



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Facts of Life

Enroute from San Diego to Alameda on a "500 on top" instrument clearance, three F6F's levelled off at 12,000 feet. As they proceeded up the coast above the scattered cloud layer, the wingmen began to lag behind. The flight leader made several 360° turns to enable the wingmen to join up. The flight leader noticed a large high cloud layer north of Los Angeles and climbed to 15,500 feet, before he realized that he could not top it without oxygen. He made a 180° turn and descended to 10,000 feet over Los Angeles, which was clear.

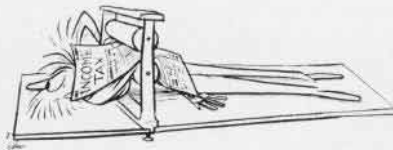
Cancelling out his IFR flight plan, he asked for a VFR clearance to his destination via the coastal route. Upon



receiving clearance, he looked around for his wingmen and discovered he was shy a couple. According to the flight leader's statement, he circled the area several times, trying unsuccessfully to contact both wingmen by radio. He assumed both wingmen had heard the change in plans and proceeded north along the proposed route.

The flight leader managed to rendezvous with one of the wingmen over Point Mugu, informed Santa Barbara Radio of the missing pilot, and proceeded to Alameda and landed. There they were greeted with the news that the other wingman was killed when his aircraft spun out of the overcast and exploded on contact with the ground some 50 miles north of Los Angeles.

It may be that the pilot who was killed attempted to remain "500 on top" at high altitude without an oxygen mask and was overcome by anoxia.



He may have flown into the overcast, become disoriented, and entered into an unusual position from which he was unable to recover. Exactly what happened will never be known.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

On the surface it may appear that this unfortunate accident was just another one of those things, but it wasn't. There was a reason for it.

There's usually a very definite reason for any accident occurring. Most accidents occur as the result of a mistake or a series of mistakes. If an accident happened every time a mistake was made, we'd all be dead. Fortunately, most accidents occur on a "combination of errors" basis. Reduce the chances of such a combination occurring, and you have reduced the chances of an accident occurring. Or reduce the number of unhealthy circumstances leading up to an accident, and the chances of getting a disastrous combination are reduced.

Now, let's put that theory into practice and crank in some of the circumstances and errors that had a direct bearing on this accident as brought out by the Accident Board:

- The wingmen were not briefed by the flight leader prior to takeoff on the IFR clearance.
- Neither wingman had a current instrument card.
- None of the members of the flight had oxygen masks.



- The wingmen not only failed to maintain a proper flight interval, but also failed to maintain sight contact with the flight leader.
- No attempt was made after take-off to establish radio contact between members of the flight.
- The flight leader assumed that his wingmen had heard the change in flight plan and proceeded on that basis.
- During the previous six months, the deceased had flown no instruments, either actual or simulated, nor had he flown the F6F.

With this impressive array of contributory facts, it doesn't take a mental giant to see that the stage was pretty well set for this accident before take-off.

I wonder how many other flight leaders have been guilty of such breaches of flight discipline as shown here and have gotten away with it?

Take it from me, you can save yourself a lot of grief and embarrassment if you take time to plan your flight properly. While you're at it, give the rest of your flight a break and cut them in on what's going on.

The Ten Commandments for an Instrument Pilot

1. Set thyself well upon thy fifth vertebra; leaving not thy fingerprints on the controls, and chewing not on thy fingernails.
2. Know thy instruments, for they are true and appointed prophets.
3. Follow the indications of thy instruments; and verily the aircraft will follow along, even as the tail follows the sheep.
4. Do not stick out thy neck a foot; stay within the confines of thy ability, and thus shalt live to a happy old age.
5. Know the appointed words and approved methods so that if thy neck drapeth out, thou shalt be able even unto thyself to place same in its proper place—upon thy shoulders.
6. Follow thy radio beam, for their ways are the happy ways and will lead to the promised land—ing.

7. Listen carefully, yea verily, to the signal impinging on thy eardrums for sometimes they seem to have the tongues of snakes and will cross us thy orientation, to the sad state of where thou must ask Heaven for guidance.
8. Assume not, neither shalt thou guess that thy position is such, but prove to thine own satisfaction that such is the case.
9. Boast not, neither brag; for surely Ole' Devil Overcast shalt write such words in his book, and thou shalt someday, be called for an accounting.
10. Trust not thy seat (of thy pants) but follow thy instruments, read and truly interpret the words as given from thine instrument panel, know that the responsibility lies not with the hand that rocks the control column, but in and with the mind that directs the hand, and thou shalt be blessed with a long and happy life.

(from Dec. 1952 edition of USAF "Flying Safety".)

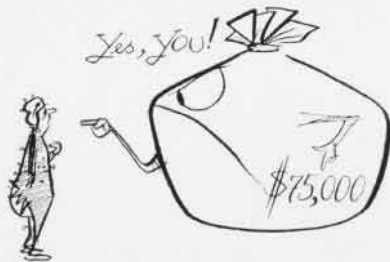
Short Day—Almost

The pilot of an F3D-2 while out on a proficiency flight decided to put the airplane through its paces. During the 40-minute flight the pilot performed several "loops," "Cuban eights" and one "split-S." The pilot didn't bother to wear an anti-blackout suit and, while performing the first two mentioned maneuvers, experienced "gray-out" symptoms.

He finally decided to execute a "split-S." At about 10,000 feet, he rolled over onto his back and pulled the aircraft through a vertical dive. He held the aircraft in this dive until an airspeed of approximately 425 knots was reached. As the pilot started to pull out, he "blacked out."

When he finally became fully conscious, his aircraft was inverted at about 8,000 feet. He rolled the aircraft upright and observed that the "G" forces encountered in the last maneuver exceeded 7.5. At this point our hotshot decided he ought to return to the field to check for structural damage to the aircraft.

This was about the wisest decision he made all day inasmuch as the aircraft required a major overhaul because of the structural damage caused by his



unauthorized maneuvers. A conservative estimate places the cost of this overhaul in the neighborhood of 75,000 bucks.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

You've heard that old story about the parrot, the cover on his cage, and his mistress. The parrot's punch line was "Holy Moses, what a short day!" A couple of more unauthorized maneuvers and this lad may have had one of those short days. His aircraft would probably have started coming apart at the seams.

The thing that really burns me up about this incident is that the pilot didn't know the F3D was restricted by current directives from performing the three maneuvers mentioned. I can't say much for a check-out system that doesn't include the restrictions on the aircraft involved.

It is interesting to note that this young fellow had recently returned from a tour of duty as an exchange pilot. He had flown a total of 694 hours in 12 different types of jet aircraft. In spite of this enviable background, he played it like a novice when he began "horsing around" in a high performance aircraft without an anti-blackout suit and without knowledge of the plane's restrictions.

They say that "familiarity breeds contempt" and this appears to me to be one of the better examples. In my book, there is no room in aviation for anyone who has so little regard for life or a piece of equipment as costly as an F3D.

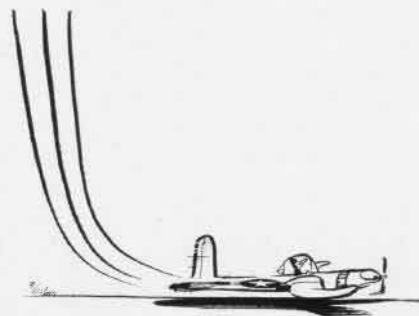


You can bet your bottom dollar that this bird would think twice before repeating this stunt if he had to pay for part of the damage out of his own pocket.

Crippled Corsair

A flight of six FG's were scheduled and cleared for a local tactics flight. They proceeded to the operating area and began making dummy strafing runs using an abandoned rock quarry as a target. On the second run the leader of the flight hit a one-inch six-strand cable that was 200 feet above the ground level, shearing off about 12 inches of his right wing and 10 inches of his vertical stabilizer. He also lost his radio masts and antennae.

After pullout, all engine instruments read normal, but the rudder movement was somewhat restricted because of the condition of the vertical stabilizer. The pilot returned to the field and landed without further difficulty. The pilot in his statement says "This accident could have been prevented by not flying so low."



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Well, that's a masterpiece of understatement if I ever heard one! It also wouldn't have happened if you had been in Peoria!

Your trouble started when you didn't conform to your flight clearance—division tactics—and instead, making those unauthorized dummy strafing runs in an unauthorized area. It may be news to you, but your air station doesn't have an authorized area for the conduct of dummy bombing or strafing runs—and hasn't had for the past three years. You were just asking for trouble when you decided to conduct the strafing runs in an area that was unfamiliar to you and hadn't been checked for ground hazards.

It's usually a pretty darn good idea to check the flight characteristics of your aircraft after a collision in flight before making a landing. Failure to do this has caused a lot of pilots plenty of trouble.