

GRAMP AW PETTIBONE

High Jinks

A flight of two F4U's on an authorized oxygen tactics hop proceeded to an altitude of 41,000 feet and remained there for 15 minutes, after which they descended to 18,000. At this altitude the section leader placed his wingman in column position, and nosed over to increase his speed. At approximately 230 knots he pulled up into a vertical climb and held it until he stalled out. The plane went into a series of unusual attitudes and regained normal flight after a fall of about 5000 feet.

At this time the section leader remarked over the radio that he was glad to have recovered from that maneuver, and started a spiraling descent. When down to about 4,000 feet he called his wingman and asked him to make a visual check of his plane as it was vibrating badly. The wingman was unable to notice any structural damage and the flight continued on down to 1500 feet.

At this time the section leader added power, and stated that he would climb back to 5,000 feet to check the flight characteristics of his plane. As he added power his plane began to stream oil and smoke. The airspeed fell off to a point where the wingman could not stay in formation with 50 degrees of flap and no power. As he pulled ahead of the section leader the latter signaled for a shift of frequency and notified the tower that he was making an emergency water landing.

A few seconds later his plane went into a diving turn to the right and struck the water at a 45 degree angle. The pilot opened his hood and made an effort to get out of the plane in this dive. He was barely clear of the plane and his pilot-chute had just started to stream when he hit the water. The plane sank immediately, while the body and parachute remained afloat and were recovered a few minutes later by a nearby fishing boat. The medical officer was of the opinion that the fatal injuries may have been received on impact with the tail surfaces of the aircraft.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Since the aircraft was not recovered the accident board can do little more than guess at just what caused the severe vibration and apparent loss of power. It may be that some structural damage was suffered during the unusual and violent maneuvers which followed the vertical stall at 18,000 feet. However, if the strength



limitations were exceeded at this time, it seems probable that a major structural failure such as disintegration of the tail surfaces would have resulted. Since this was not observed on the visual check, it is much more likely that some internal failure in the engine structure caused the vibration and loss of power.

But let's go back and look at the sequence of events that led to the accident. In the first place this pilot violated the provisions of Aviation Circular Letter 97-47 by proceeding to an altitude of 41,000 feet. I think his actions at 18,000 feet indicate pretty clearly that he was still suffering from the effects of anoxia. My records show that pilots do some very curious and unpredictable things when their judgment is affected due to insufficient oxygen. For example, there is one case on record where a PBM pilot remained at high altitude for some time without using *any* oxygen equipment. Finally he began to laugh and put his feet up on the yoke and started playing roller coaster. Some of the passengers put their chutes on and when the plane broke in half, they tumbled out and survived to tell of this unusual case.

From the time this F4U pilot left 41,000 feet until he met his death, his judgment, too, seems to have been very poor. First he attempted a foolish and prohibited maneuver. Then, when he found his plane vibrating badly, he continued to lose precious altitude. When it became apparent that he would have to make an emergency landing, he failed to keep sufficient airspeed. And finally when he decided to bail out, he was so low that by the time he got the canopy open and got out of the cockpit, he was only 75 or 100 feet off the water.

He was joking with his wingman until a few minutes before this series of errors cost him his life.



Dear Grampaw,

You probably heard this yarn eight or ten years ago when it was first making the rounds, but maybe some of your readers haven't heard it or have forgotten it.

Back in the early days of the aviation cadet program a student on a solo hop in primary training got lost about 25 miles north of Corry Field. When he started back near the end of the hour he suddenly realized that he had no notion of which way to head to reach Corry Field. After flying about ten minutes without recognizing any familiar sights he decided to land his N3N in a field adjacent to a farm house.

After a nice landing he got out and walked over to the farm house where he learned that he was nearly due north of the air station. Since he was then a little overdue, he asked permission to telephone the station to say that he would be right back. He gave his position and was directed to fly back on a heading of 170°.

About 20 minutes later the phone rang again in the Corry Field operations office, and the conversation ran something like this:

"Hello, this is Aviation Cadet _____ again. Say, no wonder I'm lost. I took off and tried to get on a compass heading of 170, but the compass in this plane is defective. It won't read above 36. What shall I do?"

The cadet was instructed to stand by the plane, and told that an instructor would come out to fly him back. When the instructor arrived, he took one look at the field where the cadet had made two successful landings and one take-off and let out a long low sigh. It was so small that he insisted on removing two fences before he would attempt a take-off.

Anyway that's the way I remember it.

Sincerely,

Cdr. _____



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Many thanks for this yarn. As you say it's old enough to have whiskers as long as mine, but perhaps it will be new to naval aviators of recent vintage.

"Quick Henry, the Ripcord."

The instructor was flying in the rear seat of an SNJ instructing a student pilot of the Brazilian Air Force on a scheduled syllabus flight in primary training. The plane entered an inverted spin and the instructor inadvertently unlocked his safety belt and fell out of the plane. Fortunately his parachute functioned well and his only injuries were minor scratches suffered when he landed in a pine tree.

The student stayed with the airplane and does not remember just what corrective action he took, but the plane was back in straight and level flight at about 2000 feet. The student suffered ecchymosis of both eyes due to the negative "G" pull, but made a successful landing at an outlying field.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

I'm not just sure what ecchymosis is, but I have a notion it results from having your eyeballs pulled an inch or so out of their sockets.

My congratulations to this student on his successful landing. I hope the instructor has all the pine needles out by now.

You Count 'Em

The pilot of an SNJ took off from Jacksonville, Florida on a contact cross-country flight to Miami via Tampa. He had slightly over 600 hours flight time, of which 175 were in the SNJ. In the preceding three months he had flown 18 hours as a member of the Volunteer Reserve.

The flight to Tampa was uneventful, but shortly after leaving Tampa the pilot could not positively fix his position. He then decided to take up a heading of 090° expecting to cross to the East Coast. After flying for some time he came to a large body of water, which he correctly identified as Lake Okeechobee, and proceeded to the southern end of the lake.

At this time he was less than 40 nautical miles from West Palm Beach and had approximately 50 gallons of fuel left—roughly, enough for a two-hour flight. Apparently he was still dubious as to his position, and felt that he should get a definite fix before proceeding over the swamps. At 1105 he sighted a small uncharted airfield near the town of South Bay. Without dragging the field, he landed downwind, choosing a runway which looked fine from the air but which had been plowed and rolled two days before.

About 160 yards from the point of touchdown the wheels dug into the soft ground and the SNJ flipped over on its back. The pilot was extricated with the assistance of a nearby work-

man a couple of minutes later. His shoulder harness and safety belt functioned correctly and he was uninjured.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

This reminds me of an accident which occurred a couple of years ago when a former PB4Y pilot was flying a Piper Cub for the first time. This chap suddenly discovered that he had only 11 gallons of gasoline left and made an immediate emergency landing in a pasture despite the fact that there were four or five airfields within a radius of thirty miles. For some reason or other the fact that he still had more than 50% of his initial fuel supply simply didn't register. Many years of burning gas at the rate of two or three gallons a minute caused him to believe that an emergency existed when he actually had enough gasoline to keep the Cub in the air for two hours.



Ride 'Em, Cowboy!

A flight student in a solo hop in an SNJ was practicing full-flap precision landings. His first approach appeared normal until just before the plane hit the deck, at which time it was in a left skid. Immediately after contact the plane began to swerve to the right. The student applied left brake, left rudder, and full throttle. After completing a ground loop of 90 degrees he became airborne again.

He then noticed that he was unable completely to retract his left wheel so he circled the field and asked for a wheel check. The engineering officer checked his wheels, which appeared to be down and locked, and instructed him to come in for a landing. This landing was just about like the previous one except that the student completed a ground loop of 135 degrees before taking off again.

After the second landing attempt a further check in the air showed the left landing gear to be bent inboard. The pilot was instructed to try a third landing, using full left brake. On this landing he got down safely without further damage to the SNJ.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Maybe the lad used to work in a rodeo—anyway he's a real rough rider. The accident board is of the opinion that the left landing gear was damaged on the first landing attempt, and bent further inboard on the number two ground loop.

"Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

"Perhaps you can draw a few morals from this account of a near accident.

"Recently I landed a JRB-4 at a USAF base. I discovered that I had no left brake whatsoever, and reported this fact to the tower. The tower instructed me to make a 180° turn and taxi back down the runway in use until I came to the turn-off intersection.

"I proceeded very slowly, using the tailwheel lock, and keeping the props in full high pitch to reduce speed and save the right brake. I was about halfway to the intersection when I saw a P-47 taxi out and turn onto the downwind end of the runway. I considered questioning the tower concerning him but did not, since he appeared to be waiting.

"It later developed that the P-47 was on a test hop, and the tower believed it to have no radio. Actually, the pilot was receiving, but had no transmitter. Since it was a test hop, his complete attention was given to his instruments. As he taxied out some minutes after my landing, it never occurred to him that I might still be on the runway. After he started his take-off, the tower held the red light on him, but he was still on instruments.

"I lost about three seconds convincing myself that he was actually coming toward me. It took another two seconds to unlock the tailwheel and apply full throttles. Of course nothing happened because the props were in high pitch, so another three seconds were lost before I really started moving out of the way, after shoving prop controls forward.

"The P-47 cleared my tail with his right wing by about a foot. That was the first glimpse the pilot had of me. As soon as I saw he was clear, I yanked back the throttles and groundlooped to the right to avoid planes parked near the runway. Total damage done was one broken throttle cable.

Respectfully,
Lt. Comdr. USN"

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Looks to me like the tower operators weren't on the ball in this instance. At least it wouldn't have cost anything to try a radio warning to the P-47 or to you. A test hop requires great attention to instrument readings, but this certainly is no excuse for taking off without making sure that the runway ahead is clear.

Congratulations on getting out of the way.



TOMBSTONE

Here lies the bones
Of Ensign Dokes,
Who put on a show
For his home town folks.