



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Ferry Tale

An HUP-2 being ferried from Jax to Lakehurst was on its Cherry Point-to-Weeksville leg at an altitude of 450 feet and an IAS of 70 knots. The pilot was reading his chart as a check on position when he heard a very loud bang (audible for two miles) followed by silence. The startled pilot, realizing that the engine had quit, threw the chart in the direction of the co-pilot seat and hit the collective down. RPM read between 1950 and 2000, both needles married.

The helicopter was over a heavily wooded area and the pilot looked back to determine whether he could make it back to a river he had passed a short time before, but he immediately realized this would be impossible. Gliding straight ahead, the pilot concentrated on leveling off about three feet above the trees. To quote:

"As I approached, I did a *side flare* and came to a dead-stop position. As the plane started to fall, I came up on the collective and it stopped the plane dead, with the fuselage in the tree tops but the rotors above. Then as we started to settle I heard the blade being chopped off and knew it was just a matter of free falling the last 60 or so feet to impact.

"On the way down our right wheel wrapped itself around the biggest tree, and it turned us from an upright position to flat on the pilot's side. This is the way it hit the ground. The plane was falling mighty fast and the impact was real hard. My window was open and my hard hat went into the muck.

"I immediately checked to see if I had been injured and was surprised to find I was not, particularly since a jagged spearhead of splintered tree stump jutted straight up 14 inches into the cockpit in the center of the pilot's open window, a scant three inches behind the base of my neck. I reached over and turned off the magnetos, at the same time asking my crewmember how he was. He said he



was OK. The co-pilot's side was straight up, and my crewmember went out first.

"After leaving the crashed aircraft, we decided to take a course back to the river's edge. The swamp was deep; we went up to our knees many times. The trees and brush were very thick and there were large thorny vines. After grabbing these vines several times to steady my progress, I decided I would rather fall. I finally made sure my stepping was near the stumps, where the ground was much firmer.

"In approximately 15 minutes we reached the river's edge but could not see any signs of help. We decided to go north along the edge about 50 yards to a stump. Upon reaching this area I waded out to the stump and sat down. (This stump was later reported to be in the middle of false river bottom of quicksand.) My crewmember

climbed a small tree on the bank, and I said I would set off some red smoke. I did so but the smoke flare gave two little puffs (about like two good puffs on a cigarette) and quit.

"Then my crewmember set off one of his but the smoke blew back into the trees and stayed low so we did not expect anyone to see it. From our position we could see a causeway bridge with occasional cars going over it. We tried to time setting off our smoke (both day—red—and night—white) to attract one of the drivers' attention. Apparently all North Carolina drivers look straight ahead for after half an hour we still could not attract anyone's attention.

"I then suggested to my crewmember that our best bet was to go back to the plane and get the PK-2 raft. We decided that he would go back, and I would stay put in hope of attracting someone. On the way back to the plane (it was difficult to know the way back because of terrain) to insure not getting lost and separated, we called to each other each 30 seconds. As my crewmember went south along the river he called that he had found an abandoned delapidated rowboat with a piece of 1 x 3 old board about eight feet long. The boat was lying upside down. He turned it over and with about six inches of water in the bottom started to row to pick me up. When he reached me, we both stood on a partly submerged thin tree and tried to turn it over to get all the water



They must be city boys!

out. We could not do a complete job, nevertheless we started out to the center of the river with my crewmember rowing.

"Our progress was slow and I noticed the boat was taking on more water—cold water. I took off both my shoes and with a shoe in each hand started to bail out the water. I thought I was holding my own, but after 15 or 20 minutes I started to slow down and I could see the boat was about half submerged. I set off another red smoke (the last) and the smoke went straight down the river to the boat docks. When it cleared, I saw that a rowboat was headed out for us. We met in about 10 minutes and they took us aboard."



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

These boys did right well on the basic course—they got down in one piece—but they could have flunked out in the finals, the survival task of getting home from the boondocks. The pilot's hardhat and his snugged and locked shoulder harness and belt assembly prevented his being flattened into the landscape. Similarly, the crewman's equipment held him suspended and prevented his 200 pounds from sandwiching the pilot to the ground beneath.

Having crashed into a swamp, they were fortunate to have picked an area near civilization. Even so, if they had begun an erroneous break-out heading almost anywhere within the remaining 270° sector their 15 minutes of weaving, wading and detouring where visibility was limited to ten yards could have terminated in disorientation and a route to nowhere. Neither had a compass or watch.

There remained the dangers of quicksand, water moccasins and cold water (40°F.) and an abandoned leaky boat considerably less waterworthy than the raft residing in the helicopter.

The NAF Weeksville Flight Surgeon recommends the following wear for circumstances such as these: Flight suit, life jacket, compass, watch, knife (machete, if possible), boondocker shoes, gloves, tin whistle and a big red bandanna. Wal, mebbe the Doc's got something there. Of course those red bandannas can be handy things to have, but you just don't hardly see them around much anymore. I've sort of figured that a piece of my red flannels or my bright plaid summer shorts could serve the purpose in a pinch.

As a comforting note, the local residents didn't all have their heads down. The ASR net alert evolution had been smartly executed and the State Highway Patrol even had the grid coordinates

within a mile of the site reported to ASR starting some 90 seconds following the crash.

This story had a happy ending, but it ain't necessarily so. The wooded swamp areas can swallow airplanes, hunters and capsized fishermen—it's not uncommon for searchers to stumble across a crash site several years old for the first time in the course of a vain search for the most recent disaster victims. These areas cannot always be avoided, but the intelligent pilot will prepare himself to pass the test in case he's called for the final exam.



Chen



Hold him off well in advance!

Not Allowed

An AD-5W was cleared into the traffic pattern to commence night field carrier landing practice, but collided with the ground prior to making the first approach. The airplane was demolished and the pilot killed instantly. There was no indication of mechanical difficulty of any kind. While the cause of the accident could not be positively determined, two distinct possibilities existed.

The most likely cause of the accident was that the pilot failed to allow for the 500 feet of altitude difference between the coastal field from which he took off and the nearby field at which he was scheduled for his FCLP; that is, he was attempting to fly the pattern at 300 feet above sea level instead of 300 feet above the terrain.

While it's strictly conjecture, a second possibility is that the pilot veered from his path of intended travel and intended attitude when he took his eyes off the flight instruments or visual ground references to reset the exterior light switch from the "blink" to the "steady" position preparatory to his first landing pass. In the AD-5W the

external light positioning switch is on the right side of the cockpit, requiring the pilot, in the absence of an assistant pilot, to lean far to the right, reaching over the assistant's seat and down to manipulate the switch.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

From all appearances, the fatal accident was avoidable. Most everybody pulls an occasional blooper, but the fact remains that you can't always get away with it, especially in an airplane.

Since his normal operations had been from a field with an elevation very near sea level, it's quite conceivable that this relatively inexperienced pilot forgot to make an allowance for the higher elevation of the nearby field. A temporary slip of the mind, but with permanent results.

As for the second possibility, if you have to exhibit your boarding house reach to actuate a switch in the cockpit, recognize the potential dangers involved. Just as the boarder has to display a nicety of judgment and timing in reaching for that second pork chop, lest he get a fork stuck in the back of his hand, so must the pilot be aware of the possible consequences of his own far-reaching actions.

The switch from "blink" to "steady" could have been accomplished at an earlier, less critical time. Granted, in this case the safest earlier time would have been prior to take-off, since it takes a very long arm to reach the switch from the left seat during flight. This situation occurs in both the AD-5N and -5W when no additional crewmembers are carried. I'm advised that AD Aircraft Service Change 642 will relocate the exterior light controls to the center console.

MEMO FROM GRAMP:

He who lacks in anticipation
Has lost control of the situation.