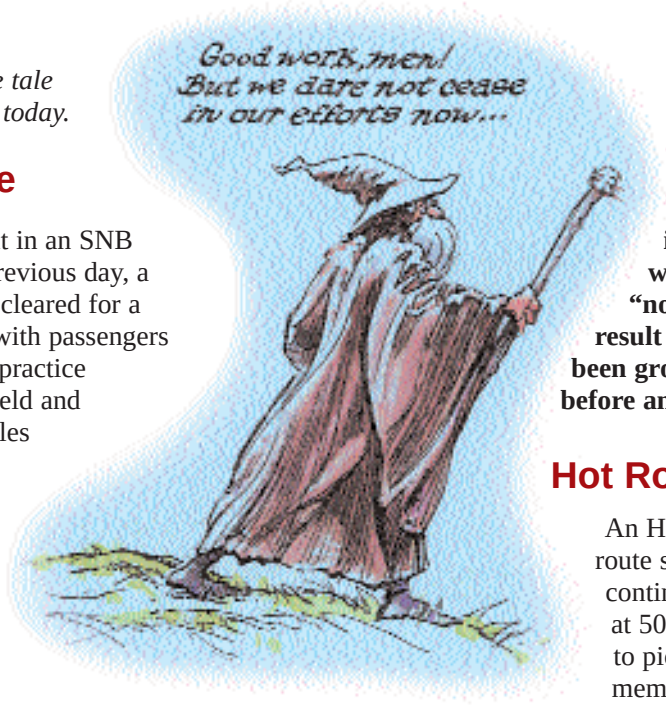
GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by Ted Wilbur

This Grampaw Pettibone tale from the 1940s still applies today.

Hot Rod Was Here

After getting checked out in an SNB two-engine trainer on the previous day, a volunteer reserve pilot was cleared for a local familiarization flight with passengers on board. He made several practice landings and then left the field and flew to an area about 40 miles to the northeast of the station, where he proceeded to attempt a series of wingovers. He stated that it was his intention to keep the airspeed between 70 and 170 knots during these maneuvers. His altitude was about 12,000 feet.



Halfway through the third wingover, he lost control of the SNB. The passengers felt the nose of the plane whip around violently. Recovery was made in a steep dive with the airspeed needle indicating 230 knots.

The pilot retarded the throttles and tried a shallow pullout. During this part of the recovery, the curved portions of the windshield cracked, the copilot's side window blew out and one passenger window was broken. The aircraft lost 4,000 feet in the recovery.

Structural damage to the aircraft was severe. Inspection showed bent spars, popped rivets and buckles in the fuselage skin. The SNB was declared a strike.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

When I read about a fool stunt like this, I want to get the axe down off the wall and set out after the pilot. I'll bet the passengers who were along for this ride feel the same way. Actually, they are darn lucky to be alive. We think of the SNB as a relatively inexpensive training plane, but it may surprise you to know one costs the Navy $72,886 in flyaway condition.

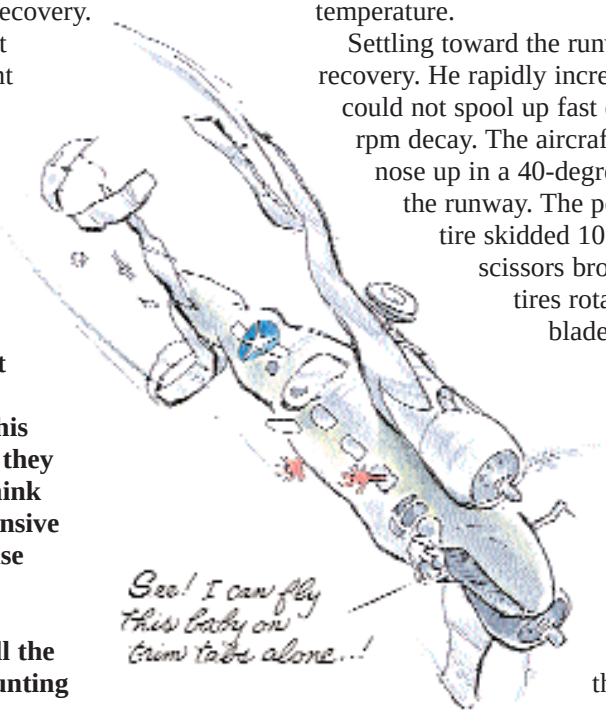
I can't take the space to list all the orders this pilot violated, not counting terrifying the folks in the back, but here is the most important one: Technical Order 6-49 restricts the SNB-JRB type to "normal flying." In case there is a doubt in anyone's mind, wingovers are not considered "normal flying" in the SNB. As a result of this incident, the pilot has been grounded and ordered to appear before an Aviator's Disposition Board.

Hot Rod Was Here, Too

An HH-46 *Sea Knight* made an en route stop for refueling before continuing on to a landing zone, flying at 50 to 200 feet above ground level, to pick up some sea-air-land team members. The aircraft landed at the destination and disembarked a squadron cameraman to videotape the helo making practice approaches to the landing zone.

The copilot was at the controls. He flew two approaches and was on the third when trouble started. He flew a low-level, high-speed, side-flare approach. In a nose-high attitude the pilot transitioned to a side flare with excessive angle of bank. The *Sea Knight* rapidly lost airspeed and subsequently also lost lift. Exacerbating the situation was the loss of wind effect and the high ambient temperature.

Settling toward the runway the pilot attempted a recovery. He rapidly increased collective but the engines could not spool up fast enough. This led to rapid rotor rpm decay. The aircraft struck the ground 15 degrees nose up in a 40-degree angle of bank, moving down the runway. The port outboard main gear mount tire skidded 10 feet. The main landing gear scissors broke and the main landing gear tires rotated 90 degrees. The aft rotor blades struck the ground six times.



The engines then spooled up, restoring rotor rpm. The aircraft became airborne, continuing a few feet above the ground for a distance of 100 feet from the initial impact point. The aircraft was flying in a relatively level attitude but with the nose rotated 120 degrees left of the runway heading. The helo

was vibrating violently when it fell a few feet to the deck, at which point the auxiliary nose wheel collapsed. Next, the nose struck the ground, the forward rotor blades drooped and two blades impacted the ground. Excessive vibration made securing the engine control levers difficult but the pilots finally secured them after numerous attempts. The rotor system coasted to a stop and the crew egressed unhurt.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Pass me the bicarb! My head's poundin' as if the *Sea Knight* was vibratin' inside it. The pilot in command didn't bother to brief for the impromptu photo op. Neither did he obtain permission from his command. Nor did he restrain his copilot from this adventurous approach and landing.

The copilot failed to arrest the helo's rate of descent and didn't consider the effect of high temperature and wind loss during the landing sequence. This led to insufficient power during the transition from approach to landing. The copilot, it turns out, was soon to be released from active duty. This sortie was a last chance to demonstrate his skills.

There's one age-old word that describes this flight which turned into a calamity. Pure and simple, these folks were "flathatting"—and they got caught!