



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Close Shave

While proceeding to the marshall point one dark night for their scheduled recovery aboard the big attack carrier, their "home away from home," a couple of A4D's, popping in and out of clouds, were completely immersed in a heavy haze layer.

The wingman got vertigo so bad that he had to break off and orientate himself on his flight instruments. In consternation he discovered he had only 800 pounds of fuel remaining. Only 11 minutes before he had read 4400 pounds during a fuel check with his leader. This could only mean a fuel cell float valve had stuck and that he could no longer transfer wing fuel. The gauge was right!

The carrier was told of the trouble and an immediate ready deck requested. This was a real shaker because the deck was already spotted for another launch and some fast shifting was required. CCA received an "affirmative" from PRIFLY, and as the carrier deck became a scene of bustling activity, the A4D descended in a no speed brake idle approach and turned inbound on final recovery bearing.

At four miles he was instructed to "dirty up" and at three miles descended to 600 feet. At two miles the pilot reported "ship in sight" and at one mile started his descent to the mirror glide slope. At 400 feet, he called



"Meatball 100 pounds," and then a few seconds later, "She just quit."

As the air filled with cries of "Eject! Eject!" from just about everyone who had been tensely following this sweat-in-the-palms drama, the flash of the Rapec seat was seen from the carrier.

The plane guard destroyer flashed its searchlight to the crash site and close aboard was the chute just settling in the water.

The pilot had hit the water only

seconds after pulling the curtain and had no time to prepare for the water entry. He released the right rocket jet fastener, but couldn't locate the left one. The chute was billowing out and dragging him, so he inflated his flotation gear and pulled in on the risers, collapsing the chute, but becoming entangled in the shroud lines.

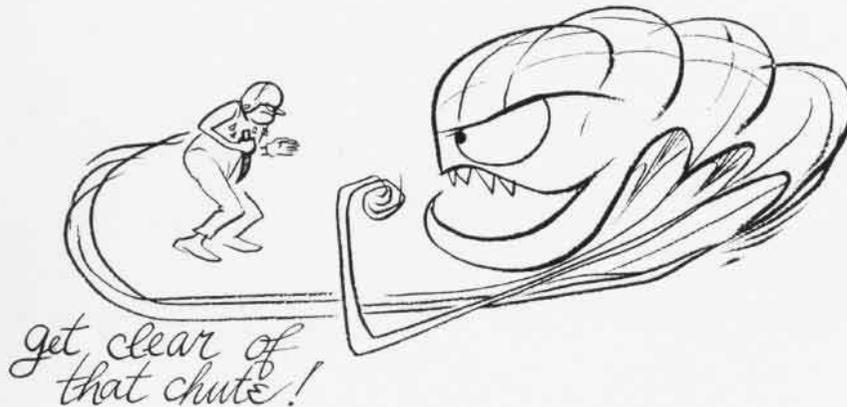
By now he felt completely exhausted but managed to grab a line thrown to him from the destroyer, which had now come up alongside. As they pulled him in, the parachute, still attached, began to drag him under and he had to let go of the line. He felt himself sinking, felt sure he was going to drown, made a last ditch effort to get his knife out, but lost consciousness at this point.

A watchful destroyer officer, seeing him sink, dove over the side and swam to his rescue in the rough seas! Reaching the pilot, he kept him afloat and dragged him back to the ship, 'chute and all. The pilot regained consciousness but both were by now too weak to climb a cargo net which had been thrown over the side so they just grimly held on to it. The parachute was pulled aboard by grappling hooks, and the pilot hauled up by his chute risers, uninjured but waterlogged. His rescuer was then pulled aboard by the destroyer crewmen.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sufferin' catfish! What a tale this was to read! This lad tried all the way and was mighty cool when things were as tight as a situation can get. A goodly amount of this coolness was occasioned by his absolute reliance on the Rapec seat which has an advertised ground level capability with zero lanyard attached. Here it worked at 250 feet and 110 knots with a sink rate already established. It's a good seat, but why try it to the limit of its capabilities? He actually delayed his descent four or five minutes while he explained his fuel problem to his C.O. and tried a couple of suggested remedies. This cost him precious fuel and was nearly a fatal error.



Getting rid of that chute in the water is the most important job a downed pilot has to accomplish. He had a knife and should have used it. You must never relax the effort to cut it free, just because rescue seems near. Filled with water and attached to you, its gonna get you sure. Might as well have your feet set in a barrel of cement. Of Gramps takes his hat off to Ltjg. Hildebrand of the USS Hyman. He's a man any of us would like to have around when things are all tensed up. That DD was RIGHT THERE when it was needed.

Obstacle Course

Four S2F's were scheduled to deck launch at midnight on a routine ASW mission. Take-off was delayed while two downed helos were struck below and the carrier deck was readied for the fixed wing launch. Number 1 man could see he had plenty of deck run available although the pitch black night would mean "on the gauges" even before lift off.

Take-off run after getting the go signal was normal and the pilot noted as he passed the island structure that he had almost 70 knots. He commenced to rotate before reaching the No. 1 elevator and felt the nose wheel leave the deck. Just as the S2F started to fly off, a terrific jolt was felt and the nose pitched down! Swiftly recovering his nose attitude, the pilot climbed the sturdy plane straight ahead and as it reached 1500 feet, leveled off to determine what the trouble had been.

There was no structural damage apparent to the crew although they had a hydraulic failure with pressure reading zero. The starboard brake lines were severed and were the obvious cause of the failure.

The ship now came up on the radio and informed them that the guard rail on No. 1 elevator had been up during their take-off and they were to divert to a nearby NAS. Another S2F which had taken off immediately after them was assigned as escort to the beach. The rest of the launch was cancelled.

Arriving over the airfield, they lowered the landing gear by the emergency method, had it visually checked, and landed safely, dropping the tailhook to engage the abort gear on the runway for an easy stop.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

There'd been a lot of work

done on those elevator stanchions in the 90 minutes prior to this deck launch, and they had been visually checked down by the Flight Deck Chief just 15 minutes prior to the launch. No one knows who raised those stanchions. However, the flight deck was NOT visually checked for obstructions between launching of three helos and striking two other helos below. Chocks and tie-downs SHOULD be removed after a helo launch, but there was no positive check done to make SURE of a clear deck. This was almost a fatal error. Deck launches are faster, but at night a catapult shot is surer. Even a blown tire at night can get hairy.

Double Play

At 1955 one winter night, a young ferry pilot arrived over NAS QUONSET in his trusty AD-6. The weather on the hop up from Norfolk had been excellent, although it was a pitch dark night. He had eaten an excellent meal before departure, and was feeling mighty fine. It was one of those GOOD nights—so far.

The tower cleared him to the duty runway, informed him the wind was calm, the runway was dry with braking action excellent, although the whole area was otherwise pretty well snowed under. The pilot asked for the runway lights to be turned up in intensity and commenced his approach.

Coming in over the water toward the runway end, it seemed like a pretty black hole, so he held off his touch-down until he reached an FCLP set-up about 700 feet down the runway. These lights extended for only 300 feet of his rollout, and as he looked out the left side for distance markers, he saw none.

Runway lights seemed few and far between, and suddenly the approach lights on the far end of the runway loomed up brightly dead ahead! Brak-

ing his AD heavily, the pilot shot off the end of the runway, rolled swiftly through 130 feet of snow packed 10 to 14 inches deep, struck a bare patch, dug in the propeller and flipped over inverted!

Hanging in the straps, the pilot called the tower to inform them of his accident, and they sounded the crash alarm. Cutting all the switches, he waited patiently and was freed in a few minutes by the crash crew.

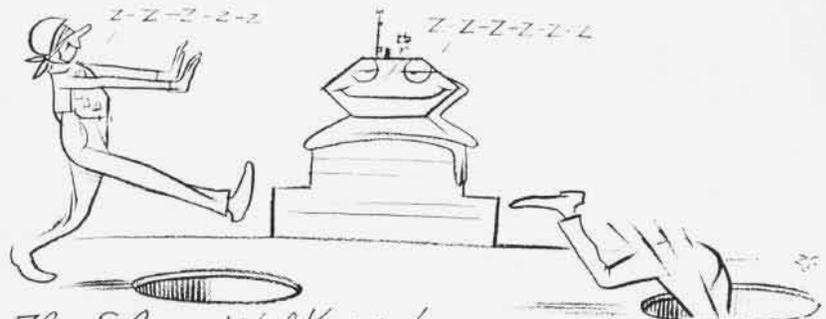
A few facts brought out in the investigation: The runway in use is 4000 feet long and 500 feet wide. It is dark on the left side because it is intersected by two other runways. There is only one runway distance marker at 3000 feet. The 1000-foot one, lost in the hurricane of Sept. 1960, had not been replaced. The pilot didn't know how long the runway was, and had not bothered to ask the tower for this info. This station has an 8000-foot runway. The wind was calm—one knot.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Jumpin, Jehosaphat! Both this young man and the tower must have flipped their wigs! The pilot GOOFED by going in on a strange runway without checkin' its length, and not taking a wave-off when things looked wrong on final. If he'd checked his pubs, he'd have KNOWN they had an 8000-footer! With no wind, your ground speed on rollout shrinks up 4000 feet in a hurry. He set up his own accident.

How the tower could clear a TRANSCIENT to land without passing out a little info just plain beats me! When the wind is calm, the BEST runway should be used—that's what all that concrete was poured for. A good alert, sharp, fast thinkin' air controlman team in the tower could PREVENT many of our pilot error accidents. It was a DOUBLE PLAY—pilot to tower and out!



The Sleep Walkers!