



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Eye of the Needle

A Ltjg. Fleet replacement pilot (FRP) was under instruction in the A-4 attack aircraft in the replacement training squadron at one of the Navy's master jet air stations. The flight schedule called for a 2130 launch on a one-hour night practice carrier-controlled approach (CCA) and mirror landing practice (MLP) hop at home field. The weather was clear; however, the visibility was reported at three miles in haze.

The assigned leader, also an FRP, briefed the flight of five in accordance with NATOPS and the syllabus guide. The Ltjg. taxied out as #4. Each A-4C took off individually, then climbed toward the marshal point.

Approach control assigned each plane a separate distance fix and altitude on the inbound *Tacan* radial to the field and upon arrival at the fix gave each an approach time.

The *Skyhawk* left 20,000 feet and departed the approach fix 15 seconds late on CCA, but the pilot advised approach control of the fact and continued the approach to the nine-mile gate. At nine miles, he called approach control and asked for a landing gear

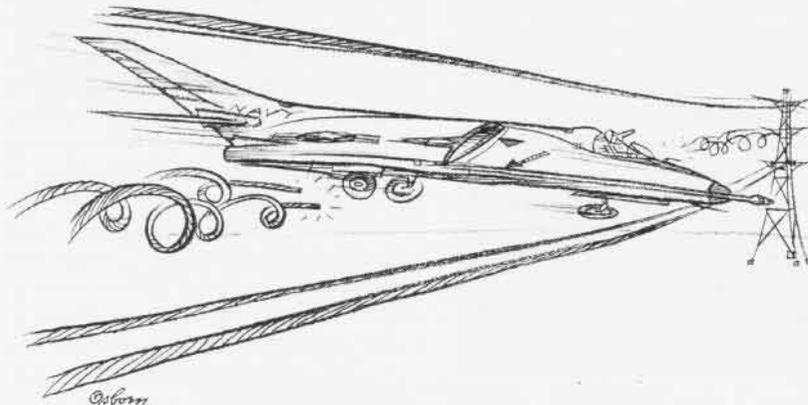
check and commenced a normal rate of descent. His gear and flaps were down at that time, and the aircraft was trimmed for "donut" airspeed. Receiving no answer, he called again at eight miles, noting by his altimeter that he was passing 700 feet.

Forty-three seconds later, he glanced at the radar altimeter. It read less than 150 feet. As the FRP instinctively added throttle, the aircraft hit some-

thing. Adding 100% power, the alarmed pilot climbed to 1,500 feet and checked all his cockpit instruments. Finding everything in order, he made one pass by the landing signal officer for a visual check of the landing gear. It looked all right, and an uneventful landing followed.

Upon examining the plane on the ground, investigators found cable marks on the main landing gear tires and on the nose gear fork. Parts of nearby communities found themselves without light and power for as long as 20 hours.

Seven miles from the *Tacan* station, 4.2 miles from the end of the runway, the *Skyhawk* had struck a 230 KVA power line. The wires broken were the middle pair of three vertical pairs of lines suspended between two steel towers at approximately 304 feet msl, 69 feet above the ground. The main wheels of the aircraft broke the first wire and the nose fork the second wire. One broken end of a cable slapped the port wing, causing minor damage to the slat and radar altimeter fairing. The aircraft did not touch either the upper or lower pair of cables. When investigators measured the vertical height of the aircraft and the distance between the wires, they found that the top of the vertical stabilizer missed the upper pair of wires by only one foot.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Oh, brother! He really threaded the needle on that'n. The Accident Board pointed out that his altitude should have been 700 feet msl. That would've put him 323 feet above the highest of the two steel towers near the extended runway centerline. Seems that a bit more margin for error could've been provided by the planners of that CCA approach, particularly when the pilot is expected to maintain his altitude entirely on his own, based solely on pressure and radar altimeters without ground assistance.

That doesn't excuse the Ltjg.'s broken-

down scan pattern though. His intermittent radar altimeter and non-operative altimeter warning light and aural tone didn't help matters much either.

The angels were flying with replacement pilots that dark night.

## Weakest Link

The *Crusader* pilot was making a ground controlled approach at an unfamiliar air station. The weather was bad and the runway was wet, so the pilot requested an arrested landing. The tower obliged, warning him that the abort gear was still in battery at the approach end of the duty runway. They advised him not to lower his hook until 2,500 feet down the runway in order to catch the mobile arresting gear.

Touching down on the numbers, the pilot noticed a chain alongside the runway, so he thought this was the arresting gear. He quickly lowered his hook.

The F-8 then picked up the cross-deck pendant of the E-5 chain gear at the head of the runway which was rigged for engagement from the opposite direction. Both cables were torn out and so was miscellaneous rigging gear on the sides of the runway. The anchor chain broke into several pieces, backlashed and crisscrossed the runway behind him as the pilot lit the afterburner and continued on into the mobile arresting gear, dragging the severed cables behind him. Luckily only limited damage was done to the aircraft.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Whew! At least he got it stopped in one piece. If some guys would just listen to what they're bein' told, all of us would have less gray hair.

## Checklist Charlie

The young fighter pilot had just returned from an operational deployment aboard the aircraft carrier, and it was his first night flying from home station. He landed his *Crusader* at 2035 for a quick recycle in order to complete a second field carrier landing practice session at the nearby outlying field.

Taxying into the pits, his F-8 was hot refueled (taking fuel with the en-



gine running). To expedite his turnaround for a 2100 Charlie time in the FCLP pattern, he only took about one half the normal load. Leaving the line, the ground crew checked the craft externally, wings spread and locked, wing up, no leaks, etc.

While taxiing out to the runway, the Ltjg. called for takeoff at 2059. The tower cleared the F-8 for immediate departure and asked the pilot to expedite due to landing traffic. He took the runway and a rolling takeoff was commenced. At 2,450 feet down the strip and at 125 knots airspeed, the aircraft lifted off in a shudder, extremely nose high, leaving a streak of sparks on the runway. Almost immediately the left wing dropped 30 degrees. As the pilot leveled the wings, the plane touched down on the extreme left side of the runway and rolled 250 feet into the grass.

The aircraft once again became airborne, very nose high, and the left wing dropped again. Application of full right stick very slowly leveled the wings. With the aircraft rapidly approaching the field arresting gear and still shuddering, the pilot ejected at 75 feet altitude. The aircraft hit the ground 6,700 feet from the takeoff point and 300 feet left of the runway, broke in half and exploded. The

Martin-Baker seat functioned as advertised and deposited the pilot 390 feet from the wreckage, unconscious but relatively unhurt.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great jumpin' Jehosaphat! I'm ready to blow my top. We buy 'em books and buy 'em books and all they do is tear out the pages. The pilot says he completed the checklist. Humph! The longitudinal (UHT) trim wheel on the stick and the trim actuator were found in the full nose-up position. The fuel transfer switch was still in the refueling position. Aileron trim was at three units right wing down. The fact that the fuel transfer was off further aggravated the situation owing to the center of gravity being aft of normal.

Solo tigers are notorious for ignoring checklists. They can do it from memory. Ha!

I think that *Crusader* left the pilot sitting in the fuel pits, while it went on without him.

A mighty expensive lesson for this gent. Perhaps some of the rest of us might profit by his mistake.

## Snivels

'I don't believe I should be held responsible for the accident as I was authorized to fly on a day when there was absolutely no lift in the air.'