



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Really in the Dark!

A flight of three SNJ aircraft departed NAAS WHITING FIELD, PENSACOLA, at 1505S on a VFR flight plan direct to NAS MEMPHIS. The weather was good except for smoke and haze which restricted visibility from four to eight miles. The flight leader experienced radio trouble shortly after takeoff but the difficulty was corrected prior to reaching Meridian, Miss.

The flight proceeded according to plan past Meridian and took up a heading of 320 degrees toward Memphis. About 30 minutes before the Memphis ETA and while receiving an "N" signal from the Memphis range, the flight let down from 6000 to 3000 feet. During the let down the flight passed through a leg of the Memphis range to an "A" quadrant. This occurred at approximately 1720. The flight leader thinking that he had crossed the east leg of the Memphis range turned west and after a short time turned south. By this time, it had become dark.

Approximately one hour later after numerous changes of heading and wandering all over the SW "A" quadrant of the Memphis range, the flight came to an abrupt end approximately 80 miles SSW of Memphis. The flight leader ran out of gas and bailed out at 1820 not wanting to land dead stick at night.

One wingman, running low on gas, pulled away from the formation a few minutes before the leader bailed out and landed on a highway after dragging the area twice with his landing lights on. Just prior to touchdown the aircraft struck four telephone wires, hit a telephone pole and came to rest in an adjoining cotton field.

The other wingman saw the flight leader's plane crash, but didn't see the pilot bail out so he zoomed the crash



and a small airport at Cleveland, Mississippi to attract attention to the crash. He then made a wheels up landing in a field near the crash at approximately 1825 with 20 gallons of fuel remaining.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Great balls of fire! These three lads were really in the dark in more ways than one. Maybe there were a few more mistakes that could have been made, but I doubt it. The only kind words the accident board had to say about these accidents was that the shoulder harnesses and safety belts were properly used and prevented any injury.

Here are three experienced pilots, a lieutenant commander and two lieutenants, none with less than 1400 hours of flight time and none with less than 260 hours in type who allow themselves to get lost in spite of the fact that the weather was good and the visibility fair. The flight leader and one of the wingmen had recently qualified in all respects for a standard instrument card! I wonder who gave them their checks?

Just for the books, let's take a look at some of the most obvious errors that led to this fiasco:

1. Common sense alone would indicate that a compass heading of 320 degrees from Meridian to Memphis would direct the flight across the south rather than the east leg of the Memphis range.
2. When the flight leader crossed a leg of the Memphis range and became uncertain of his position, a 90 degree turn from the flight path either to the right or left would have identified the quadrant in short order. No constructive effort was made at this point towards orientation.
3. The flight leader obviously made little effort to conserve fuel since he ran out of gas in approximately three hours though

his wingmen had between 15 or 20 gallons of fuel remaining.

4. Each pilot in a formation should track the flight when he is not leading and should be capable of assuming the lead at any time. In this case, neither wingman kept an accurate track of the flight and couldn't take over the lead when the flight leader became lost.

5. Both wingmen used mighty poor judgment when they elected to make a landing at night when they were unable to determine the contour of the land.

6. A satisfactory explanation was never given as to why one wingman did not land at the small airport at Cleveland, Mississippi, but elected to land four miles to the west in unknown terrain—even though he had 20 gallons of fuel remaining.

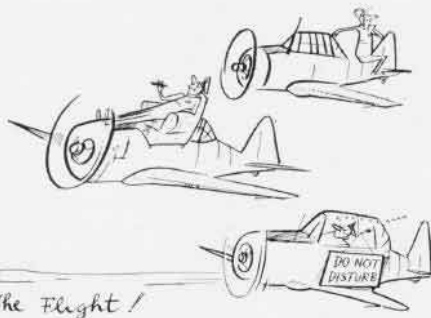


These lads are probably going to need a lot more help from their guardian angels when they try to explain this one to the Aviator's Disposition Board.

Dead Stick Approach

Prototype aircraft cost several million dollars apiece, and the pilot assigned to ferry one often feels like he has been told to move all the gold in Fort Knox without an escort. Here's a recent incident that occurred during the ferrying of the original F7U prototype which had just been fitted out with new afterburner engines to run performance tests.

The pilot picked the plane up at Dallas for delivery to the Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent. The first leg of his flight was from Dallas to Maxwell AFB. Near Monroe, Louisiana, the secondary fuel transfer system went out of commission leaving him with 1300 pounds of fuel which he couldn't use. At the time he was at 30,000 feet and had approximately 1200 pounds of fuel in



the primary system.

When he discovered this, his first intention was to land at Jackson, Mississippi. However, he learned from a passing Air Force plane and a commercial airliner that the ceiling at Jackson was down to 400 feet. By the time he received this information, he was over Jackson and down to 700 pounds of fuel. He was informed that Meridian had reported 6500 feet on their last weather sequence and he elected to alter course slightly to land there. He shut down one engine over Jackson at 30,000 feet and throttled back on the other. He arrived over the Meridian cone at 16,000.

He was at once informed that the weather was deteriorating and the ceiling was down to 2000 feet. At this time he was down to 150 pounds of usable fuel. In addition, he realized that his ADF was unreliable.

He immediately secured *the other engine* and commenced a dead stick radio range approach entering the overcast at 11,500 feet. With both engines secured



and an airspeed of 165 knots, he found that his rate of descent was 800-900 feet per minute. Realizing that he would have about 15 minutes gliding time in which to complete his approach, he rechecked the high cone before proceeding outbound on the let-down leg.

The approach was completed as planned and the pilot broke out of the overcast at 1700 feet over the field. He then fired off one engine and landed on a 3000 foot runway without incident.

Grandpaw Pettibone Says:

I predict that this lad will be able to entertain his grandchildren with many tales of his days as a naval aviator. When he found himself in a tight place, he didn't panic, but took advantage of a lot of spare altitude to get down safely despite a shortage of fuel.

Incidentally, I hear that more than one jet in Korea has been faced with the same problem after stretching a combat mission a little longer than the book allows. Quite a few pilots have "coasted" home.



When you're short on fuel, altitude is just like money in the bank—so plan to make the best possible use of it.

Gobbledegook.

Instrument conditions prevail. Much traffic is moving, communications between planes and the radio stations are normal, everything is fine. Suddenly Dilbert comes on the air:

"Memphis Radio, Memphis Radio, this is Navy 5678, Navy 5678, calling Memphis Radio. Come in please Memphis Radio. Navy 5678. Over . . ."

"Roger, Memphis Radio, this is Navy 5678 calling on Able Channel. We have a position report to give you. Are you ready to copy? Over . . ."

"Roger, Memphis Radio, this is Navy 5678, Navy 5678, a Roger for Dog . . . uh . . . we were over . . . uh . . . uh . . . Jackson, I think it is, Jackson radio range station at . . . uh . . . 20, two zero minutes past the hour. Our altitude at the present time is . . . uh . . . 6000 feet. 6000 feet. We departed NAS COLUMBUS, NAS COLUMBUS. Our . . . uh . . . destination is . . . uh . . . NAS PENSACOLA, destination NAS PENSACOLA, Florida. At the present time, we are cruising Item Fox Roger. We estimate . . . uh . . . Memphis Radio Range Station at . . . uh . . . just a minute . . . uh . . ." (holds mike button down for 30 seconds) . . . "We estimate Memphis Radio Range Station at three six, three six. Did you get all that, Memphis Radio? This is Navy 5678."



Grandpaw Pettibone Says:

Well, certainly Memphis Radio "got all that." The operator probably finished a game of solitaire, ate his lunch and finished his second cigar while he was taking the message. The plot is always the same and runs on into many, many un-

necessary words. Therefore while Dilbert monopolizes the air, other pilots can't make their radio contacts, give their reports and receive instructions. If you think you can't give all the information in 10 seconds that Dilbert took a half a day to say, try it. The secret is to make your calculations, plan what you are going to report and then say it. The sample report below is the procedure directed on the inside back cover of your Radio Facility Chart.

"Memphis Radio, Navy 5678, Jackson Radio, two-zero, six thousand, IFR to Pensacola, Memphis three-six." The range station operator will get the information as he is merely filling in the blanks on the form provided for recording position reports.

Another good way to remember the sequence of reporting when giving a position report is "PTA—position, time, altitude."

Smooth Landing?

A JG, pilot of an AF-2W returning to Norfolk after a night cross country flight, received clearance to land. At the 90° position, the pilot observed another aircraft below him on a long straight-in approach, and elected to take a wave-off. He retracted his landing gear and started a short 360° turn for his second pass.

In the words of the pilot. "I put the wheels down this time just before reaching the 180° point. The 360° turn did not give me time to complete the second landing checkoff list. The tower cleared me to land and the approach to the landing was normal in every way.

"Shortly after touching down, the prop dug into the runway and the plane came to a stop. I can't say whether the wheels or the bottom of the radome hit first. I made a rapid survey of the switches, immediately placing my hand on the wheel lever. It was either all the way down or nearly all the way down. The landing was so smooth that the tower cleared me for a left turn off the runway after I had come to a complete stop."



Grandpaw Pettibone Says:

Great heavenly day! How many planes are we going to bang up this year in unnecessary wheels-up landings? This is the *twenty-ninth* in just three months time.

In almost every case the pilot tells a similar story. Something happens in the landing pattern to distract him or cause him to take a wave-off, and he assumes that the wheels are down rather than making a positive check.

Don't be in too much of a hurry to land. It's a lot better to go around again, if you aren't sure that you have completed the landing check-off list. If you don't think so—ask any pilot who has tried to explain a wheels-up landing to a disposition board.

