



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

An Open Letter

Open letters seem to be "in" these days so here's one of appreciation to the Wheels Watch that recently came across Gramp's desk. It expresses well the sentiments of anyone who has ever been saved by that lonely man at the end of the runway.

Safe on Deck, Finally
March 1969

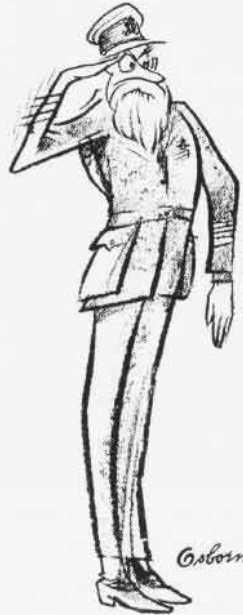
Dear Wheels Watch,

Thank you again for increasing your attention to each aircraft at those times when traffic pattern density is greatest. As you know, this situation brings out the best and worst in student pilots.

Take my first night solo, for example. I was confident that I knew my job and could control my aircraft. What I didn't take into account was an act so basic that my preflight planning hadn't included emphasis here. Once in the pattern, more effort was put on line-up, airspeed and altitude than on the landing checklist which had been called for and executed in a perfunctory manner for many flights.

As you know, landing gear are visually checked on every pass, every pass, that is, except the one that you caught as I came over the landing threshold. Later my copilot and I knew that we had missed many indications of our gear remaining up. One reason was other traffic, traffic which concerned you as well. We were both much relieved to know that your concentration wasn't diverted to less than full attention to our aircraft.

My heart didn't undergo that terrible sinking sensation until a half hour after we landed safely. Then I began thinking of what might have happened to the aircraft and to us. You told my copilot and me later of the shock that struck you moments



before our intended wheels-up touchdown. Sorry 'bout that. Thanks from both of us for being on your toes for what may have been a dull watch until we came along.

Sincerely,
Ltjg. Anymouse



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Neither rain, snow, sun, wind nor darkest night can keep him from his appointed place. Think of the hundreds of planes he watches every day, but must still be alert to warn that one-in-a-thousand which comes by wheels up.

Gramps salutes the Wheels Watch, whoever and wherever he may be, for his unending devotion to duty and continued service to Naval Aviation.

C...arrier O...nboard D...elivery

The C-1A *Trader* departed the coastal naval air station one pleasant afternoon to deliver eight civilian passengers to the CVA for an orientation cruise.

Over the aircraft carrier at the "break," the pilot was instructed by the tower to give way to a jet fighter which had just taken off. After extending the downwind leg to take proper interval, the *Trader* began the carrier approach "on speed" with a "good ball." The pilot describes his approach as pretty much OK. A little power call was received in the middle with still a center ball and on speed, followed shortly by a power call approaching the ramp. Suddenly the wave-off lights came on. The plane seemed very close to the flight deck and did not climb as expected when power was applied. A thump was then heard as the tailhook hit the deck and picked up the #2 wire.

The landing signal officer describes the approach in less glowing terms: LOX COCO EG-DNIC CUT-WO-IN FLT. "He intercepted the glide slope low and started to get slow and settle. Responding to a power call, he started to climb but approaching the ramp, eased power, dropping his nose and going low, anticipating the cut. A wave-off was given with the lights. The pilot responded with a cut, pulled the nose up, then added full power and retracted the landing gear."

An inflight engagement of the #2 wire slammed the aircraft to the deck where it started vibrating severely as the propeller blades dug in.

As the port engine continued to run, awkwardly jarring the crippled bird, the pilot called for the copilot to turn off the fuel and unsuccessfully attempted to feather the propeller. He then pulled the emergency fuel, oil and hydraulic switches, still trying to stop

ILLUSTRATED BY *Osborn*

the engine and prevent a fire.

As soon as the *Trader* came to rest on deck, the plane captain unstrapped, went aft and evacuated the frightened but uninjured passengers as quickly as possible.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great gallopin' ghosts! I wonder if the pilot and the LSO were talkin' about the same approach?

This COD pilot should'a stood in bed. About the only thing he did right was to secure the engines and climb out. He had literally worn himself into a rut. He'd made so many passes and got aboard that he just didn't respond quickly or properly on that one in a thousand, the wave-off. Food for thought, skipper? Perhaps some wave-off training is needed.

D'ya suppose those civilian passengers have now become oriented toward travel by train?

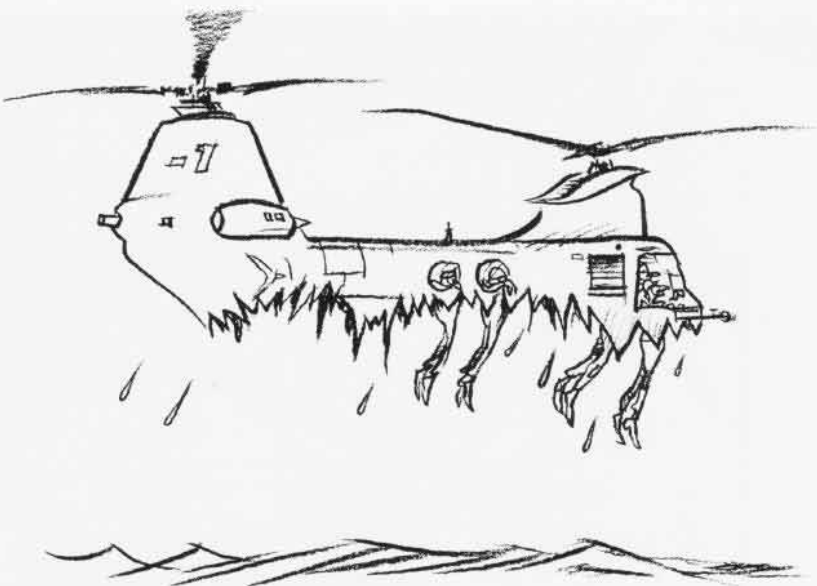
Booby Trap

The SAR duty officer received a call at 2120 to evacuate four men from a Texas Tower platform which was in danger. Since the crew of the UH-46A *Sea Knight* was on standby status at home, it took about 15 minutes to get everyone together and briefed. The ceiling was 300 feet with a ½ to ¾-mile visibility in heavy rain and strong winds. Approach Control was standing by with a special VFR clearance. Landing was to be on the tower platform.

As the pilot preflighted the helo, he sent the copilot to the locker room to don his anti-exposure suit. Proceeding to turn up the aircraft, the pilot could not get the second engine started. After three tries, he cut #1 and secured the aircraft.

The back-up bird was being rolled out of the hangar as he climbed out. With the copilot's help, it was preflighted and turned up with no problems. The heliport tower gave them the altimeter setting, the winds of 25 to 30 knots and special instructions to remain at 500 feet or below for vectors by Approach Control to the tower. The hover check proved satisfactory, and so, even though the radar altimeter was not functioning, the pilots decided to continue.

The *Sea Knight* took off and, upon entering the clouds at 450 feet, im-



mediately descended to VFR and headed out to sea, holding 400 feet and 100 knots. Because of intermittent clouds, the pilot was forced to fly strictly on instruments.

Approach Control soon advised that the tower should be dead ahead the *Sea Knight's* nose, so a slow descent was begun to regain VFR conditions. Breaking out at 250 feet, the pilot could see faint lights ahead.

As the altimeter passed through 200 feet, the pilot felt a sudden down draft. He immediately pulled in collective and raised the nose, but was too late. The aircraft struck the water with what seemed to be a heavy dragging effect. The lights ahead went out; then the helo broke free.

The flight leveled off at 2,000 feet and, while the pilots regained their composure, Approach Control reported that the Texas Tower was no longer in danger.

The plane commander requested an immediate GCA back to home field where the helo broke out at 250 feet. The chopper air-taxied to the hangar line and hovered while ground personnel looked for damage. The port main landing gear was missing.

A four-foot high landing cushion was eventually constructed from mattresses, and the wounded warrior was gently set down on the starboard and nose gear with the left stub wing resting on the mattresses.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy smoke, fellas! Next time you want a close shave, maybe you should see a barber. You young tigers are just too eager. The urgency of the mission kind'a turned cold, as it often does. Would'a been considerably colder if you'd gotten your feet wet. You sure can't help anyone else if you're in need of help yourself.

The H-46, as well as some other birds I know of, has a built-in position error in the barometric altimeter which isn't appreciated by most pilots. The amount of error depends on rate of climb or descent and becomes intolerable when the aircraft is at low altitudes trying to make its way in the less dense medium.

The moral of this story is — or should be — pretty obvious. Don't fly IFR without a radar altimeter. Are you guys ready to take the pledge? O.K. Repeat after me. . . . Thanks! Ol' Gramps worries about ya!

Memo from Gramps

An excerpt from the commanding officer's endorsement of a report on a recent mishap really hits the nail on the head:

"In a combat environment, personnel are apt to rationalize departure from standard operating procedures as part of combat necessity. This cannot and will not be tolerated in this command. Complete, consistent adherence to safe, standard operating procedures is the key to successful operations. The dangers attendant to any deviation from those procedures must be continuously brought to the attention of all personnel involved. Combat operations, in all but the most extreme circumstances, increase rather than decrease the persistent need for absolute compliance."