

# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Heads Up Thinking

A mechanic working on the line on a very dark night noticed a trail of oil on the taxi way. He traced the oil back to the line where, a few minutes before, a plane had taxied away. This was reported to the line chief who immediately telephoned the information to the tower. The plane had not yet taken off and was recalled to the line. Inspection showed that the right engine had developed a serious oil leak and considerable oil had been lost just in taxiing.



*Grampaw Pettibone says:*

Say now, that's really using the old noggin'. Chances are that a situation such as this would never occur during daylight operations because someone would have seen the oil leak before the plane ever got out of the chocks. This man's alert action may well have prevented a very serious accident.

## Come Up and See My Cards

Every once in a while someone asks, "What finally becomes of the Aircraft Accident Reports?" Not long ago I discovered that some pilots have the notion that these reports wind up in their official records over in the BUPERS files. This just ain't so!

The main reason for the investigation and report of each accident is to learn what the cause was, so that we can correct some defect in the plane or try to keep somebody else from making the same mistake.

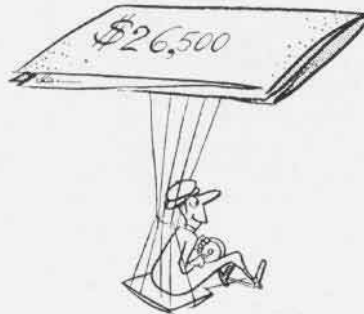
The accident reports wind up in the files of the Bureau of Aeronautics where the reports are arranged in chronological order by type of plane. Nothing in the AAR goes in the pilot's official record unless his commanding officer has initiated separate disciplinary proceedings.

I mention this as a plea for honesty. If we don't get a complete and honest report of each accident, we may be off on the wrong track in trying to prevent that type of accident from happening again.

Before going to the files a summary of each accident report is placed on an 8 x 10 card. The edges of this card contain a code which can be punched to indicate a great many facts about the accident, the type of plane, the location, the extent of damage or injury and the causes of the incident.

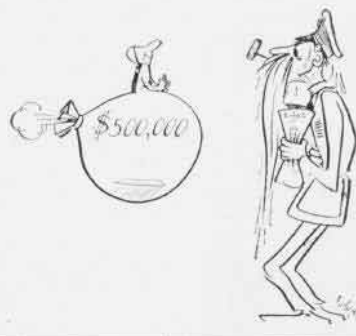


You might be interested to know that since this system was instituted in 1941 over 38,000 accidents have been analyzed and recorded. If you're ever in Washington, you can drop into the



Flight Safety Office and ask to see the card on that crack-up you had a few years ago.

By the way, this might be as good a time as any to talk about the cost of aircraft accidents. There are several ways of figuring cost and, at best, it's a rough job. Down in the front office where they are constantly trying to figure out how much can be done with next years appropriation for new planes, aircraft accidents are thought of in terms of replacement costs. In other words if someone busts up an F6F that cost about \$80,000 five years ago, these people have to think in terms of what it will cost to replace that plane with a new type fighter. Present fighter



types and the ones that will be purchased in the next couple of years cost four and five times as much as the F6F's and F4U's that were purchased a few years ago. Twenty-five years ago Naval Aviators gasped when they heard that new planes were going to cost \$26,500 apiece. Nowadays you may be flying a plane that cost as much as we used to pay for a destroyer.

Treat 'em right, 'cause they sure come high.

## Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

I am a Naval Reserve Officer on inactive duty. I would appreciate it if you would answer three questions for me:

(1) May I be allowed to ride as a passenger in a Navy plane on a space available basis, merely by presenting my Naval Reserve Identification Card.

(2) Do I have to have a set of orders issued by competent authority to make such a flight?

(3) Would I be required to be in uniform for the duration of the flight?

Many thanks,  
LT. \_\_\_\_\_, USNR.



*Grampaw Pettibone says:*

The answers to your questions are contained in Army-Navy-Air Force Joint Letter 49-670, published in the Navy Department Bulletin, 15 September 1949.

Personnel of the Naval Reserve, both officers and men, may be authorized by competent authority to ride as passengers upon presentation of proper identification on a space available basis after all priority requirements have been satisfied. Orders are not required, nor need the reservist sign a release from claim for injury and death. He must, however, sign a certificate stating that the transportation supplied is not for personal gain or conducting business which will result in remuneration.

Normally the uniform of the day should be worn. However, Commanding Officers may authorize the wearing of civilian clothes in exceptional circumstances.

Some Commanding Officers prefer to issue a set of training duty orders without pay to cover the period of the flight, but this is not mandatory.

From the above you can see that you may ride on your ID card under certain circumstances. This is a *privilege*, however, and not a *right*. The permission of competent authority is required, and competent authority in this instance is defined as an official bearing the title of Commanding Officer or higher in the chain of command.

## Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

If you haven't already read the accident report, you will soon. I think the cause of the accident will read something like "Pilot misjudged point at which to remove power." There's a lot more to it than just that, a combination of supreme conceit about my own ability and overconfidence of a variety that is rare.

This accident started a long time ago and ended in a heap on the end of the runway. Since the fatal day, I've been doing some thinking and examining myself objectively. The results aren't so good.

Let's look back—It started in "A" stage on one of the progress checks. I had flown a good hop and knew it. When I climbed out of the plane I threw out my chest, looked the instructor in the eye and said "How was it?" It sounded like "Good, wasn't it?"

My solo check was good too, in fact, the check pilot let me solo immediately which wasn't being done at the time. My opinion of my ability went up, confidence, I called it.

"B" stage was easy too. I learned fast and had reached a point where I could set the plane down at any spot designated with power, without power, "S" turn, anyway you wanted it.

"C" and "D" stages were also easy. While other people sweated about it, I took everything as a big joke. After all I had this thing in the palm of my hand, didn't I?

My first set-back came in formation flying when I got my first down, but unfortunately it was given me by a famous downcheck man, so I took it with a grain of salt.

I'm not sure just when I decided my own judgment as a pilot was better than anyone else's, but what happened in advanced training didn't help any.

On my second hop in a *Bearcat*, the instructor on the runway portable was talking me in. Then he got excited and told me to level off. From the cockpit, I looked high. But I figured he knew best. Fact is, I dropped in from about five feet and established the world's record for the highest bounce ever taken by a *Bearcat*. I got the plane on o.k. but began to wonder if the man knew what he was talking about. After all, if I had leveled out when I wanted to, that wouldn't have happened, would it?

In Advanced Carrier Qualifications, another thing happened that didn't help any. During Field Carrier Landing Practice, one LSO let me make approaches that only experienced pilots are supposed to be able to do well, no

straightaway. When another LSO tried to change my way of thinking, I thought he was just a hard-headed lug who didn't like to see students enjoy themselves.

Next high point in my climb to a fall came at the Jet Training Unit. Coming in from a familiarization hop, the man on the runway portable told me I was low and slow and to take a wave-off. I know darn well I was low, but not slow. I was *positive* I was fast, the gauge said so, didn't it? And wasn't my attitude correct? I figured he knew best and rammed the power to it, put a slight back pressure on to check my rate of descent and ballooned, I'd been fast after all.

After that, Grampaw, I was from Missouri, and anyone offering advice would have to prove what he said and it wouldn't have done any good because by this time I wasn't listening.

When I was assigned to a jet squadron, I was very pleased and on reporting found out I was one jump ahead of almost everybody. Only four pilots had had previous jet experience, and the rest hadn't checked out as yet. That didn't help either.

So there I was believing myself infallible and when a person is perfect, he makes no errors and therefore needs no margin of error. I finally cut my margin to zero when I began shooting for the end of the runway, instead of up the strip a short distance.

Then it happened. I brought her in at 105 kts., cut my power where I figured it would put me on the end of the strip, but I misjudged the rate of descent for that speed and left my landing gear on the seawall.

Misjudged? Yes, partly, but more than that I misjudged because of a classic case of overconfidence.

I've read the handwriting on the wall, Grampaw, and believe me, from here on out I'm striving to be an *old* pilot instead of a *bold* pilot.

I write this in the hopes that the bold pilots who may read it will stop and examine themselves *before* they have an accident. I walked away from mine, but they might not be so lucky.

Lt. (jg) USN



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Thanks for this interesting letter. Sometimes it takes a rough and costly accident like this to make a fellow stop and take a close look at himself. However, when you consider that new jet fighters like the one you busted up cost close to half a million dollars, the process is mighty expensive.

I hope that some of the potential "hot pilots" who read your letter will take heed *before* they find themselves trying to explain how an accident happened.

## Next Time Tie It Down

The F6F pictured above was being warmed up and tested by a plane captain. After letting the engine run for several minutes, the plane captain revved it up to 2100 RPM in order to check the mags. At this time the port chock began to slide and another plane captain standing by the wing attempted to signal the man in the cockpit to retard throttle.

The latter was concentrating on power settings and did not see the signal. The port chock then freed itself from the wheel and the aircraft immediately swung around 180 degrees to the right, jumped the starboard chock, and headed for the operations building.



The plane captain put on the brakes but forgot to retard the throttle, and the prop and engine of the F6F went through the corner of the operations building. When the landing gear hit the foundation of the building, the plane lost its forward motion. Fortunately no one was injured.

The accident board recommended that all planes be tied down during pre-flight checks involving high power.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

That sounds like a good safety measure. However, I had the feeling when reading this report that this fellow had not been fully instructed in the correct procedure for checking the mags. In the first place he should have had his feet on the brakes, and the brakes on, before turning up to 2100 RPM. Secondly, he should have been trained to take a look around and make sure that the plane was holding before directing his attention to the instrument readings.

