

# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Folks are Really Friendly

Civilian cooperation with lost aircraft seems to be the order of the day. In the past few months, reports have been received of civilians lining up cars to illuminate small airports, golf courses and even a football field in an effort to help lost pilots get down safely in darkness and bad weather. The most recent report, however, sets a new high for this sort of assistance:

A Marine pilot departed from NAS GLENVIEW in a *Corsair* on a cross country flight to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Over Lebo, Kansas he ran into an upper storm front that had not been reported by any of the weather stations en route. His plane began to pick up ice on its wings and cowling.

The pilot reversed his course, intending to return to Kansas City to land, but soon discovered that his remote indicating radio compass would not pick up Kansas City or any other station. It had failed completely. By this time it was dark and the storm was increasing in intensity.

Spotting a hole in the clouds beneath him, the pilot dived through into a clear area and began to circle the lights of an unknown town at low altitude.

At this point the citizens of Lawrence, Kansas sprang into action. The pilot watched a parade of autos leave the town and surround a small grass emergency strip, lighting it with their headlights through the rain. One car in the lead attracted his attention with a spot light and indicated that the field was clear for a landing.

Meanwhile some other citizen had called the airport at Kansas City by phone. Kansas ATC called the Naval Air Station at Olathe and reported that a Navy flier appeared to be in trouble and was circling a nearby town at low altitude.

Just as the pilot was starting his approach for a wheels up landing on the grass strip, he heard Olathe tower call and tell him not to land. He continued to circle, but at the moment Olathe could not give him a steer as they did not know which town he was circling.

This time a Naval Reserve resident of Lawrence sprang to the rescue. He telephoned NAS OLATHE and informed the Navy that Lawrence was the scene



of action. Olathe's GCA crew was alerted.

Olathe tower then instructed the pilot to climb through the overcast and attempt to locate a *Constellation* which was approaching Kansas City on the Southwest leg of the Kansas City radio range.

To aid him in locating the big airliner, Olathe asked the commercial pilot to drop his landing lights. The *Corsair* pilot saw the bright beam, located the *Constellation* and flew parallel to it. At this time he was able to pick up an on-course signal from the Kansas City range and he set his gyro compass to coincide with the inbound beam heading.

He then took up a heading for Olathe and was picked up on the GCA scope about 25 miles north of the station. At this time, two radio contacts were established and the pilot was given headings to bring him over the field. After weathering a severe attack of vertigo, he broke into the clear at an altitude of 400 feet directly over the field and made a normal landing.



### Grampaw Pettibone says:

They tell me that this lucky Marine has a good looking wife and a couple of mighty nice youngsters. You'd think that he wouldn't give his guardian angels such a rough time.

From what I can make out of the two reports that we got on this incident the pilot wasn't worrying too much about the surface weather until he began to pick up ice at altitude. Then the ceiling and visibility below and behind him became very important items. By the time he turned around, the weather back towards Kansas City was down to 400 feet, rain, and low visibility.

According to press reports, he sent the Mayor of Lawrence, Kansas, a real nice thank-you letter.

I'll betcha that it will be a long time before he gets into another jam like this.

## Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

Your article in the January 1950 NAVAL AVIATION NEWS concerning the landing of PV airplanes by use of the elevator tab has just come to my attention. This was very interesting to me, because on Christmas night 1941, I made a single engine night landing in a PV in Manila Bay using the tab for elevator control.

Later, while a PV instructor at Sanford, Florida, I often speculated as to whether the maneuver was possible in a PV. The point was proved by LCDR \_\_\_\_\_ in the PV Squadron at Tarawa, who, returning from a strike, discovered that he had no elevator control. Rolling in a little up tab, he climbed to altitude, put down his flaps and landing gear and tested the stall characteristics of the airplane, then came in for a successful landing, using the tab for elevator control. It so happened that a news correspondent was aboard the PV and was so grateful that he wrote the incident up in the Saturday Evening Post, with a full page picture of LCDR \_\_\_\_\_ captioned "The Best Pilot in the Whole World." Lated when I had occasion to meet LCDR \_\_\_\_\_, I asked him why he elected to land rather than jump. His reply was that that was the easiest thing to do.

I hope this belated information will add to your file on PV tab landings.

Sincerely yours,

CDR, USN



### Grampaw Pettibone Says—

Sorry I had to delete the name of the B.P.I.T.W.W. in accordance with a long established policy on this page.

Your letter does more than add to the file on PV tab landings. It really starts it, as the case you report is the first instance that has come to light wherein a PV was safely landed in an actual emergency using the tab for elevator control.

This should settle, once and for all, the question of whether or not it *can* be done. I was and still am of the opinion that under peacetime conditions, and over suitable terrain, a pilot should offer the rest of his crew (co-pilot excepted) the alternative of bailing out. A controlled parachute jump from the rear door of a PV flying straight and level involves very little risk of injury.

It seems to me that the important thing to remember out of all of this discussion

is this:

The first time is the hardest in almost any maneuver.

If you know before hand just what you and your plane can do in any emergency, you're miles ahead of the fellow who has to dope things out under actual emergency conditions. A pilot can discover a lot of things that may come in very handy by simulating various emergencies at high altitude.

If he knows the answer before the emergency occurs, his crew and his associates will know that he is one of the B.P.I.T. W.G.D.W. Gosh darned, if they won't!


## Stop, Look, and Listen

Early this year an airman on a CVB was killed when he attempted to drive a tractor on to the deck edge elevator just after the warning horn had sounded. He was in the process of delivering the tractor from the hangar deck to the flight deck.

Witnesses state that he drove towards the deck edge elevator at a fast clip. A plane was turning up on the elevator, and this may have prevented him from hearing the warning horn. The safety man on the elevator had called out "Stand Clear" before turning on the current, but turned his back momentarily just as the warning horn blew. At this instant he saw the tractor out of the corner of his eye, but the elevator was already going up.

The timing in this accident was particularly unfortunate in that the driver just managed to get the front wheels of the tractor on the elevator as it started to go up. He made a desperate attempt to jump clear, but the tractor flipped over on top of him and crushed his skull.

Although existing safety directives were considered adequate to prevent an accident of this type, this CVB has added an extra safety man on the deck edge elevator. He is called elevator captain and will stand near the center of the inboard edge of the elevator to determine whether or not it is "all clear" for operation. The elevator will not be moved until the elevator captain has given a "thumbs-up" signal to the elevator operator and safety operator.

 **Grampaw Pettibone Says—**

Despite all the warnings and advice given on this subject, experience shows that some men will attempt to jump on an elevator or make a run for it when they hear the warning horn sound. I think the extra safety man will do some good in stopping this practice. In the case above, the presence of a plane turning up and men standing on the elevator should have indicated to the driver of the tractor that the elevator was about to go up. His haste to make that particular trip cost him his life.

## Wing Not Locked

The F4U-4 pictured below started a normal flyaway launch, but as the plane gained speed, the left wing commenced to rise to the fold position. Upon reaching the end of the deck, the left wing was up at an approximate 45° angle.



As soon as the plane became airborne, the wing continued folding and was torn off. The *Corsair* rolled to the left and hit the water off the port bow of the ship in a 35° nose down, inverted position. The plane sank immediately with the pilot apparently unable to get clear.



**Grampaw Pettibone Says—**

Tests on other F4U-4's in this squadron showed that it is possible for the manual wing locking control to be placed in the locked position by the pilot when actually *only one wing* is completely spread and hydraulically locked. No system is provided in the wing folding hydraulic system to keep the outer panels "in step." Varying air loads can easily cause one wing to reach the fully spread position slightly ahead of the other.

In all probability, this pilot was directing most of his attention out the right side of his plane. In spreading his wings, he probably observed that they were both moving down, but actuated the wing locking control after noting only that the right wing folding gap door had closed. He then saw the warning flag on the right side go down flush with the wing surface and assumed that he was ready to go.

As the plane commenced its take-off run, witnesses noticed that the wing folding gap door on the left side was still open, indicating that the wing hinge pin was not in the locked position. With normal hydraulic pressure on the system, the manual locking pin, if actuated first, can prevent the wing hinge pin from being driven home.

Standard operating procedures aboard carriers should provide for checkers on each side to give a positive shake-test on each wing before a plane is catapulted or deck launched. In this case the accident board was unable to find any individual who had made such a check of the left wing.

Even so, the ultimate responsibility rests with the pilot. After all, his life is at stake, and he is provided with a positive check if he looks at the wing folding gap door and warning flags on both sides be-

fore giving the ready signal.

This is an isolated case—let's keep it that way.

## They Waited Too Long

A P2V-1 airplane in the vicinity of Cape Charles, Virginia, was observed to be flying straight and level at an estimated altitude of 4,000 feet with the right engine trailing smoke, indicating that the aircraft was on fire. Shortly afterwards ground observers saw the fire increase in intensity, and soon the right engine fell from the plane. The plane continued straight and level, apparently well under control, but fire was observed where the right engine had been. About fifteen seconds later the right wing fell from the plane hitting a marine railway boat-repair shed in the village of Oyster, Virginia. After the right wing fell from the plane, the fire appeared to spread to the rest of the airplane as it dove towards the ground with erratic and violent gyrations. An estimated 2,000 gallons of fuel were on board at the time the fire started. The plane exploded on impact, and wreckage was scattered over an area of 200 yards.

Evidently the crew did not realize immediately the seriousness of the fire, evidenced by the fact that in spite of the relatively long time available, no one resorted to use of his parachute even after the engine fell from the plane. It is considered that there was sufficient time between the fall of the engine and the loss of the wing for at least two enlisted crew members to clear the plane.

Examination of the right engine after recovery indicates that the fire was in the accessory section, origin unknown.



**Grampaw Pettibone Says—**

It appears that the pilot was either attempting to reach NAF Chincoteague, the closest large airfield in the vicinity, or planning to ditch in the large, flat, tidal area near Oyster, Va. The pilot may have been influenced in this decision by his familiarity with a similar accident. In that case, also a P2V, an engine caught fire in the air, fell from the plane, and the pilot flew for several minutes, finally making a wheels-up landing at his home airport with no injuries to personnel.

Crash records show that such good fortune is exceedingly rare. When a plane is on fire at altitude, the best advice that can be offered is:

1. Be prepared to abandon the plane immediately.
2. Know and try emergency fire procedures.
3. If the fire persists, do not hesitate to jump.

I know of no single case in which the slightest criticism has been directed at a pilot or crew for leaving a burning aircraft.