



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Broken Bridles

Last month's mail bag contained two letters from AD-4 pilots who experienced very unusual catapult shots caused by broken bridles. Both were operating in the Korean Area. Excerpts from their letters are printed below.

*Case 1.* "I was scheduled for an ASP pre-dawn launch in an AD-4W. Everything was normal up to the time the catapult officer waved his green wand forward and turned it out. At that time I shifted my eyes straight ahead, all set to go. The plane just launched from the port catapult was climbing out, and a destroyer was showing a red truck light ahead and a little to port. It was quite dark.

"Neither of my two crewmen nor I felt much boost from the catapult. I had no reference light to show me I was rolling or how far. The plane swung to the left a little and I knew I was accelerating, but not normally. Should I try to stop or push on the throttle? Still having faith in the catapult, I pushed on the throttle and was surprised at the ease of keeping my hand forward.

"Expecting to go into the water, I pulled back on the stick. Another surprise—it came all the way back too easily. The plane seemed to rock a bit; the nose came up so I released some back pressure—about an inch. I was flying but I could hardly believe it. I pulled the wheels up immediately, concentrating on holding the wings level, the nose up, and the throttle full forward. I gradually released back pressure as I picked up airspeed and altitude.

"During this time my crewmen were staring at an airspeed indicator which read 50 knots. We had been on the starboard catapult and left the bow of the ship at the center of the deck. Observers said the plane settled very little. The wind across the deck was 43 knots; my weight was 16,800 lbs.; I had 150 feet of deck run. The AD-4W Handbook gives 77 knots as the normal stalling speed for this weight. With full power, it is probably much less.

"After landing back aboard, I learned that the bridle had broken, cracking the radome underneath 'from ear to ear.' The bridle is being sent to the Bureau of Aeronautics for inspection."

*Case 2.* "I was being catapulted from the port cat in an AD-4NL. In the rear compartment were two aircrewmembers. The loading of the aircraft was one 500-lb. GP bomb on the left inboard wing station, four 260-lb. fragmentation bombs on the innermost outerwing stations, four 100-lb. GP bombs on the next outerwing stations, about 800 rounds of 20 mm ammunition and an APS-31 radar



set on the right inboard wing station. This gave us an approximate gross weight of 20,000 pounds. The sky was full of stars, no moon, and a definite horizon was noted. Wind was 35 knots over the deck.

"The plane director moved me on to the port cat and turned me over to the catapult officer for the initial turn up. I received the signal (red wand), applied full power and when I was satisfied the plane was ready for flight, I indicated same by blinking my wing and tail lights on dim. I immediately received the final turn up signal (green wand) and switched my lights to steady, dim, indicating I was ready for launch.

"I turned my head straight ahead, leaned back on the head rest and watched my instruments. I noticed the catapult officer's green wand wave straight ahead to fire the cat and in about two seconds felt a small boost. At this point I wish to state that there were only two or three deck lights (red) visible, and it was impossible to determine how fast I was moving or how far I had gone. Immediately I saw a flurry of sparks come through my prop blast and about that time I can remember seeing the catapult officer's two red wands at my wing tip signalling emergency stop.

"At this instant I felt I was half-way down the track and moving fairly rapidly, so I decided to try to fly it off, pick up my gear, jettison my bombs and hope to make it. I was *positive* that by trying to apply full brakes that late we could expect to do no better than dribble off the bow and be run over by the ship. As soon as I *felt* that we had reached the bow, I retracted my landing gear and reached for my emergency bomb release to drop my 500-lb. GP. I reached for the handle and missed, at the same time feeling that the plane was mushing but not

falling completely out from under us. I made no effort to jettison the bombs on the outboard wing stations, since I would have had to take my right hand from the stick to turn the master arm switch on. I decided to just try to fly the plane as best I could.

"By now the plane began to roll slightly to the left and realizing I was going to hit the water, I pulled all power off. When it had turned about 90° to the left, the left wing struck the water.

"As soon as the aircraft was completely stopped, I unsnapped my safety belt and chest strap and jumped out on to the right wing. I didn't take time to try and get at my raft because I knew a destroyer would be over very shortly and I didn't know how long it would take the aircraft to sink with a load of bombs on it.

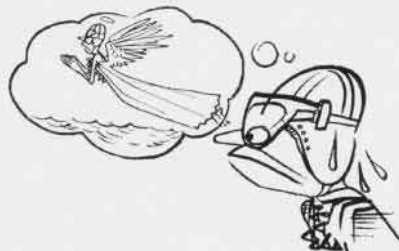
"When I was on the wing, I saw that the carrier was about 30 yards away. I also saw one of my crewmen who had escaped from the right side and asked if he was okay and if he knew where the other crewman was. He was doing fine and said the other crewman was getting out the left side when he left the plane. We made sure our Mae West jackets were inflated and noticed that the plane was settling in tail high.

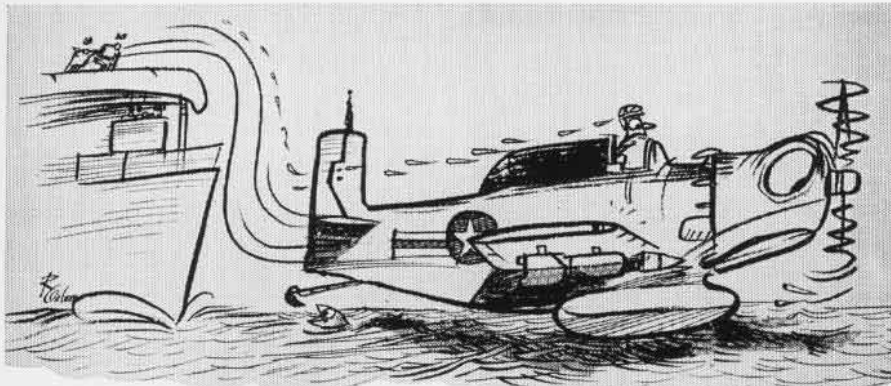
"At this time the carrier had two searchlights on us and we took out our .38's and fired tracers. About the same time I noticed another tracer about 25 yards further away from the plane than we were. We didn't know how the other crewman could have possibly made it that far in such a short time after ditching from the other side of the plane but we knew it meant that he was out and alive. The crewman who was with me then pulled a night signal flare as I continued to fire my tracers. The destroyer moved in for the pick-up.

"When we got back to the carrier, I learned that the bridle was not recovered. The catapult officer said this was the first shot on this bridle and that it had snapped just after the hold down ring had broken.

"I made no effort to warn my crew because they have been thoroughly trained in ditching and bailout procedures in this aircraft, and prior to the shot they had stated they were ready to go. This means they are standing by for *anything* until I inform them that we are safely airborne. I felt that it was more important to try and do the best job I could of flying the plane rather than calling to them. In talking to them later, they said they knew we were getting a bad shot and were ready when we hit the water. Both were clear of the aircraft before I was.

"The crewman who was last to get aboard the destroyer was wearing about 25 pounds of extra land survival gear. This was a





"THE PLANE WAS MUSHING, BUT NOT FALLING COMPLETELY OUT FROM UNDER US."

USAF C-1 emergency sustenance jacket, and it is believed that this is very dangerous to have on in the water. It is of no value there and almost dragged its occupant down."



#### Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Speaking of bridle troubles, did you ever hear the yarn about the farm hand who brought his bride to the big city on their wedding night. As they were checking in at a large hotel, the room clerk asked if they would like to have the bridal suite. The groom turned to the blushing country lass and repeated the question, "He wants to know if we want a bridal suite?" After a moment of hesitation, she whispered, "I don't think I'll need one dear."

To get back to business, these two accidents which occurred just three days apart in the same squadron, put a big dent in the pilots' confidence in the bridle being used on the AD-type aircraft. In fact, they asked permission to make deck launches rather than catapult shots.

Actually the bridles being used on the AD have been in use for a number of years, and their strength is more than adequate if the proper launching procedures are followed.

Because of previous accidents, BuAer had issued a number of special warnings in the form of instruction bulletins, and had taken action to procure a new-type articulating shuttle which will reduce the possibility of faulty bridle hook-ups. Manufacturing difficulties have delayed the availability of this shuttle, but by the time this is in print they expect that all carriers will have the new shuttle.

Catapult Bulletin No. 68, applicable to Essex-class carriers, stresses the importance of careful inspection of launching bridles and the shuttle engagement during night operations. Use of a night signal wand will illuminate the area around the shuttle and should minimize the chances of a faulty hook-up.

Pilots must comply strictly with the prescribed use of brakes during positioning on the catapult.

In its use, the AD bridle is doubled and forms two eyes for attachment to the plane's catapult hooks. The double bight is placed around the catapult shuttle. In these two cases it seems probable that the bight of the bridle around the shuttle was not properly positioned and that in each

case one wire slipped off when the catapult was fired. This would soften the first part of the catapult shot, crack the radome, and permit the bridle to be cut by the prop.

I don't know anyway to stress how important perfection is in handling planes that are being positioned for night catapult shots—other than to warn again that the lives of the pilot and crew depend on how well the work is done.

P.S. I think this squadron is to be congratulated on the state of training of the crewmen. It's no fun to keep reminding your crew that an emergency may occur on any flight. However, I've looked at the death certificates of many crewmen who evidently didn't get a thorough briefing on emergency procedures. It's a lot better to be prepared for the worst and not have it happen, than to suddenly find yourself in trouble and realize that you haven't explained to passengers and crew exactly what they can do to save their necks. The crew in this ditching had the word and came through in fine shape.

#### Dear Grampaw Pettibone

In the January issue you noted that the USS *Wright* has just completed 1373 consecutive arrested landings aboard without an accident of any kind, and expressed an opinion that this accomplishment may have set a record.

As a matter of record, Air Group FOUR with detachments of VJ-4, VC-12, and VC-62 operating aboard the USS *Midway* from 5 January to 22 May 1950 completed 3660 consecutive landings without a single landing accident of any kind, including blown tires.

Operations during this cruise were chiefly with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean area. Commanding Officer at that time was Captain Wallace M. Beakley and Commander, Air Group Four, was Commander Richard Burns.

L.T. \_\_\_\_\_, USN.



#### Grampaw Pettibone Says:

I did say that if some carrier had a better record—we'd surely hear about it. This time I'll go further out on the limb, and state flatly that I think this must be the all-time record. Incidentally, I heard from a couple of other ships, too, but 3,660 accident free landings is tops.

## Fire Hazard

The fire department of a naval air facility was called out on what is considered to be a 'freak emergency that was loaded with potential disaster.

Upon completion of refueling a wing tank of a fleet TBM, a member of the plane crew leaned over and a cigarette lighter fell from his shirt pocket to the wing of the airplane. The lighter evidently landed on the spring-loaded lever as a spark was produced which resulted in the gasoline in the tank becoming ignited. Since the tank was full, there was no explosion. Fast action by the crew resulted in smothering the fire by CO<sub>2</sub> from a portable extinguisher before personnel from the fire house arrived at the scene.

There was no damage at all; however, crews now gassing planes are not permitted to have *any* articles in their shirt pockets.

## Don't Get in the Gravy

There have been two more SNB accidents caused by inadvertent retraction of the landing gear on takeoff. It seems that in each case the co-pilot reached over to adjust the cowl flaps and in so doing his sleeve brushed against the wheel lever—easing it out of the detent.

The wheel lever is supposed to be spring-loaded in both directions—much like an ordinary electric light switch. However, in both of these cases, subsequent inspection showed that the springs were defective, or improperly installed. As soon as the plane picked up enough speed to take the weight off the right oleo and thereby release the safety latch, up came the wheels, and down went the Beech.



#### Grampaw Pettibone Says:

There's no denying that the design and location of the landing gear switch in this model wouldn't win any prizes. In fact, it's the sort of booby trap that shouldn't be built into an aircraft if we expect to keep our accident rate down. Perhaps by the time this is in print the control will have been re-designed to make it a little more fool-proof.

In the meantime, don't get your sleeve in the gravy!

## Not A Bad Idea

The President of one large airline, worried about the volume of memoranda and bulletins flowing to and from executives, offers the following pertinent suggestion:

"Give each executive a slab of granite, a chisel, and a hammer. Then instruct him to chisel out his next memo by hand!"