



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Close Shave

An RA-3B with a crew of four departed a Pacific island early one afternoon on a routine transPac flight to the Philippines. After take-off, the flight proceeded outbound with everything operating normally for the first 20 minutes. While climbing through 29,500 feet with the cabin pressurized at between 8,000 and 9,000 feet, the Plexiglas canopy section over the third crewman's seat suddenly failed, causing an explosive decompression.

The pilot immediately checked the cockpit altimeter and found it had risen to 19,000 feet. He quickly popped the speed brakes, ordered all crew members to check their oxygen systems and initiated a rapid descending turn. Seconds later, the navigator informed the pilot that the third crewman was hanging out of the blown canopy section.

The pilot immediately retarded the throttles and the navigator and plane captain unstrapped and began pulling the third crewman back into the aircraft. He was wearing his integrated torso harness with the oxygen hose attached to the harness but had not been strapped in the seat because he had been performing duties in the photo compartment.

The third crewman was pulled into the aircraft as quickly as possible and oxygen administered with the use of the navigator's mask. He was bleeding from a scalp wound and unconscious with little response. Later he began thrashing about, fighting the oxygen mask. By this time, the pilot had taken a heading for home base at low altitude and landed approximately 25 minutes later.

An ambulance met the aircraft and rushed the crewman to the hospital, a resuscitator on all the way. He regained consciousness in about 12 minutes and full consciousness gradually returned over the next five hours to the point



where his memory was almost completely restored. He remembered nothing of the trip back to the base in the aircraft after the incident, but did have a vague memory of the ambulance.

The other three crew members aboard the A-3 suffered no ill effects other than temporary discomfort to their ears.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

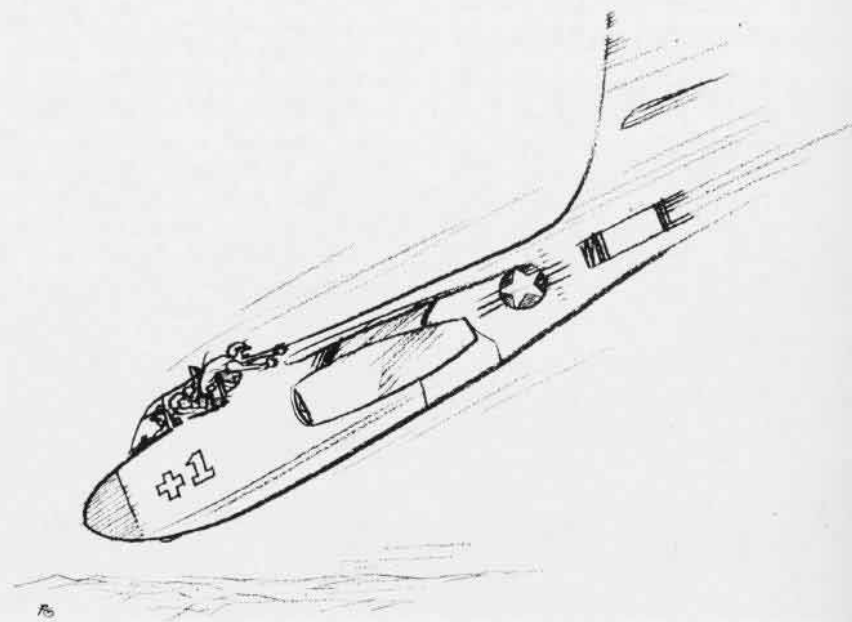
Holy mackerel! That wasn't

a close shave but a real narrow escape. Sure wouldn't want to tangle with this lad when sea story time rolls around 'cause it'll be hard to find one to top this.

This lad is downright lucky in more ways than one. Because of his duties aboard the aircraft, he wasn't strapped in and, when the explosive decompression occurred, his feet lodged under the console to keep him from being pulled out of the aircraft. His excellent physical condition without a doubt was a big plus in a speedy recovery. The pilot, navigator and plane captain demonstrated nothin' short of outstanding headwork durin' this emergency. It's a real pleasure to add these names to Gramps' Ole-Pro list. I'll fly with you guys any time.

Home-Field-itis

It all began as an exasperating day for this lad. He was called at home at 0930 and informed that he was scheduled for an 1130 brief. He had planned to visit the Squadron Flight Surgeon that morning, concerning a "catch" in his back, and did so after checking into the



squadron around ten o'clock.

During his visit to the Flight Surgeon he voiced concern about a fleeting mid-back pain, which occurred in certain positions. A thorough examination revealed no definite back disorder. The lad was assured that this shouldn't hinder his flying.

Upon returning to the squadron, he was notified that his hop had been cancelled, but was given no reason for the cancellation. This was somewhat upsetting, but he spent the remainder of the morning and early afternoon as a fairly normal working day. At 1415 he was again notified of the opportunity for a flight. He indicated his readiness to fly and was placed on the schedule with an RIO.

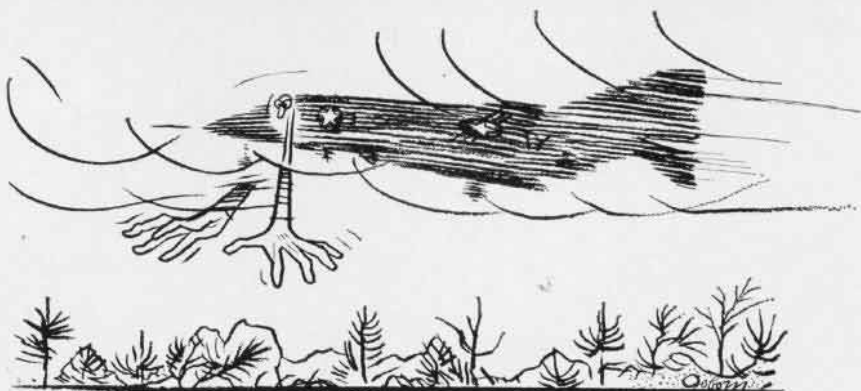
The hop was briefed at 1500 as a Navigational Training Flight, calling for an instrument departure, round robin, Tacan penetration and GCA to the MCAS. NOTAMS indicated the absence of approach lights on runway 32 and forecast weather was 500 feet broken, 1,500 overcast with three miles visibility and fog. (Specified minimums for this youngster were 500/3 and, although the forecast was good, there was no alternate briefed which met requirements.)

The F-4 turned up without incident and, prior to takeoff, the altimeters were checked, an error of 0.03 being set into both of the cockpit altimeters. Flight clearance was given and the *Phantom* departed on runway 32 at 1646.

The flight for the most part went as planned and was uneventful, except that the pilot neglected to turn on cabin pressurization before passing 8,000 feet. Noting this between FL 180-220, he made an attempt to pressurize, but experiencing severe pain in one ear, the driver had to dump the pressure.

Weather at the destination in the meantime had deteriorated to 300/3. Acting on this information, these particular *Phantom* Phlyers decided to attempt one penetration and GCA and, if not successful, proceed to the nearest acceptable alternate. Their fuel state at the time was 6,100 pounds, which allowed ample fuel for an alternate.

The penetration proceeded uneventfully as GCA acquired the flight with no problems and com-



menced the approach to runway 32. (Just prior to this time an F-10 landed and had broken out at 250 feet.) The approach went well initially, but did require several heading changes, made necessary by what the controller described as a wind shear. (The pilot noted that he suffered a slight recurrence of the ear block, a single episode of vertigo, and a feeling that "things were going wrong.")

At about one mile, the final controller called the aircraft for rising slightly above glide path. At three quarters of a mile, he called again for going below glide path. At this point, the RIO, who had been watching for the runway lights, glanced at the altimeter and noted 200 feet. Glancing back out the left side of the aircraft, he saw "bare ground." He was about to tell the pilot to wave off, when he felt a surge of power followed by the crunch of the plane in the trees.

The *Phantom* proceeded into the trees at approximately 50 feet of

altitude. Feeling the machine hit the trees, the pilot braced himself with his right hand against the instrument panel. The ill-fated bird continued cutting a swath through the trees for 750 feet before settling to a stop. The forward portion of the cockpit had been carried away during impact, leaving the seat, left panel, and approximately 1½ feet of the floorboard. Although pinned between the seat and panel and slightly injured, the pilot was subsequently extricated by the RIO who had weathered the mishap without incurring any injury. Fortunately, there was no fire. The station helo arrived shortly and delivered the crew to the station.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Bust my britches, but not those minimums!

Besides common horse sense, the lack of an acceptable alternate should have been clue enough to stow that flight plan and bone up on OpNavInst 3710.7C. There's some good reading in that manual and it was published to help prevent this sort of mishap.

The requirements set forth in this good book were not plucked from thin air by the gents who wrote it. Besides cold hard facts and statistics, many years of experience were put to good use in arriving at these minimums purposely to help us all remain within our capabilities.

You Can't Win 'em All

For an Armed Forces Day "open house" spectacular, the day was fine and the wind 10 knots gusting to 17. Parachutists commenced their jump. Could you believe it? With thousands of acres available, one parachutist landed on the MAD boom of a parked F-3 *Orion*.

