

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Mexican Hayride!

The two Beechcraft pilots had an uneventful flight from San Diego to Litchfield Park, where the junior of the two pilots was assigned to pick up and deliver a JRB-6 to Corpus Christi. Since the other Beechcraft was also going to Corpus, he was to act as follow pilot for the rest of the trip.

After a brief acceptance flight the pilots cleared for El Paso, arriving safely about half hour before sunset. They dutifully sent their "ROVNITE" messages. So far they were going "great guns." They had left San Diego after lunch, taken delivery on the JRB-6 and put about 600 miles behind them by nightfall.

The next morning they were informed that the weather along the authorized ferry route to Corpus Christi was below VFR minimums. They were given a contact clearance to Corpus Christi via a more southerly route. The Ensign who had a total of 1000 hours and approximately 200 hours in Beechcrafts asked permission to lead the flight in order to gain additional navigational training. This permission was granted and the two plane section departed from Biggs AFB, El Paso at 0940 MST.

The senior pilot who was following in the SNB-3 had a passenger and some cargo and found that the JRB-6 kept pulling away from him at the power settings recommended for long range cruising. An hour or so after take-off he heard the JRB pilot call him and tried to answer on all VHF channels and on 3105, but apparently his transmissions were not receiving. He decided that sooner or later the other pilot would slow down and made no effort to keep up with him as that would have involved using additional fuel. He lost sight of the JRB slightly over two hours after take-off. He states that it was about 15 miles ahead and "blended in with the clouds."

After the planes became separated, both turned south looking for better weather. The pilot of the SNB realized after a few minutes that he would soon be deep into Mexican territory unless he reversed his course and looked for a clear area to the north. He did this, and after a short while was able to turn to the east and home on a 50,000 watt radio station in San Antonio. He landed there after 3 hours and 45 minutes and reported that he had separated



from the other plane.

Meanwhile the Ensign in the JRB also reversed course for a couple of minutes to see if he could spot the other plane. When he saw that he was alone and unable to establish radio contact with the other Beechcraft, he decided to stick to a magnetic course of about 150 degrees. The weather seemed to have closed in all around him. He was forced to dodge one thunderstorm after another. He tried to home on the San Antonio range but the static made it impossible to be sure of the station identification. However, the radio compass needle seemed to remain centered on a heading of 150 degrees so he continued on this course.

After another 30 minutes, he saw mountains all around, but was unable to locate his position on the chart. He was lost and he knew it. However, he still had a good deal of gas left and he decided to hold his heading of 150 degrees and land at the next airfield. He was still on this heading an hour later when he noticed that his fuel supply was getting dangerously low. Finally he saw a clear spot to the south and soon afterwards found a small town. Three quarters of the way around town he ran out of gas. Seeing a hard flat field about 1200 feet long, he lowered wheels and flaps and tried to touch down at a slow airspeed. Unfortunately the field elevation was 7200 feet, and he found his ground speed very fast. Half way through the field he had to veer off to avoid a group of burros. He went on through two more small corn fields and finally nosed up to avoid hitting an adobe wall.

The next day an R4D arrived with gas-

oline, two new props, and a repair crew. The JRB was flown back to Corpus Christi where about 500 man hours will be required to complete the repairs.



Gram paw Pettibone says—

Let's take a closer look at this Mexican Hayride.

Fresnillo, Zacatecas, Mexico — that's where he finally landed. I had to break out my World Atlas to find out just where this was. After locating Fresnillo, I decided to trace the chart, so you could see just how lost a fellow can get. One thing we have to give him credit for—he certainly was getting some mileage out of that JRB. With a nose tank I think he would have made Mexico City.

The errors that led to this fiasco are pretty apparent, but let's go over them quickly:

1. The flight should not have departed from El Paso with the authorized ferry route closed due to bad weather. The radio aids on the route via Van Horn and Marfa are of no help to planes not equipped to receive the signals from the VAR stations in that area.

2. Having decided to proceed on the route indicated by the broken line, it wasn't very smart to plan a non-stop flight all the way to Corpus Christi. According to my calculations that's over 700 miles and even with economical power settings the planes would not have arrived with the required one hour margin of fuel.

3. In allowing the junior pilot to take the lead over a route with which he was unfamiliar, the senior pilot was violating instructions contained in ACL 43-49 which defines the responsibilities of a "Lead Ferry Pilot" and clearly states that "The primary consideration in ferrying aircraft is the safe and expeditious delivery of the aircraft and not pilot training."

4. Having elected to stick his neck out in this manner, the senior pilot most certainly should have checked to see that he had voice radio contact with the other plane. He should have flown in a cruising formation, ready to take over the lead should the junior pilot head off course or encounter conditions that he could not cope with. To drag along 15 miles in the rear was inexcusably poor airmanship.

The actions of the junior pilot, once he became separated, deserve a little consideration too. He obviously hadn't spent any time planning this flight or he wouldn't have held to that heading of 150 degrees quite so tenaciously after he realized that he was lost.

When he did decide to make an emergency landing, he delayed doing so until he had exhausted his fuel in flight. Fortunately his guardian angel was right on the job with a flat space within gliding distance.

A mighty poor show all around!

Will You Be Ready?

During the past few weeks two emergencies arose in flight which necessitated the abandoning of TBM's in flight. Both were at night. Both allowed a short time for the pilot and crew members to get out. In each instance the pilot stayed with the plane until actual altitude was below 1000 feet. Both pilots survived, but three passengers were killed in the first case.

Case 1.

The first emergency occurred at an altitude of 5000 feet over rough hilly terrain with an elevation of 1800 feet. The TBM was cruising at 160 knots in level flight when the engine failed following a series of rapid and intense explosions. The bail-out order was given at about 4500 indicated and the pilot received an acknowledgment of "Yes sir" from the bombardier's compartment. The pilot held the plane in a glide and attempted to restart the engine. When his radio altimeter indicated 700 feet he parachuted hitting the ground almost simultaneously with the plane and about 400 feet directly behind it. He suffered only a sprained ankle.

The three passengers did not leave the plane and were killed on impact. All had their harnesses and chutes on and still intact. They were not strapped into the safety belts on the seats. The emergency escape door was in place on the plane and evidently had not been used. The right rear part of the fuselage was not badly damaged and investigators were able to test the door for proper release. When the handle was turned the safety wire broke easily and the door slipped from its hinges.

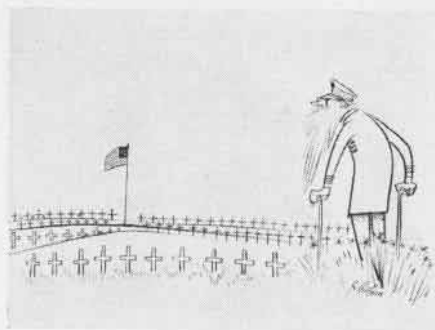
Case 2.

The following is quoted from the statement of a passenger in the second emergency:

"We were circling the seaplane base at an altitude of 2100 feet, as indicated by the pressure altimeter in the radar compartment. During this time, a definite jar of the aircraft was felt, which seemed to be identical to that experienced when wheels are lowered. Check with the pilot, however, showed that he had not lowered the wheels. The theory that we had struck a bird was discarded due to our high altitude.

"Sensing something unusual about the incident, Chief _____ briefly went over the bail-out procedure with me. About 3 minutes after the jar was felt, and while the review of bail-out procedure was just being completed, the pilot broke in on the ICS to say that the plane was on fire and to bail-out.

"Chief _____, who had his



ACCIDENT BOX SCORE

| | 1948* | 1949* |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| Major Accidents | 1244 | 1243 |
| Fatal Accidents | 104 | 93 |
| Fatalities | 180 | 159 |
| Strikes | 383 | 370 |
| Major Overhauls | 229 | 199 |

Note: These figures cover the period from January 1 to September 30 in each year. Flight hours have not been computed thru 30 September as we go to press, but will be 10 to 15% higher in 1949.

hand on the seat-lowering lever, in the act of showing me where it was, released the lever, and I crawled forward to hand him his parachute and stand clear in accordance with bail-out procedure. He fastened on his parachute, pulled the escape hatch lever, forcibly kicked out the panel and disappeared. I experienced some difficulty in snapping on my parachute due to the fact that the snap on the left hand side was stiff and unwieldy.

"A check of the altimeter showed 900 feet of altitude at the time I went through the escape hatch. The plane was in a shallow glide, the engine running steadily. Many sparks, some licks of solid flame and black smoke were shooting back from the engine past the hatch as I went through, diving down and forward. This was probably an oil fire, as my suit later showed oil stains on the legs.

"When I was sure that I was clear of the plane, I held my hand over the top of the chute and pulled the cord. I could detect no reaction except that the chute packs flopped around, so I held my hand on the front of the pack and pulled again, with instant and positive reaction by the chute. The pilot's chute was visible a short distance above me in the light of the burning plane. However, I later lost sight of it.

"I landed in 3 feet of water about 1/2 mile from the nearest shore."



Grampaw Pettibone says—

The pilot, the chief, and the technical observer whose statement is quoted above all left this burning TBM successfully and none suffered any serious injury. I think all deserve congratulations for keeping their heads and acting quickly and efficiently in a tough situation.

Why such different results in the other instance? The first thought of course is, "Did the pilot brief his passengers properly?" I'm very glad to be able to say that he *did* brief them quite thoroughly. You see, when the plane made a refueling stop, a passenger who had been on the plane gave up his place to one of the three who was later killed. He states that the pilot was very thorough and careful in his instructions to the passengers regarding the wearing of harnesses and emergency procedures.

Why, then, didn't they leave the plane when the bail-out order was given? There is no way of determining this, but one possibility presents itself. The pressure altimeter in the aft compartment was indicating 1800 feet (the terrain level) when the impact occurred. They may have been waiting in the hopes that the pilot would restart the engine. However, if such were the case it is difficult to understand why they had not at least jettisoned the door. In all probability their reactions were not as quick as those of a group of experienced aircrewmembers. Possibly they had just reached the point where they were ready to jump when the impact occurred.

It pays to be prepared for an emergency at all times. And remember this—when a pilot gives the order to "BAIL-OUT" that means that in his experienced judgment that's your best chance of survival. Don't wait for another order. If you are in a position where you can see the pilot don't wait for him to jump first. **BUCKLE THAT CHUTE ON AND GET OUT JUST AS FAST AS YOU CAN.**



Crash Helmet Saves Pilot

The F8F in the picture above was held-off after the cut and flown into the barriers so that the lower half of the main wheels hit the #3 and #4 barriers, which were torn loose. Effective contact was made with the #5 barrier which caught the main landing gear flipping the plane forward.

The nose of the aircraft hit the deck and it then bounced about 12 feet in the air, turned a flip and landed inverted.

As you can see it is going to hit with a mighty mean crunch. Fortunately the pilot was wearing one of the new protective helmets. The impact was hard enough to crack the helmet, but the pilot was not seriously injured in the crash.