



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

The Calculated Risk

An F9F-6 flight leader gave a pre-flight briefing to his flight prior to a practice rocket hop. He placed particular emphasis on the squadron policy that all pilots purge their tip tanks before making runs on the target, and that all pilots start their pull-out at 5,500 feet altitude as the elevation of the target was 2,700 feet.

The flight departed on schedule with full loads of fuel aboard. Approximately nine minutes later, the flight leader entered his first run on the target from 10,000 feet. He didn't purge his tip tanks. His dive brakes were not extended nor did anyone in the air or on the ground see them down through-out the dive. He overshot the line of intended run and S-turned back onto it. The angle of dive at the firing point was 55°.

He commenced pull-out much lower than 5,500 feet, according to the witnesses' statements. He managed to get the nose of the aircraft about 10° above the horizon, but the plane mushed into the ground and exploded. The pilot must have realized he wasn't going to make it and attempted an ejection. The impact and ejection were simultaneous, and the pilot was fatally injured.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Gez whiz, fellas! Why don't you give yourselves an even break and fly these machines according to prescribed doctrine? It's one thing to get into trouble because of inexperience, lack of knowledge, or incorrect technique. But there is absolutely no reason for a pilot to insist that his flight follow the rules, then go out and fail to execute them himself.

Sure, this lad forgot to purge his tip tanks. And he probably forgot to put



his dive brakes down. But he had overshot the run line, and he certainly must have realized he was accelerating too fast. Instead of pulling out then, he bent the plane back into the target increasing his dive angle. In doing so, he lost his chance for a safe recovery.

He took the calculated risk because of his experience and confidence in himself. Maybe he had done it before and had had a close one, which might have led him to believe he could get away with it again. But doctrine is made to prevent pilots from getting into a position where they'll only have a second or two to decide whether to take the risk or not.

In my opinion, it takes more will power to admit a mistake and abort the run than it does to take a chance and press home the attack. The only thing you prove by trying to salvage a bad run is that you exercised exceedingly poor judgment. After all, the target isn't shooting back at you.

Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

The April issue of *Naval Aviation News* contains an article on page seven in regard to a hairy incident in a Beechcraft in which it is alleged that both engines quit simultaneously on take-off at about 75 feet altitude and shortly after the gear was retracted. According to the article, there were traces of water in the gasoline.

Let me give you the correct version inasmuch as I was a witness and am

a firm believer in calling a spade a spade, when it comes to accident prevention. Instead of water in the gasoline, the trouble was caused by the firm and smart movement of the mixture controls toward the aft position. In such a situation, those poor old engines get real upset as their policy is to operate on a cash-and-carry basis.

To say that the resulting landing was normal, but somewhat sloppy, is a minor understatement. It was a downright thrill which brought out the troops from their hiding places in the fox holes underneath the hangars. After rolling to a stop on the 8,000-foot runway, came the dawn to the intrepid aviators as to the cause of the engine failures. They hurriedly fired up the engines as the crash equipment



How Hairy can it get?!

surrounded them and proceeded rapidly to the take-off end of the runway for another attempt. By this time the entire crew was tensed up wondering what maneuver would be attempted next.

A council of war was held on the ramp. By unanimous vote it was decided that the aircraft should not be allowed to demonstrate its capabilities again. A road block was established, and the Beech corralled and led meekly back to the flight line.

We happen to have the best sump drainers in the business, so it's rather a low blow to shift the blame to them

Very truly yours,
Cdr., USNR



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

I think I'll just sit this one out.



Chase Pilot?!

An F9F-6 pilot on his first familiarization flight in type took off accompanied by a chase pilot. Upon becoming airborne, the fam pilot observed his high pressure fuel pump warning light to be on. It went out with reduced throttle, but came back on again after a climb to 5,000 feet. The chase pilot then advised him to dump his tip tanks and return for a deferred emergency landing.

The approach was normal though slightly fast, and the pilot reduced throttle to idle just as he crossed the end of the runway at about 50 feet altitude. The aircraft commenced a rapid rate of sink which resulted in a hard landing and bounce. The pilot overcorrected for the bounce by jamming the stick forward and bounced again. Adding full throttle, he took a wave-off and made another approach.

The second approach was a duplicate of the first—only this time the pilot determined to make the aircraft stay on the deck. On the third bounce, the aircraft hit on the starboard wingtip, flap, nose wheel, and starboard landing gear, damaging all four. He took a wave-off and found he had difficulty maintaining control owing to several hydraulic leaks.

At 800 feet, he actuated the pre-ejection lever, which jettisoned the

canopy, and unfastened the seat belt. At 1,500 feet, the control became ineffective again, so he elected to try another landing, this time in the emergency arresting gear on another runway.

He made two approaches, but waved off each time owing to drift. On the third approach, the tower waved him off because of the armed seat. The pilot climbed to 5,000 feet and ejected successfully about eight miles from the field. Abandoned, the aircraft tried to go it alone but only managed to get within three miles of the field where it crashed and burned.



Gram paw Pettibone Says:

Well, if that didn't wilt the lily, nothing would! Maybe the airplane did try to get back to the field for the pilot's sake, but I'll bet a plugged nickel, it gave a passing thought to the chase pilot and decided to end it all by heading for the nearest hole in the ground. That fella might just as well have been flying over in the next county for all the good he did.

He should have identified the fuel pump warning light as a condition peculiar to the recent switchover from aviation gasoline to JP-3 fuel. All the squadron pilots had been briefed on the probability of such an occurrence.

He should have realized that a pilot on his first fam flight in type is keyed up to some extent, and it doesn't take much to shake him up. After the pump light went out and they climbed to 5,000 feet to burn the fuel down, the chase pilot decided a

deferred emergency existed and sent the fam pilot back to the field.

From here on, the fam pilot was on his own. He wasn't coached on his first approach. His errors weren't pointed out so he wouldn't repeat them a second time. He wasn't coached on his second approach and after his canopy was jettisoned, communications were practically nil. Three passes later, several of his squadron mates, who had rushed to the tower when the fiasco first started, had the presence of mind to order an ejection because of the armed seat.

The chase pilot did help some, however, in addition to furnishing moral support. He gave a blow-by-blow description of the damage as it occurred and changed the flight from a deferred to an emergency landing. If there is one thing that you need to know, it's the fact that all that noise of scraping and buckling out there on the starboard side on the last landing isn't an illusion.

This reminds me of the farmer who told Clem to check Zeke out in the caterpillar tractor. Clem cranked it up and told Zeke to step on the clutch, move the gear handle over here, and steer with the hand brakes. Away Zeke went. Five minutes later, after flattening 100 feet of corral fence, tearing out the corner of the bunkhouse, and nudging the side of one slightly used station wagon, Zeke had it under control and went barreling out across the field. Clem caught him at the first turn and stopped the machine.

"Say," he said, wiping his brow, "it's a good thing I checked you out in how to steer this thing. If you hadn't missed the old lady's pansy patch, we'da really been in trouble!" Which just goes to show that if you are sent out to do a job and do it right, you won't find yourself behind the eight-ball with your feet in your mouth.