

# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Two Missing Screws

About 15 minutes after take-off the pilot of an F6F reported to an accompanying aircraft that he was having trouble with his gas system. Although he turned the selector valve, the tanks were not being changed. At this time he was on "RESERVE" tank and was within 10 miles of two good airfields. Twenty minutes later he passed up another sizeable airfield, and continued to turn his fuel selector in a vain attempt to draw gas from another tank.

After 55 minutes in the air he radioed that his "Reserve" tank was down to 10 gallons. Since the flight was proceeding a few miles off the coast line, he turned towards the beach and jettisoned his belly tank. His engine cut out a few seconds later and the F6F was ditched about 200 yards off shore. The plane appeared to make a perfect water landing and remained afloat for about 2½ minutes. The pilot was observed swimming vigorously towards shore. The tide was high and the surf rough. The pilot is still missing.

A couple of days prior to the accident this F6F and two others had belly tanks installed. Investigation revealed that in all three instances both stop screws on the fuel tank selector valves were removed. The removal of these stop screws allows the selector valves to be rotated more than 360 degrees. Such rotation in turn causes the turn-buckle on the selector chain to ride up on the sprocket, either breaking down the chain arrangement or allowing it to fall free of the sprocket. In either case the chain falls free and it becomes impossible to shift tanks.

 **Grampaw Pettibone says:**

This tragic chain of events started when a maintenance crew failed to get the word on the correct way to install the belly tanks. Only one of the stop screws should have been removed to enable the pilot to move the selector to the belly tank position.

It is difficult to understand why the pilot didn't head for terra firma when he first discovered that his fuel system wasn't functioning correctly. Every year we have three or four cases where pilots virtually sign their death certificates by not landing soon enough when they are in trouble. Last year, you may remember the case of the student who flew past three fields with his engine on fire in a fatal attempt to get home.

Whenever you know or suspect that something is wrong with your engine or any part of your plane, start thinking about



how quickly you can get on the ground. It's a lot better to land and find that the trouble wasn't really serious, than to keep flying along till the engine quits cold or the flames are licking at your ankles.

## Booby Trap


The pilot of an SNB-3 retracted his wheels after take-off and tried to return the switch to the neutral position. He found that the switch wouldn't stay in this position, so he returned it to the up position for the rest of the flight. When he landed he noted on the yellow sheet that the switch was faulty.

A couple of hours later he returned to the aircraft for a second flight and was informed by a maintenance man that the landing gear switch had been fixed and that it would now remain in the neutral position.

On the take-off run the pilot applied power to 35 hg. When the SNB had travelled about 600 feet and reached an airspeed of about 45 knots, the landing gear collapsed and the propellers struck the runway.

*JRB/SNB Service Change No. 43 had been partially completed in that the old type three position landing gear switch had been replaced by a two position switch. The new type guard was not available so the old guard was reinstalled.*

With this guard and switch combination, it was impossible to place the switch in what appears to be the neutral position unless it was held there manually or with the edge of the guard. In reality it was then in the "UP" position.

 **Grampaw Pettibone says:**

This is what I call a real "Booby Trap." Until October of 1948 the JRB-SNB handbooks said, concerning the land-

ing gear switch: "Always return the switch to the center position after raising or lowering the gear." A revision to the handbook dated October 1948 says: "When the landing gear is extended always have the switch in the 'DOWN' position." In March of 1949 SNB/JRB Service Change #43 was issued providing for a change of both switch and guard to eliminate the neutral position.

I wonder how many pilots actually get to read all the changes to pilots handbooks and all the Aircraft Service Changes. My guess is that in a squadron where all the pilots are flying the same type plane—the word gets around pretty fast. But I strongly suspect that the pilots who fly infrequently and in different types don't see all the changes.

Certainly the maintenance people were at fault in this instance in going ahead with the service change when they did not have all the parts to complete the job. At least until the new guard was available it would have been a good idea to tag the switch with a card saying "NOTE NEW TYPE TWO POSITION SWITCH."

## Brush With Death

There's a certain Lieutenant (jg) in the midwestern part of the United States who knows that his number just isn't up yet.

After not flying for more than a year, he reported to a Reserve base and was checked out in an SNJ. A couple of days later on a solo flight he decided to try a few acrobatic maneuvers. He did two rolls to the left, two to the right, and then started a split "S" at an altitude of 3700 feet.

He blacked-out during recovery from the split "S" and on regaining his senses found himself at very low altitude in a dive. He eased the stick back cautiously to avoid a second black-out and went through a tree top as he completed his pull out.

 **Grampaw Pettibone says:**

How close can a fellow come to killing himself and still survive? This chap dented up the leading edge of one wing and smashed the landing light, but was able to fly back to base and land safely.

Aircraft Circular Letter 24-49 deals with restrictions on acrobatic flying and specifies that no maneuver shall be commenced in which the entry, follow through or completion will be below 1500 feet above the water, ground, or highest obstruction.

If you're rusty from a long lay-off, as this pilot obviously was, it's a darn good idea to add on a couple of thousand feet to this minimum. You can live longer.

## Seven Errors

The F8F-2 which the pilot was flying was a new plane. The safety screw on the fuel tank selector switch, which prevents the pilot from switching to the belly tank when one is not in use, had not been removed. After the flight was airborne the pilot noticed this and reported it to his flight leader, who instructed him to continue with the flight for the time being.

The flight returned to the ship after approximately two hours and made a simulated attack. At this time the division leader informed the ship of the difficulty and the fact that the plane was down to 40 gallons in the main fuel tank. The pilot dropped his external tank and began to orbit the ship.

About 30 minutes later he observed a clear deck on *another carrier* and called to say that he was making an approach. He received an acknowledgement for this transmission and started his approach to the second carrier only to receive a wave-off due to a foul deck. As he took this wave-off he saw that his own ship was ready to receive him. He immediately made an approach but was waved off for a poor pass. On his next turn his engine began to miss but caught again as he leveled his wings on the down wind leg. It cut out again on the cross-leg and the plane began to settle. With the wings level the engine again caught but the pilot was not in a position to continue his approach.

He passed the carrier on the starboard side and called to say that he was almost out of gas and would have to land on the next pass. This transmission was not acknowledged. As the pilot turned in his final approach the engine again cut out, but caught quickly enough for him to continue his approach. In the excitement of his emergency the pilot had forgotten to put his flaps down and was therefore given another wave-off. Seeing the deck clear and realizing that he might not be able to make another pass, he chopped his throttle, floated up the center of the deck, and caught a late wire. The propeller and speed ring hit the barrier.

*Grampaw Pettibone says:*

Everybody screamed at this lad for not taking that last wave-off, but I'd like to start way back at the beginning of this flight and tally the errors that put him on the spot!

1. The maintenance crew failed to remove the stop screw in the fuel selector.
2. The pilot failed to check for suction on the belly tank during his warm up.
3. The division leader, when first informed of the situation, did not advise the pilot to orbit the ship.
4. The pilot makes no mention of any attempt to remove the screw by any means

available to him such as his knife or the edge of his knee pad.

5. Having been instructed to continue on the flight the pilot should have dropped his belly tank to rid the plane of this unnecessary weight and drag during the next two hours.

6. When the carrier was notified that the plane had only 40 minutes of fuel left, the pilot should not have been required to wait 30 minutes before being allowed to make his first pass.

7. When the pilot radioed the L.S.O. that his fuel was almost gone and that he could not take another wave-off, this message was not acknowledged. Actually this word was never passed to the L.S.O. who assumed that the pilot could take another wave-off.

This is certainly an example of an accident that had no business happening. From the initial discovery of the trouble until the time the plane started to sputter, over two and a half hours elapsed. From where I sit it looks like this accident couldn't have happened without a lot of cooperation from all hands.



SHOULDER HARNESS SAVES PILOT OF THIS F4U

The F4U-4 pictured here had an engine failure shortly after take-off. The pilot found himself losing altitude rapidly and on a collision course with an automobile on the highway which borders the air station.

To clear the automobile he skidded his plane to the right and headed for an open field. His wheels were still down as he had originally expected to make a cross wind emergency landing on the airfield. After taking the tops out of some small trees the plane hit the clearing, rolled about 300 feet and then flipped over on its back.

The pilot states: "I was trapped in the cockpit, but the crash crew and equipment arrived in what I thought was a very short time and they got me out by digging the earth away and then pulling me out. There is no doubt in my mind that it would have been better to go in with my wheels up, but due to my first thought of getting back to the field and then finding that I could not make it; also trying to avoid collision with the auto, there just wasn't time to get them up. . . . My shoulder straps and safety belt were tightly secured and without any doubt saved me from serious injury and possible death."

## Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

Thought you might be interested in the following dialogue between a pilot in trouble and the C.I.C. aboard a carrier:

"Flat Turtle from Rabbit Nine Two. Mayday. Mayday. Engine failure at Angels four directly above carrier. Which side shall I ditch on?"

"Rabbit Nine Two from Flat Turtle. Say again your last message."

"Flat Turtle LISTEN TO ME. Engine failure over carrier. Angels three. Which side shall I ditch on?"

"Rabbit Nine Two from Flat Turtle. Roger. Wait."

P.S. About a minute after the big splash the C.I.C. boys were on the air telling Rabbit Nine Two to ditch on the port side. He was fished out of the drink a few minutes later still mumbling to himself about that "WAIT" message.

— LCDR. USN.

*Grampaw Pettibone says:*

What no sky hook?

Thanks for this interesting yarn. I've been plenty put out myself at some "Wait" messages, but never with as much justification as this fellow had.

## Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

The enclosed poem was written by one of our safety-conscious flight instructors . . . perhaps you would like to use it on your page:

THE SAD, SAD STORY OF DILBERT

You know a Dilbert, and YOU know a Dilbert,

But I know a Dilbert with a special twist:

He MEMORIZED his check-off list. Now Dilbert had two years of college His head was chuck full of knowledge: He could MEMO-R-IZE his check-off list.

On runway four there's a heck of a crash;

Dilbert forgot to change his gas; He MEMORIZED his check-off list.

On Dilberts 'wheels-up' there were many hollers,

The Navy doesn't spend such useless dollars:

He MEMORIZED his check-off list. Then he crashed into a drainage ditch,

You see, his mixture wasn't rich: He MEMO-R-IZED his check-off list.

On that crash his head was 'blocked', You know his shoulder harness wasn't locked.

He MEMORIZED his check-off list. The moral of this sad, sad, story

Could be very long and gory. But from further words I will desist,

PLEASE, READ your check-off list. W. BIEHL

*Grampaw Pettibone says:*

Many thanks. The author really hits the nail on the head. If I had a nickel for every accident caused by memory failure, I could buy that farm and retire.