



Osborn

A Salute to the Sage of Safety

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

For twenty-five years Grampaw Pettibone has exhorted all Naval Aviators to practice safety and those who heeded him well now bear him witness

By Izetta Winter Robb



flying back in the days when airplanes were built out of cigar boxes and baling wire; when an airplane was considered a success if the pilot could coax it 50 feet in the air, and a successful landing was anything you could walk away from. . . . His log book is studded with 'firsts,' dating back to such things as 'first to take off in a seaplane carrying 250 pounds of useful load' and 'first to make a four-hour endurance flight.' In the last war he used to dogfight in a flying boat and use a Colt .45 to help out his combination gunner and bomber in the bow. . . .

"Grampaw is still a rabid aviation enthusiast, particularly where Naval Aviation is concerned. He has had more close calls and experiences than Eddie Rickenbacker and Dick Tracy combined."

Robert Osborn insists that the Idea is the important element in his successful creation. Once you have that, according to Osborn, you are on your way. Actually, Osborn was doubtful that a peppery, old guy, with tartness coming off his tongue as easily as

catastrophe follows a stall, would succeed.

Both the late Capt. Warner—his death occurred just a year ago—and Osborn, also the creator of Dilbert, a character of sterling stupidity, must take a bow together for creating a legend that has served the interests of safe flight in naval aircraft beyond any dream they originally had of its possibilities.

Admiral Arthur W. Radford, USN (Ret.), who, while on active duty was Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet, and later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had a very close affiliation with the old man. "I am indeed one of Grampaw Pettibone's oldest friends," he declares. "I was in charge of all Naval Air Training from the outbreak of WW II until April 1943 and had a hand in getting Grampaw Pettibone started. In my opinion, he has played a most important part in making our flyers aware of the hazards in flight. I am sure he will continue to be the most popular feature in *Naval Aviation News*."

Looking back, Rear Admiral H. B. Miller, USN (Ret.), in 1943 a commander heading BUAER's training literature section, confirms this estimate: "When Warner and Osborn joined forces, little did we anticipate that Grampaw's life would be so long and the results so gratifying. The Warner-Osborn team hit upon a formula of discussing and illustrating safety in such an entertaining manner that the success of this formula has

FOR A QUARTER of a century, Grampaw Pettibone, the astringent, acidulous curmudgeon, vaunted foe of the careless and mindless, has increased the chances of longevity for Naval Aviators. He is a legend created by the fusion of an Idea and an Artist.

The man who thought of Grampaw Pettibone, Captain Hubert Spencer "Seth" Warner, sat at the flight statistics desk in the Bureau of Aeronautics in 1942. As he studied the reports of training accidents, he was horrified by the needless loss of lives and planes for want of just the right knowledge to overcome the varied hazards a man faces in flight. Instructions, Notams, pamphlets, and various types of written warning had flowed continuously to the training stations of Naval Aviation, but apparently they did not stem the tide of increasing casualties. "Why were so many of the stupid accidents alike and why were so many of them so stupid, 100 percent pilot error?" Warner pondered.

It was at this point that Capt. Warner thought of Gramps, who, as "the oldest livin' Naval Aviator" would give the young neophytes of flight "the word." Robert Osborn, then a Reserve lieutenant and illustrator par excellence, brought this idea into being.

In the January 15, 1943, issue, Capt. Warner introduced Grampaw Pettibone in these words: "Gentlemen, meet an old-timer, P.S. ('Post Script') Pettibone, long since retired, but now back in parachute harness. He started

been widely copied in other fields. I daresay that the first thing the reader of *Naval Aviation News* turns to is Grampaw Pettibone."

There has been only one Osborn whose devotion to safety in Naval Aviation training remains undiminished, but seven Gramps have followed Capt. Warner to sit in the ol' man's seat. Speaking of them, "whoever they are," RAdm. Miller writes, "they have done a magnificent job in maintaining the humor, the sageness and whiplash so adroitly provided by Warner."

Back in 1943, the original Grampaw didn't know it, but "stupid accidents" caused by pilot error were going to occur again and again through the next 25 years.

In a quick survey of Grampaw Pettibone's uninhibited critiques, *NA-NEWS* discovers that the current generation of young pilots is still marked with the same defects: failure to use the checkoff list, flat-hatting by the usual number of grandstand devotees, lack of planning, ignoring of warnings, *get-homeitis*, and any number of unwise maneuvers. Maintenance still fails to come through with zero-defects performance, and weather and folly combine to lure many an unwary soul into danger, even death.

In his field of critical comment, Grampaw Pettibone has ranged and raged over the entire spectrum of aircraft operation. Still the most critical areas of aircraft operation, from Jennies to jets, are takeoffs and landings. How to get up from the runway or off the carrier is still the work of a professional and everyone is involved in the process. Getting back safely requires equal competence. Design of aircraft and supporting equipment has helped incalculably, but still, as Gramps puts it, "The world's best safety device is situated slightly above and between the ears—use it."

AT TIMES, Grampaw Pettibone became downright discouraged in his role as safety exhorter and prophet. In 1964, after more than 21 years of service, he wrote, "Your ole bearded buddy ain't too surprised at anything that happens in aircraft any more." Indeed, experience confirmed his sad commentary.

For example, in 1958, one accident occurred which not only stumped the experts but almost killed them when two senior officers flew a TF-1 Trader



to a monthly safety officers' conference on the West Coast. Accompanying them were six other aviators, flying as passengers, who boarded the plane after a briefing on bailout and ditching procedures.

In the course of the flight, one of the passengers reported that the port engine was on fire. The intercom didn't work so all the pilots began shouting and giving contradictory advice.

As the pilot hit the feathering button to the port engine, the copilot lowered the landing gear on the advice of one of the passengers and immediately raised the wheels again as the pilot shouted, "Gear up."

Airspeed dropped alarmingly. The starboard throttle had crept back owing to a loose friction knot. While the pilot was fighting to maintain control, the copilot was busy *fastening his shoulder harness*.

Ditching was inevitable and the plane came to rest in three to five feet of water. All eight aviators aboard were injured but survived.

What really set Gramps off was that "no one had worn a parachute

harness, only one had on a Mae West, neither pilot had used a hard hat, and three out of five passengers did not have the shoulder harness fastened. One passenger, who was strapped in, released his safety belt on the first impact and caught the full force of the second one. The TF was a strike."

Grampaw Pettibone really laid it on: "It's just too doggone bad there weren't more seats up front to take care of everyone trying to get into the act. After hearing a thorough bailout and ditching briefing, how all hands aboard could ignore Mae Wests, parachutes and shoulder harnesses beats me. . . . Until BUMED revises the physical qualifications for NavCads to include feathers and webbed feet, we better use the gear BUAER provides us to make up for the lack of 'em."

IN SALUTING Gramps, Rear Admiral Paul D. Buie, current commander of the U.S. Naval Aviation Safety Center, NAS NORFOLK, describes himself as "your pardner in crime-fighting" and opines, "As for that beard you sport, most of us guess that each gray strand represents an accident or 'hazardous experience'—(Oh, my achin' back). . . . We will never get a ZERO-accident rate nor know how many accidents we prevent." But he promises Grampaw Pettibone he will never give up.

"There'll always be a flat-hatter" is the despondent thought of Gramps and the Safety Center. One such type demonstrated that frequently pilot error is anything but singular. A Reserve ensign ran up the score to seven violations in exactly one hour and 40 minutes as follows:

"In the annals of Naval Aviation, a special and memorable place will always belong to Grampaw Pettibone, the legendary aviator created by the late Captain Hubert S. Warner, USN, and Illustrator Robert Osborn."

**—Admiral T. H. Moorer
Chief of Naval Operations**

(1) Made a pass at a two-plane section of SNJ's conducting an instrument flight; (2) headed for home instead of his assigned area; (3) flat-hatted (even though he was on probation for a similar incident and had been forbidden to go below 2,000 feet except in the landing pattern); (4) made a pass at a farmer's car and missed it by about 10 feet; (5) buzzed a farmhouse and barn, then started down a gully below treetop level; (6) severed two power lines; and (7) landed at his home field where he stated that he had "hit a duck or some sort of bird."

Grampaw points out that this last statement "showed considerable imagination since there were about 20 feet of copper wiring trailing from the airplane." He reported that this chap was headed for the Aviator's Disposition Board, and "unless I miss my guess, his wings will be permanently clipped. Ah, for the good old days of public hangings. We could have all gone and taken a picnic lunch."

THE WARNER-OSBORN concept of Grampaw Pettibone was based on the principle of learning from the mistakes of others. As Gramps points out, "You won't live long enough to make them all."

"The tart discussions and evaluations" of Gramps are particularly admired by Vice Admiral John J. Hyland, Commander Pacific Fleet, who writes to the Sage of Safety, "We have profited by them. You have been a real expert at inserting the needle, but you don't stick it in unless it is well deserved."

For an example of this, we turn back to earlier days. The patrol commander of a PBM decided to give a simulated engine failure on takeoff after a few touch-and-go's. The PPC stood between the two ensigns at the controls. The lesson came off badly as the PBM hit with sufficient force to suffer strike damage. It bounced and remained airborne as full power was applied.

The bounce had knocked the PPC off his feet and his right leg was broken. As the two ensigns got things squared away and readied for a proper landing, the second radioman attempted to help the PPC.

He made this statement later: "I made the PPC lie on the flight deck, head forward, and took my belt and

'I regard Grampaw Pettibone as one of the most valuable members of my staff. He's a fine blend of Irish spirits and a thrifty Scotch temperament.'

—Vice Admiral Thomas F. Connolly, DCNO(Air)

the plane captain's and strapped his legs together. . . . Had I morphine, I would have given him an injection. . . . He was in much pain . . . but asked me to send the 'IN' report. I started to knock Mr. _____ out with my fist, but didn't think that I had the power, so didn't."

This was too much for Gramps: "It's lucky for the PPC that this chap didn't have an old horse pistol handy. After all, the lieutenant's leg was broke—so . . . what the heck."

But Gramps immediately took a turn to the positive and pointed out the availability of morphine syrettes for multi-place aircraft and wound up with the rye comment, "Next time, I'll bet the PPC is occupying one of the pilot's seats when he gives a simulated emergency to a relatively inexperienced copilot."

For Gramps, silence is no virtue and repetition no vice. He has regularly squared off with his favorite expletives: "Great balls of fire," "Great horned toadies," and "Jehosaphat" is as near as the saint of safety ever comes to profanity, but the air seems blue as, over and over again, Grampaw warns against flat-hatting, ignoring weather, failing to follow regulations.

Gramps came near to silence when six Reservists penitently rehashed a cross-country training flight. They wrote down their own errors, which included failure to take measures in the light of foul weather reports, delay in taking action after encountering difficulties, and folly in not returning to a midpoint station. Furthermore, two of the pilots had no oxygen masks. The once unwary, now wiser, pilots

concluded their critique with two points:

"This is a poor way to get experience. . . . All of us are lucky to be here to write about this never-to-be-forgotten experience."

Gramps finished this off in two words, "Nuff said."

So far as we know Gramps only once refused to make comment on a case, this in his 25th year of giving everyone anything but the silent treatment. Here's what stumped the expert:

"During the takeoff roll, at 120 knots, the neophyte pilot . . . smartly pulled the stick aft. The F-4 over-rotated and stalled at an airspeed of 135 knots, with at least 20° nose up and commenced several wing-rock cycles.

"There was no response to the Instructor Pilot's frantic calls for 'attitude.' Being *in extremis* at about ten feet above the ground, the instructor elected to abandon the rear cockpit. The seat and chute performed flawlessly and deposited the disgruntled instructor on the runway intersection.

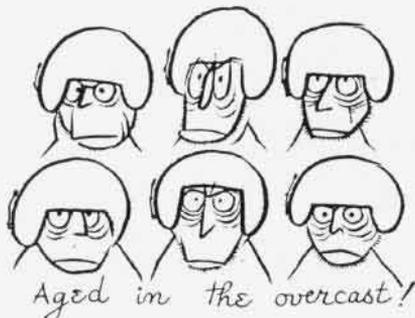
"The fledgling pilot, not too disturbed over the turn of events, found himself in the enviable position of stable flight again, continued on and landed uneventfully—and nonchalantly—just one hour later."

This incident will probably become known in Naval Aviation safety annuals as the first—and perhaps the last—of Dilbert's triumphs.

Dilbert, the perennial accident-prone pilot, usually, according to Gramps, flies along "fat, dumb and happy." For example, this is the kind of situation that really burned the old man up:

"Dilbert called for another beer. He was having a bang-up time not far from the air station. It was pretty late, but why should he worry? All he had to do the next day was drive a few bodies to Washington in a *Beechcraft*. If he couldn't cope with an SNB, hangover or no hangover, he deserved to stop flying. That's the way Dilbert had it figured."

He set off the next morning with one of the passengers in the righthand



seat. Since he had been late in getting started that morning, he missed breakfast completely.

The weather was VFR, a few clouds and moderate turbulence. A half hour later, Dilbert realized he didn't feel well. In minutes, he felt worse and declared that the weather didn't look good and he was going to land and check it. The passenger up front wondered why he didn't use the radio, but said nothing.

On the ground, Dilbert found the appropriate relief. In another 45 minutes, he tried a bowl of chicken soup. That experiment was successful and, a while later, he announced to the passengers that the weather was satisfactory and they would be going. After Lakehurst there wasn't a cloud in the sky. For once the weather was "embarrassingly good."

According to Grampaw Pettibone, "This was one of Dilbert's better days. He was a little late, but he made it without so much as a scratch on the airplane—and for Dilbert that is something. Of course, there's no telling what might have happened had the weather *really* turned bad."

GRAMPAW Pettibone's mission in teaching safety to young aviators has always been successful. One of his faithful readers, Vice Admiral W. I. Martin, Commander Sixth Fleet, writes: "Any tailhooker who admits too close a personal rapport with the legendary Mr. Pettibone runs the risk of revealing himself as a onetime member of the 'Groped-in-the-Groove-and-Goofed Club.' The pleasure of such a risk is all mine as I recall an almost

religious rapport with the Sage of Safety going back to the first time Gramps let fly with 'Great balls of fire!!!'

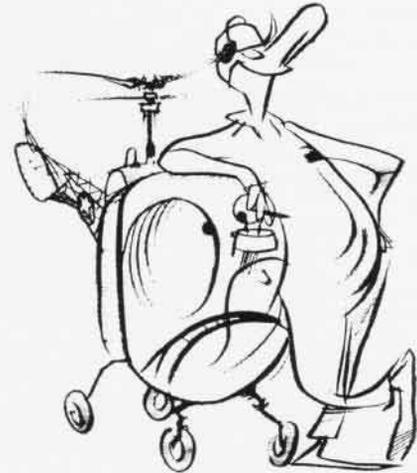
"His coming into being 25 years ago was a stroke of good fortune. The fact that his unique and salty services have been available to three generations of Naval and Marine Aviators speaks for his nimble and knowing adaptation to changing times, techniques and technologies, and without ever once suffering loss of credibility or dilution of his awesome argument that 'all people-caused accidents should never have been.'

"Thus, from a time of the sub-subsonic N3N and SBU to the present era of Mach Two machines, his trenchant treatment of Dilberts in our midst has undoubtedly kept thousands of Wings of Gold wearers from coming to similar grips with trouble."

But more than testimonials of distinguished Naval Aviators indicate the efficacy of Gramps' preachments, for a survey made some years ago by the National Research Council showed that *Grampaw Pettibone* is the best-liked and most effective safety column. In personal interviews, 88.2 percent of all Naval Aviators on active duty read Gramps regularly; 10.8 percent read him frequently and only one percent read him seldom. No follow-up has been made to discover the mortality rates of the "unreading" one percent.

Gramps' faithful readers check up on him. In August 1954 (see page 21), Osborn in the lead illustration showed Gramps taking his fill of watermelon—in his officer's blouse.

Promptly Gramps heard from a Navy lieutenant, pilot type, asking, "It seems to me that the uniform of the day in a watermelon patch in August would be an old pair of shorts and towel. How about it?"

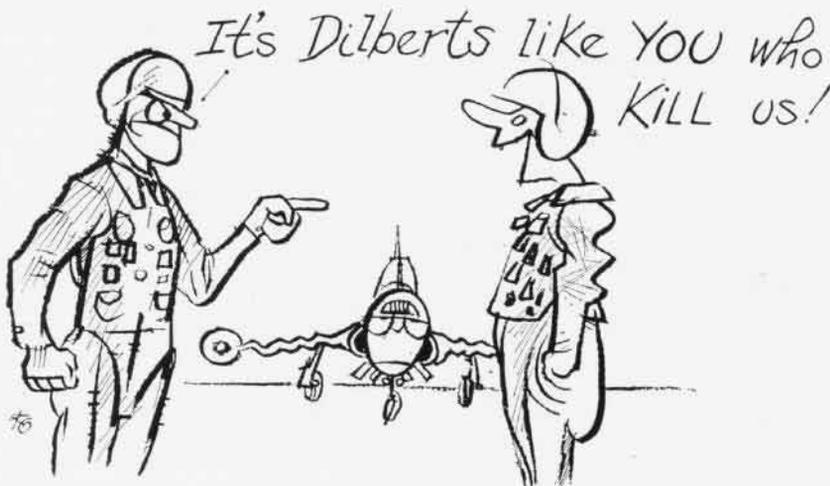


"Son," Gramps replied, "I get your message. . . . I suffer from a rare disease called 'accidentitis,' the symptoms of which are high temperatures and extreme chills. They don't show, but there are two sets of woolen underwear under that tunic.

"When you've been around as long as I have, you'll find that worrying about you young lads takes a lot out of an old man. Besides, if you'll look at the picture again, you'll notice that I was wearing a bib. While this item is entirely unnecessary, it is considered good practice when imbibing nutrients of high liquidity."

Another pilot, Commander, USN, who preferred to remain anonymous, queried Gramps: "I have done considerable . . . research and have been unable to reconcile with facts one of your statements on page 6 of the February 1954 issue of NANews: 'A cowl speed ring was found obstructing fuel flow into the carburetor.' Knowing your reputation for being correct and a sage in your own right, how about telling me how that could happen?"

Gramp started out bravely, "Well, bub, it ain't easy. You see, this AF-2S sustained a high G impingement upon a barrier cable during carrier operations. This encounter caused the cowl speed ring to deflect upward, thereby

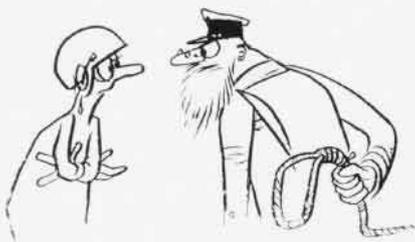


restricting the flow of ozone to the intake duct of the carburetor. The deformation of the cowl speed ring was such that it caused a severe twisting effect of the airflow across the fuel nozzles, which in turn—all right, I give up. It was a slip of the pencil. . . . Let me up, fellas.”

VICE ADMIRAL A. S. Heyward, Chief of Naval Air Training, uses one of Grampaw Pettibone's favorite expletives in addressing a letter of congratulation to the old man: "Great balls of fire, do you mean to say it's been all of 25 years that you and that cohort of yours by the name of Osborn have been trying to keep us wayward birdmen in line?"

"Many of us owe our continuing health and relative happiness to careful reading and heeding your colorful comments, driven home by Osborn's telling cartoons. Between the two of you, many pilots and planes have been saved to fly another day."

Sometimes the incident is grim that saves other pilots. In July 1962, Gramps described the flight of two young pilots in a T-28. At Jackson-

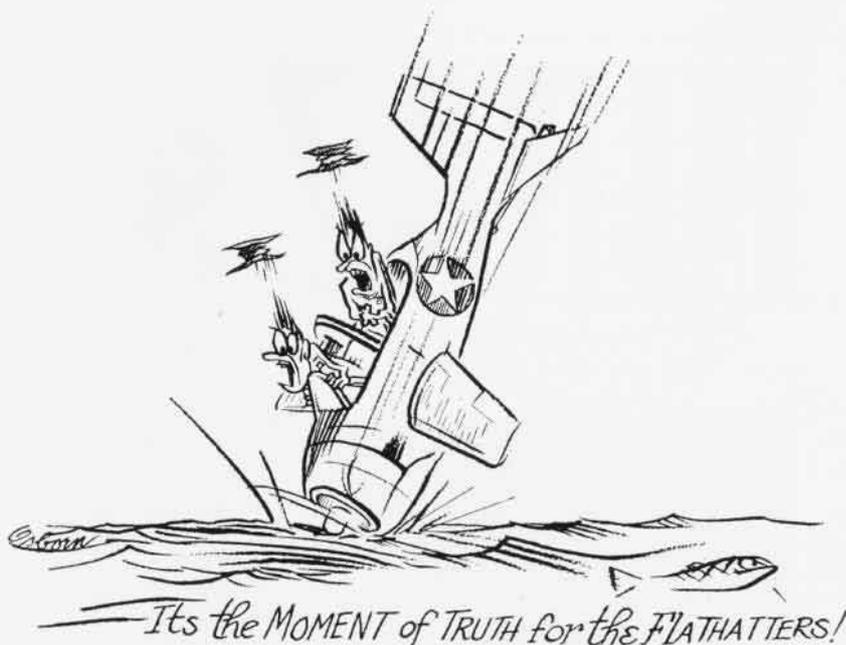


ville, they detoured to the beach.

Flying over the sand, inboard of the water's edge, they cruised from 100 to 200 feet altitude until they approached the more populated areas. Now they really lowered her and followed the beach contours at about 10 to 20 feet, waving to bathers and fishermen. A lifeguard reported the T-28 passing down his beach, the prop wash tossing up sand.

A woman sitting on the porch of her country store saw only the aircraft canopy pass over the intervening 20-foot sand dunes. Two young women, sunbathing on the sand, saw the plane coming and, jumping up, ran for the dunes. They reported that the pilot smiled and waved to them as he passed by at eye level.

He must have decided to take



another look, for he immediately pulled up into a steep wingover to the left. The T-28 attained a level of about 200 feet, turned, faltered and plunged into the water, striking about 100 yards off shore. Both men rode it in. There wasn't time to get out.

Gramps comments, "What a waste! Two fine young men lost because they had to 'impress' a bunch of bathers and fishermen! Everyone knows flat-hatters get hacked but good. The main trouble is that most of 'em end up DEAD and very few get before a board. The first survivor who gets caught at it will now get hung higher'n a horse thief. Ol' Gramps sits on the Big Board and believe me, the only discussion is not whether to hang the flat-hatter up to dry, but how high."

The account of the two Dilberts plunging into the drink to their death gains emphasis by Osborn's illustration. The artist never fails to drive home Gramps' exhortation. Vice Admiral John T. Hayward, President of the Naval War College at Newport, R.I., calls his illustrations "magnificent." This is his witness: "The marvelous characters of Gramps and Dilbert have, together, done a job for U.S. Naval Aviation that is immeasurable in its achievement."

To which Vice Admiral W. A. Schoech, USN (Ret.), DCNO (Air) in 1962-63, agrees in these words:

"The old fud managed to cook up the optimum stew of criticism and praise, through words and cartoons for each erring pilot he chose to address.

"No doubt it would be difficult to measure Gramps' cost-effectiveness (I hate even to raise the point for fear that next week it may kick up a study) but we must admit that his humorous approach always got the immediate attention of young and old. Surely his words get results that couldn't be hoped for via official directives. Many of us are still breathing today because of the sharp tongue of the old coot with the whiskers.

"Let's declare Arlington Cemetery out of bounds for Gramps, give him a DSM for his first 25 years of service and pass a law to guarantee his caustic jibes for the life of Naval Aviation."

