



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## STOL

The C-117 was on a local area training hop which was also scheduled to pick up some repair parts at a nearby NAS. Local weather at the NAS was reported as a partial obscuration, scattered clouds at 2,000 feet and visibility two miles in ground fog. Requesting an instrument approach, the flight was cleared for a Tacan number one approach to the field to land straight in on runway ten.

The plane broke out at 650 feet, and the copilot (who was on his Fam II flight in the aircraft) could see the water. (Horizontal visibility through the fog was quite limited.) He advised the pilot that they were contact so that he could continue his letdown. At three miles, a gear down report was made to the tower and, at two miles, a runway was sighted to the left of course.

The pilot then went contact and continued his approach to the sighted runway, while the copilot gave a runway-in-sight report to the tower. The tower cleared them to land but advised that the flight was not in sight.

As the *Gooney Bird* reached short

final, the copilot had a strange feeling that this was not the right runway, but by that time they were committed and



April  
Fools!

5/10/68

touched down at 600 feet on a 1,300 foot heliport runway, one mile north-west of the main NAS.

Both pilots were now fully aware that they had goofed but could do little except hang on. The venerable old aircraft rolled off the end of the runway with tires smoking, continued on a rough macadam surface an additional 759 feet and finally stopped on a main automobile road about 100 feet short of the sea wall of the adjacent bay. Appearing cool and collected, the pilot calmly called the tower for taxi down the main tow road to the NAS. The request was politely denied and the flight advised to shut down and stand by for a tow.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

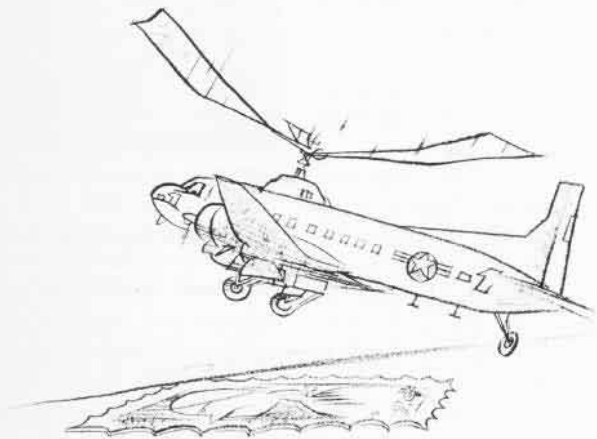
Mutter, mutter, sput, sput! These guys came out smellin' like a rose in spite of themselves: as red as one too, I'll bet. This business of landin' at the wrong airfield has been with us since the days of balin' wire and glue. This case is just one of several I've heard about in the past few months.

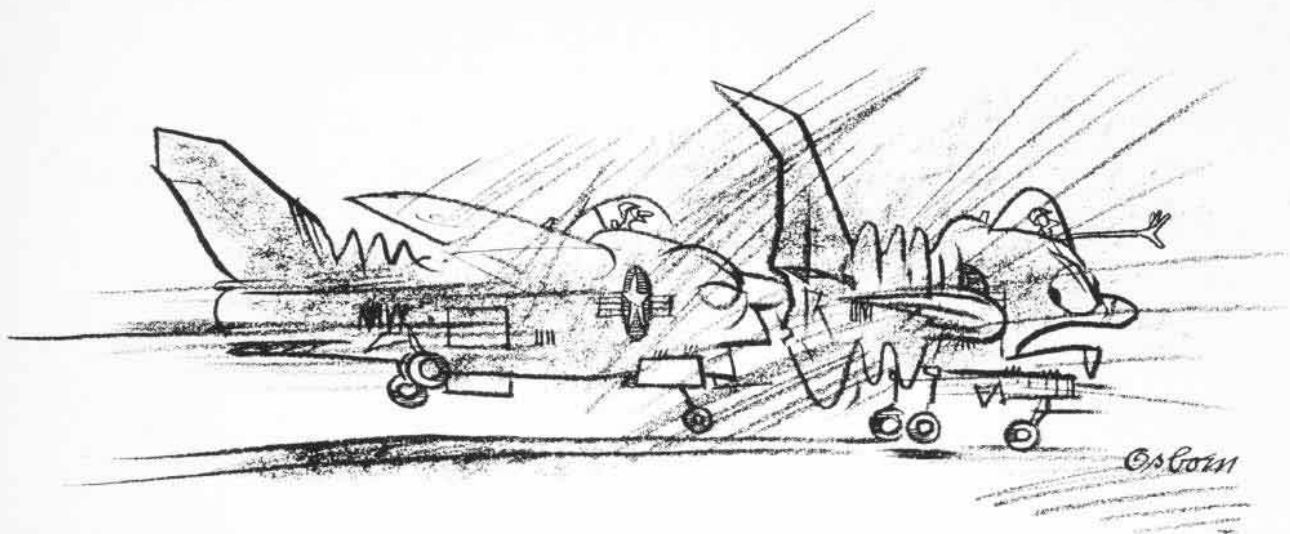
Y' say it can't happen to you, eh? Don't speak too loudly. These things tend to sneak up and grab you when you're not lookin'. "But there were extenuatin' circumstances." Yes, of course, there were. That's the way a good share of our accidents happen.

The pilot pretty well summed it up in his statement: "Low visibility, faulty instruments, inexperienced copilot and command pilot error are considered the causes of this unapproved landing."

## Nobody Here but Us Chickens

The Landing Signal Officer was kept pretty busy one dark night with five A-7B *Corsair II*'s in the field mirror landing pattern. The planes were methodically following each other around and around the pattern as the pilots prepared for refresher carrier





qualifications the next week.

Halfway through the practice, the pilots began reporting that fog was forming at the upwind end of the runway and moving across the field while visibility at the approach end was still seven miles. As the fog thickened and progressed, the tower instructed all aircraft in the pattern to make final landings.

Bantam One, at the 90° position, completed his landing, running into dense fog toward the end of rollout. He stopped at the 10,000-foot point, then turned off and cleared the runway.

Bantam Two, at the 180° position when the word was passed, touched down on speed 1,200 feet down the runway. After passing the 5,000-foot marker, he entered the still advancing fog bank. Unable to see more than a few feet in front of his aircraft, he slowed rapidly to about five knots and steered slightly to the right of center line. He advised the tower of the conditions and reported what he had done.

By this time, Bantam Three, on initial rollout, commenced early braking and notified the tower he intended to take the left side of the runway. He continued braking to a stop as he entered the thickening fog.

Bantam Four was next, somehow unaware of the rapidly deteriorating situation at the far end of the fog-shrouded runway. He touched down

on speed at the mirror, on center line, and began normal aerodynamic braking. Hearing that the plane ahead was landing to the left, he steered to the right as he went IFR at the 5,000-foot point. Sighting the now halted Bantam Three at about 50 feet and shooting on past, he began maximum braking, blowing one of his tires in the process. He then steered back toward the left side, knowing that Bantam Two was somewhere ahead in the gloom.

Sure enough, the *Corsair* appeared ahead, but he was unable to maneuver out of the way and collided with the tail section of the slowly moving Bantam Two near the center line with 3,500 feet of runway remaining.

Bantam Two travelled 90 feet and turned 90° right, stopping with the nose off the edge of the runway. The pilot transmitted a collision report to the tower and secured his engine with the fuel master switch as the throttle was ineffective.

Bantam Three skidded broadside for 150 feet, stopping near the center line and heading 120° left of the runway heading. He secured the engine and got out. Luckily, there was no fire because it took the crash crew ten minutes to find the scene in the fog.

Bantam Five landed uneventfully on the other parallel runway and required a "follow me" truck to lead him to the line.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Well, if that wouldn't frost the punkin' off the vine! It sounds almost like the story of the division of destroyers which followed each other into the fog and ran aground.

Sure, the tower operator led 'em down the primrose path, but they didn't have to follow each other blindly into the goo. It should'a been a simple matter to get everyone on deck safely with two parallel runways available. Instead, they struck two expensive new jets.

There might'a been some excuse if the fog situation were unusual or unexpected, but ol' Gramps remembers the same fog bank. The flight is not complete just 'cause the wheels have touched concrete.

## Memo from Gramps

In recent months, I've seen far too many mishaps in which there was a decided lack of communication between the pilot and copilot or NFO. They involved both omissions and commissions of action.

In Fleet operational missions, the crew is usually a team. When the same two people work together and fly together regularly, each should know the weaknesses and shortcomings of the other team member. Based on this knowledge, they should then act accordingly. Blind trust is not in order, but neither is mistrust.

Pilots must have the conviction that "I am my brother's keeper." Tell the other guy what is going on and what you're doing. He's interested, and he does have a "need to know." There is usually a lot more at stake than just two guys and an airplane. Don't forget those back aft.