of buffalo! Why in tarnation must all our junior aviators be destined to make the same mistakes as their elders, all over again? Don't they ever learn any lessons from the older generation? This is the third box canyon loss this year. One took four lives.

This is one for the books. The sheer luck involved in such a successful ditching, escape and uneventful recovery is staggering. Their nomex flight suits undoubtedly saved them from disabling burns. Additional protective equipment which would have been worn in most other type aircraft would probably have prevented other injuries and been most helpful.

These guys had no business being in this mountainous jungle area in the first place. It had been designated a "special area" and required authorization to fly over it. The spot where the plane crashed was completely inaccessible even by helicopter, and the wreckage was impossible to see from the air. The crew almost had to walk all the way out but were spotted by air late that evening as they were being nursed by friendly local nationals who had helped them to their village.

## Too Many Cooks

One day last winter, two Marine first lieutenants launched at 0750 in an F-4J as the number two plane in a ground controlled, intercept training



flight. After the training flight was completed, fuel remained for a GCA practice approach at a nearby air force base and a tail chase on the way home. The tail chase terminated when the wingman lost sight of his leader. Almost immediately the first lieutenant realized he was unable to retard the throttles below 95 percent rpm.

After cycling the throttles in and out of the afterburner detent several times and still not being able to retard them, he notified his flight leader and declared an emergency with the tower and base radio.

On the way back to the Marine Corps air station, the pilot and his NFO went over the NATOPS checklists carefully for "runaway engine" and "single engine landing" procedures. They discussed with their flight leader various ways to handle the emergency and, when they arrived overhead, they had already extended the speed brakes and ram air turbine, dropped ½ flaps and secured the port engine. They planned to make a spiraling approach using G forces to slow the aircraft and to secure the starboard engine on touchdown. They would use the drag chute after touchdown and drop the hook to engage the second arresting gear.

Meanwhile the squadron operations officer and the landing signal officer were informed of the emergency by the operations duty officer. They tried unsuccessfully to reach the pilot of the ailing *Phantom II* by radio from the hangar; therefore, they proceeded by vehicle to the approach end of the duty runway where eventually they were able to communicate with the *Phantom* on the tower frequency. At this time a lot of discussion began about just exactly what to do. Items such as shutting down the engines, ½ flaps vs. full flaps, approach end engagement vs. mid-field, deployment of the chute, etc., were reshaped. On advice of the LSO, the flaps were put to full down and the landing gear was lowered during the spiral descent.

The lieutenant started toward the initial point, making S turns to keep the airspeed down. At about one mile, the *Phantom* was down to 1,000 feet altitude, but the pilot couldn't get the airspeed below 200 knots. They circled left at 800 feet, keeping a tight turn, and tried again. He was still unable to get the plane down and to stay below 200 knots, so he made another 360° port turn. The LSO and operations of-



ficer then advised him that he should drop the hook for an approach and engagement, and that they would call for the drag chute prior to touchdown.

The third approach was lined up good, although still high and fast. The LSO called for the drag chute at one mile from the runway, which initially dropped the airspeed to 180 knots. The craft was still airborne over the first arresting gear and touched down briefly about 3,000 feet down the runway. Immediately, the pilot secured the master switch as briefed, but someone transmitted on the radio, "take it around — you missed the wire." Someone else yelled "shut it down." The pilot tried to keep the *Phantom* on the ground but soon realized that he couldn't. The drag chute then collapsed and the starboard engine still had not begun to unwind. He turned the master switch back on and tried to light the afterburner. The nose was rotated for takeoff. After gaining 30 to 40 feet of altitude, the F-4 settled to the runway but was pulled off again with a higher nose attitude. It still wouldn't stay in the air, and the pilot, believing that the afterburner had not lit, tried to place it on and keep it on the deck without success.

As they crossed the center of the field, the NFO asked the pilot about the possibility of ejecting, to which he agreed. As the NFO ejected, the pilot

made one last attempt to get it on the deck, and then he punched out. Both crew members landed safely on the runway as the doomed *Phantom* crashed and slid down the parallel taxiway, coming to rest in a ditch.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Great gallopin' ghosts! Let's convene the accident board 'n make the decisions by committee. That way nobody can be blamed. Everyone involved here made a few discoveries that day.**

**NATOPS did not cover proper procedures in case of a stuck throttle. The pilot never did check to see if he could possibly move either throttle independently of the other.**

**The "accident board" in the ground just ended up confusing the issue by planning to set up an approach end arrestment for the F-4 contrary to the flight leader's and pilot's agreed and briefed procedure. Either might have worked if executed correctly. As it was, after debating the pros and cons of each procedure over the radio, the first lieutenant was so confused it's a wonder he could follow directions at all. Possible action in case of a missed arresting gear was not discussed, and the fact that the engine doesn't quit immediately when the master switch is actuated wasn't mentioned either. Just goes to show you that even the better than average jock can be led down the primrose path.**