



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Stub Wings and a Prayer

The pilot of an AD-6 *Skyraider* received taxi clearance and proceeded 300 feet to the warmup area preparatory to takeoff from Tokyo International Airport for a night return flight to his home base. While completing his runup and takeoff check list, he was interrupted by the tower with his ATC clearance. Immediately thereafter he was cleared to the runway.

The takeoff roll seemed normal to the pilot; however, immediately upon becoming airborne the aircraft wanted to assume a nose-high attitude and turn to the left. The pilot attempted to set the aircraft back down on the runway but was unable to do so owing to lack of aileron control. The *Skyraider* settled, and the pilot retracted the landing gear.

The engine was torn completely out of the aircraft shortly after impact, rupturing the main fuel line. The 150-gallon external fuel tank also ruptured.

The burning *Skyraider* slid 47 feet before skidding to a stop 170 feet to the left of the runway and approximately 7200 feet from the takeoff end. The pilot, who had lost consciousness momentarily upon impact, regained his senses at the completion of the slide-out and was immediately aware of intense heat. Unbuckling his safety belt and shoulder harness, he dived out the right side of the aircraft. He was unable to shed his parachute because of burns on his ungloved hands.

Not until after the crash was he aware that his short flight had been made with folded wings.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Great balls of fire! That's what the tower operators saw about two-thirds of the way down the runway.

Because of their unfamiliarity with the type of aircraft, the problem of controlling many other aircraft at the same time, and the complication of night operations at a busy commercial airport, the control operators did



not realize that the aircraft's wings were folded.

Less easily explained is the fact that in going through the takeoff check list *twice* prior to takeoff, the pilot failed to note that the wings were not spread. According to the accident report, the external lights were on steady, rather than flashing, thus the pilot was less likely to note that the wingtip lights were overhead. Also, the short distance he had to taxi reduced the time during which he might have noticed the folded wings. The very short period of time from taxi clearance to completion of engine runup and receipt of ATC clearance—only four minutes—indicated a rather hurried check of the attack aircraft.



According to the Flight Surgeon, this case illustrates the astounding extremes which can result when a daily routine habit pattern is interrupted. The pilot was departing an airport with facilities unlike those of his accustomed home base. As a creature of habit he would normally rely on his squadron lineman to remind him to drop his wings while taxiing out of his parking spot. Also, the usual outside locking-pin check was missing from his accustomed pattern as he began to taxi. The pilot forgot the entire procedure as his mind switched to the task of contacting the tower for takeoff clearance. Further, his presence at an international airport may have made him overanxious and hasty in his preparations for getting airborne.

Burns on the pilot's hands were caused by his grasping the hot canopy when evacuating the aircraft. He had lost one glove that morning, so had left both hands uncovered. Burns on the upper face would have been eliminated or minimized had he had his visor down. However, the dark visor he had used earlier that day had not been replaced by the clear visor designed for night use. The clear visor was back at home base.

Several other gents have tried this maneuver, and there's no telling how many have *almost* attempted a stub-wing takeoff but were saved in the nick of time by an alert tower operator or a last-instant realization. So this lad wasn't the first to try it, and his 50 to 75 feet doesn't even constitute an altitude record.

Probably the most notable case (*Naval Aviation News*, December 1949) was that of the AD-2 driver who took off at NAAS Charlestown in spite of the tower operator's repeated warnings as he continued down the runway on his takeoff run. As far as I know, his altitude of about 250 feet constitutes the record for *Skyriders* in the wings-folded configuration. His machine burst into flames upon crashing, too, the pilot suffered only slight burns.

It sure beats me how these stub-wing-wonder boys came through in one piece. They must have been thinkin' mighty pure thoughts. But one thing's for sure—their minds weren't fixed on their check-off lists.

To Have and Have Not

Case One: With his *Cougar* which had been rolling in alternate directions out of control and now headed straight down at 400 knots, the young pilot ejected through the canopy. In the pilot's own words, "When the chute opened, my feet were above my head,



was tangled in cactus. After about three hours I heard a plane. *I used one flare to signal the plane* and another to build a fire.

Case Two: Following a "thunking" sound and progressive loss of power, the pilot of a TV-2 on a night cross-country flight shut down the engine. Here's his story: "I was descending through a cloud layer and decided it would be better to eject than attempt a night flame-out landing with the city and the mountains in close proximity. I informed my passenger that we were abandoning the aircraft. Then I blew the canopy, waited for the sound of the other seat going, and ejected myself.

"My landing was normal and I stayed near my chute and waited to be



causing my body to be jerked downward with a force greater than that of ejection.

"During my descent I was drifting backwards and tried turning myself around so I could see the terrain I was going to hit, but I couldn't rotate myself. I prepared myself for ground contact by bending my knees. I didn't hit hard, although I did fall backwards. The chute didn't drag me, because it

picked up. Eventually I heard a jeep and they heard my calls and a little later found me. *I would have been picked up within an hour if the flares I had laying in my locker had been in my flight suit where they belonged.*"



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

The "haves" have it. Nuff sed. Period. Exclamation point.

That Good Right Hand

A local sheet issued by a unit out in the field included a blow-by-blow description of the following incident.

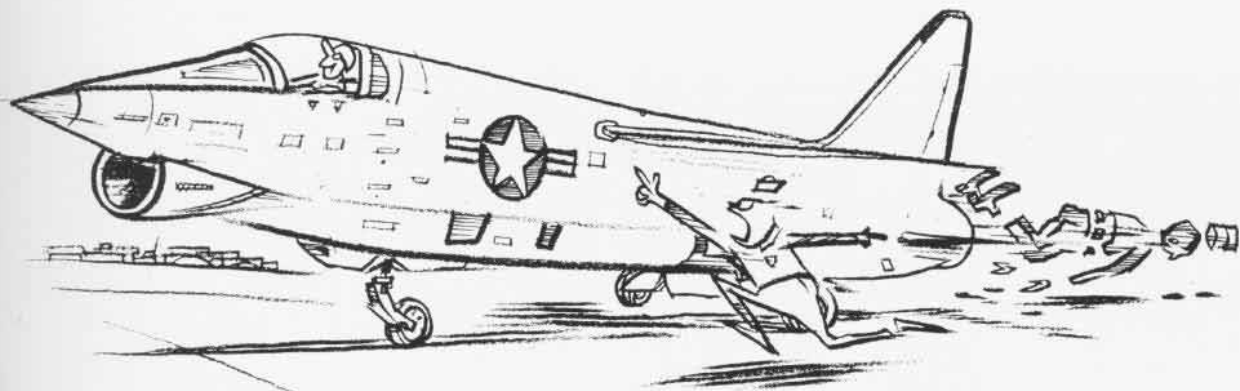
As the pilot was making his pre-flight inspection he noted some small dirt and debris in the intake of his jet aircraft and commented to the plane captain about it. After the inspection, the pilot crawled into the cockpit and prepared for the lite-off without waiting for the "all clear."

All of a sudden a man came running up wildly waving his arms. Just as he reached the aircraft, the plane captain crawled out of the intake. The plane captain would have been seriously injured if the pilot hadn't been interrupted in his attempt to crank up the engine.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

The plane captain is the pilot's right hand man. In order to keep him around for awhile, it's a good idea for the left hand to know what the right hand's doing—and vice versa, if only to keep things safe.



Killer Diller