



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Poor Way to Get Experience

The following is a story of six Naval Reserve aviators who were cleared for a cross country navigational training flight from NAS GROSSE ILE, Michigan to Otis Air Force Base on Cape Cod, a distance of about 650 nautical miles, who as it turned out got quite a bit more experience than they had bargained for.

The flight was originally planned to refuel at Griffiss Air Force Base, Rome, N. Y. and then to continue on to the ultimate destination. However, because of reported thunderstorm activity in the vicinity of Griffiss AFB, the flight was cleared only as far as the Naval Reserve Air Station, Niagara Falls, N. Y. and arrived there at 1615.

The operations department and aerology at NAS NIAGARA were secured and the flight was briefed on the weather by Flight Service. The enroute weather to Otis AFB was reported by Flight Service to be VFR with scattered clouds and rainshowers, tops of all clouds at 7,000 feet. The destination was reported to be good with 20 miles visibility so the flight of six filed a VFR flight plan (500 feet on top) to Otis AFB with Flight Service and departed Niagara Falls at approximately 1710.

About an hour after leaving Niagara Falls the flight encountered numerous cumulus buildups and a few thunderstorms which they were able to circumnavigate for a while. The flight was forced to climb and to change course frequently in order to maintain 500 feet on top and stay out of the clouds. The static had become so bad that the radio range receiver was practically useless. At 15,000 feet the flight leader while flying between two buildups ran



into a box canyon of clouds and couldn't avoid entering the overcast.

Somewhere between Syracuse and Albany, N. Y. while in the overcast, the flight became separated into two sections, the division leaders and two wingmen made a 180 degree turn while the other three aircraft continued on course and climbed out on top at 18,000 feet. When the flight became separated, a series of radio transmissions occurred between various members of the flight including the flight leaders of both sections which resulted in the conclusion that they now were decidedly *two* flights and that neither knew quite where they were. Finally, all radio contact between the sections was lost.

The section that made the 180 degree turn continued to weave in and out of the clouds trying to stay on top and maintain a course toward Otis Air Force Base. After numerous blanket calls on Guard channel by the section leader, the section was finally located by Otis

AFB DF and given a steer to the base. About 30 miles west of the field they luckily found a break in the overcast, descended underneath and landed at Otis without any further difficulty even though the ceiling at the time of landing was only 600 feet overcast.

The other section was not quite as fortunate as is evidenced by the statement of the section leader.

"When the division leader entered the clouds, I elected to continue straight ahead and began to climb. My two wingmen stayed with me and we broke out on top of the overcast at 18,000 feet. I made quite a few changes of heading but there was so much noise and static that I couldn't orientate myself using the range receiver, so I finally turned it off so that I could hear the VHF. It was getting dark by this time and I called Griffiss Air Force Base for an emergency VHF DF fix, telling them that we were lost and on top of the overcast at 18,000 feet.

"A number of stations answered and Mitchell Air Force Base finally pinpointed our position. They gave vectors for us to fly and kept in touch with us constantly until we were over New York City. While we were being vectored to New York City we were lowered to 5,500 feet in the overcast. We maintained this altitude while Mitchell Idlewild and Floyd Bennett fields were trying to get us in a position to land. [Incidentally, the weather in New York at this time was reported as 400 feet variable, 1½ miles visibility.]

"Floyd Bennett GCA finally took over and gradually lowered us to 2,500 feet and at this point Idlewild GCA ordered us to 1,500 feet and then an immediate descent to 300 feet. We couldn't get

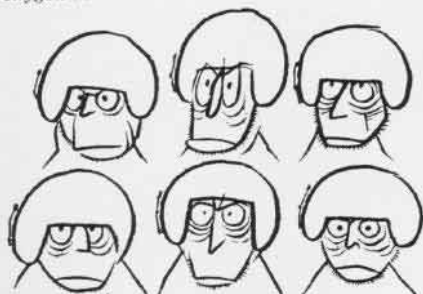


down fast enough on instruments and missed the airport at Idlewild. Up to this point Idlewild GCA thought that there was only one plane involved. When I told them there were three of us, we were immediately returned to Floyd Bennett GCA."

AND THAT'S NOT ALL—LISTEN. "Floyd Bennett GCA finally got us over their field and into their GCA pattern. On the first approach they brought us down to 700 feet. We did not break contact so we were sent back to 1500 feet for another pass. On this approach we were brought down to 500 feet and I could see street lights but GCA ordered us to return to 1500 feet. On the third approach we broke through the overcast at 300 feet over the field and landed with very little hesitation.

"We had been in the air better than three and one-half hours, and for the last hour had been flying instruments at night in formation. When we landed we could not have made another GCA approach as I had only 17 gallons of gas remaining. One of my wingmen had 13 gallons and the other had only 5. After returning to their home station and rehashing the flight, the six pilots finally made the following observations in the hope that they might keep other pilots from making some of the same mistakes:

1. We should not have accepted the Flight Service weather report as the basis for a VFR flight without checking the weather sequence reports along our route.
2. We did not recognize the seriousness of the weather situation soon enough and thus were caught in bad weather.
3. We shouldn't have tried to stay on top under the circumstances, but should have returned to NAS NIAGARA FALLS. We didn't find out until later that only four pilots had oxygen masks.



Aged in the overcast!

4. No one tried to get enroute weather from the radio range stations until too late.
5. A flight violation hasn't been received. (YET)
6. THIS IS A POOR WAY TO GET EXPERIENCE.
7. ALL OF US ARE LUCKY TO BE HERE TO WRITE ABOUT THIS NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN EXPERIENCE.

Grampaw Pettibone Says:
Nuff said!

No Suction?

A plane captain with the assistance of another mechanic was attempting to correct a maximum RPM discrepancy in the starboard engine of an F2H. The plane captain took position in the cockpit and the assisting mech took position directly under the starboard engine to make minor adjustments as necessary.

A tractor-drawn jet starting unit was used and the engine was started successfully. The plane captain proceeded with a full power turn-up, noted the RPM error, reduced throttle and signalled to the assistant mech to make the necessary adjustments on the engine.

This sequence of events was followed three times. (During this time, the jet starting unit power leads were left connected to the aircraft receptacle and the operator of the starting unit remained seated on the tractor.)

At some time during the fourth full power turn-up, the operator of the starting unit when informed that the unit was needed to start another aircraft, dismounted the tractor and approached the starboard side of the aircraft turning up. As the operator approached directly in front of the air intake of the starboard engine and started to lean over—presumably to disconnect the power lead to the aircraft—he was



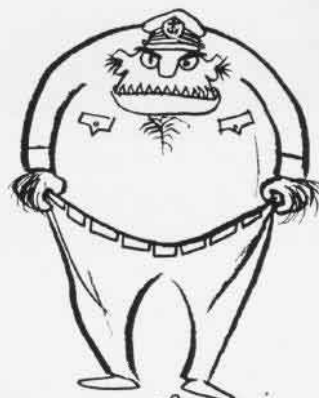
sucked head first into the air inlet duct of the starboard engine.

Grampaw Pettibone Says:
About the time that I begin to relax and figure that everyone has the word on giving these jet engines that are turning up a wide berth, I see another accident report. This is about the fifth or sixth time that someone has been sucked head first into the intake of a jet, and in all cases the injuries were either serious or fatal. In this case, the victim received such serious injury that there is some doubt that he will be able to return to duty.

This accident reminds me of the following verse that was originated some time ago and contains some mighty good advice when working around jets.

"There's not much suction," said Chief Erard, "They may pull a little, but not very hard." He stepped slightly closer and held out an arm As though daring the jet to do him some harm. "Well, doggone me," said the F2H1,

"I reckon I'll inhale that sonofagun. He thinks there's no suction in front of a jet? Perhaps this will prove his theory's all wet. "Just stand by a second. I'll empty his pockets. Why, I'll pull his eyes right out of their sockets." The jet then inhaled as he eased on the gas And sucked the Chief in—clear up to his—hips. Moral: In general, Chiefs are rather tough and jets prefer more fragile stuff. So kindly heed this warning clear Avoid jet engines from both front and rear.



Even a Chief is no match for a jet!

Belly Landing Box Score

1 April to 30 September, 1952

Forgot to lower wheels.....	41
Raised wheels instead of flaps after landing	21
Total.....	62
Wheels up landings prevented by alert tower operators	16
Wheels up landings prevented by runway wheel watch	21
Total.....	37

Grampaw Pettibone Says:
Just look at those figures! Sixty-two wheels-up landings in six months, just because a few knuckleheads neglected one of the most important items on the landing check-off list — **WHEELS DOWN AND LOCKED**. It just doesn't seem possible but these boners are costing us well over \$1,000,000 a year.

However, it makes me feel good to see that alert tower operators and runway wheel watches have prevented thirty-seven wheels-up landings during the same period. The addition of the runway wheel watch is really paying off in dollars and cents.

The Training Command is using all sorts of gimmicks to prevent wheels-up landings. I hear that one instructor and student who were waiting to take the runway for take-off even pulled right out into the middle of the landing runway when they observed a plane in the final landing approach with the wheels up. I don't recommend this as a permanent preventive measure, but it was effective in this case of faulty headwork.