



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Recall

The two flight students met in the hallway outside their briefing room. They briefly discussed their upcoming initial solo formation flight and then quizzed each other on emergency procedures while waiting for their instructor.

When another instructor arrived, with his own two students who were to fly the same type of three-plane formation hop, he conducted the brief for all four students. Later their own instructor arrived, and they completed the brief as it would be conducted in their own flight.

The weather, far from ideal, with thunderstorms in the area, would gradually deteriorate throughout the afternoon.

The three T-28 *Trojans* launched on schedule at 1347 and proceeded with basic turns, lead changes, break-ups, rendezvous, etc. Halfway through the period, another flight's instructor asked on the radio if there had been a recall. The instructor said no, but one of the students advised him that he had just heard home tower issue a recall of all VT squadron aircraft to return to home plate as there were thunderstorms approaching the field.

The instructor then requested his students to change the lead back to the original flight leader and head back for the field. They leveled off at 1,200 feet msl as they approached the initial point, soon spotted another three-plane formation ahead and took interval on them approaching Point Bravo.

Two miles from the downwind end of the duty runway, the lead student called the tower for permission to break and was cleared with the proviso that there was traffic upwind and that he would be number nine in the break. The leader kept the upwind traffic in sight and, as they came over the runway, he noticed a cloud bank and/or rain showers past the upwind end of the runway. Continuing on, he saw the first plane of the flight ahead

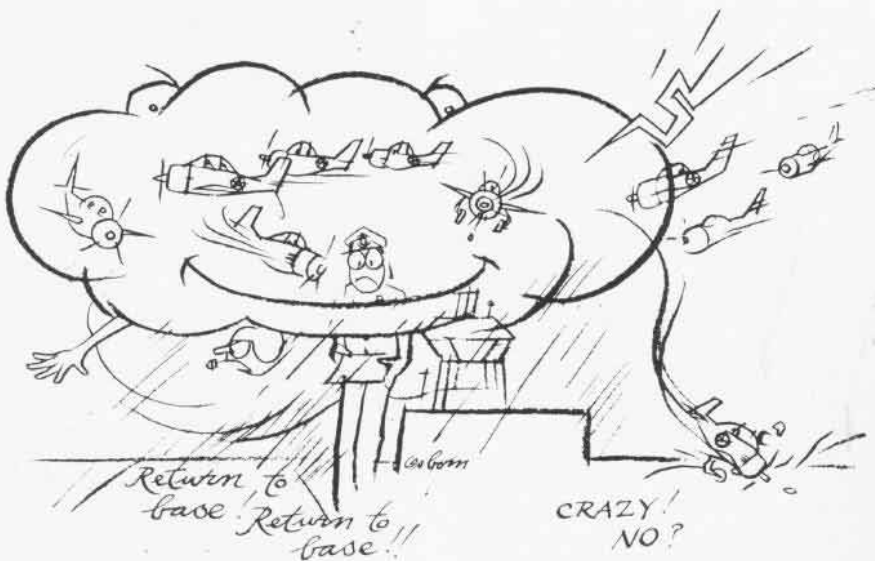


break. Shortly thereafter, the #2 man broke and disappeared momentarily in the clouds. Then the chase pilot broke and disappeared completely in the goo.

Just about that time, the student

leader went IFR. As he went on the gauges, he reported the fact to his flight leader, who advised him to go ahead and break but cautioned both students to keep their eyes on their instruments. The student started a normal break, but then decided to follow standard procedure for unintentional IFR flight. He leveled his wings, flew for one minute straight ahead, and started a turn, climbing to 2,000 feet. He soon broke out VFR and headed back to find the rest of the flight.

The #2 student began to break and was soon observed by the chase instructor losing altitude rapidly in a steep turn to the right. The chase followed him to an altitude of about 400 feet, calling him to "Pull out! Pull out! You are in a descent! Get on your gauges!" The student momentarily leveled his wings while the instructor broke off to recover his own aircraft. The chase next observed the student in a 100-degree left bank and again called to him, "Get on your gauges! You're rolling inverted!" The student's reply was a plea: "I need help, sir." It was the last transmission heard from the student. An unknown voice called,



ILLUSTRATED BY *Osborn*

"Get on your instruments, we can't help you."

The rest of the flight regrouped VFR, away from the field. Repeated calls for the missing student received no reply.

The *Trojan* hit the roof of a building in a 70° nose down attitude at a high rate of descent. The ensuing fire destroyed the wreckage and the building.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Great gallopin' gremlins!!**

**Who in tarnation is responsible for this tragedy?**

The pilot, you say? He became disoriented in unexpected IFR conditions and lost control. After all, he completed basic and radio instrument phase! Was he really ready for something like this?

The instructor? He shouldn't have brought the flight into IFR conditions. Ah, yes, but who ordered the return to the field in the first place without advising on the changing weather conditions?

The tower, you say? They recalled all the aircraft back to the field which was expected to go IFR any minute, didn't keep the pilots advised of changing conditions, and let 11 planes into the pattern all at once.

How about the squadron duty officer who asked the tower to recall his aircraft when things started to close in?

Reminds me of an old story. "Message to diver. Surface immediately. The ship is sinking!" Diver to ship, "Never mind, I'll just wait'n let you join me here."

Probably the worst thing in the world to do when the duty thunderstorm hits the field is to recall all the birds. Better that they divert or try to wait it out. This poor student was led down the path by those whose job it was to keep him out of trouble. They failed.

### **The Hurrieder I Go . . .**

The first lieutenant and major briefed for a local night bombing hop on which they were using 5-pound MK-76 practice bombs. It was the second hop for both and, because of various delays, things were running considerably behind schedule. During his preflight of the aircraft, the lieutenant was further delayed while ordnance personnel finished loading the A-4E *Skyhawk*. As he climbed into the cockpit, he noted that his leader was already turned up.

Abandoning his usual thorough pro-



cedures, he took various shortcuts to try to catch up. His post-start checks were also curtailed and hurried, as he noted the leader already taxiing to the marshaling area.

The junior aviator quickly called that he was ready to go and followed the leader to the end of the runway — for arming of their ordnance. The pre-takeoff checks were performed from memory. Then the flight had to wait three minutes — short of the runway — for landing and departing traffic.

Turn-up checks on the runway also were completed off the top of his head, and he then followed the leader into the air. The lieutenant's *Skyhawk* seemed to leap, airborne sooner than usual, but he attributed that to the light weight of practice bombs and the coolness of the evening air.

As he began a 300-knot rendezvous at 11,000 feet, he noticed the amber fuel transfer light glowing dimly from the instrument panel. Suddenly realizing exactly what had happened, he stared unbelievably at the zero reading on the fuel gauge. He rolled wings level and informed lead that he had no fuel. As he reached for the emergency generator, the engine flamed out.

Knowing that emergency start procedures would be futile, the pilot set up a glide and looked for the best place to make a safe ejection. Between three and four thousand feet, he ejected and

was picked up by a Coast Guard helicopter to which he swam after it landed in the water nearby.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Great shades of Walter Mitty! The only thing I c'n add is that he survived in spite of the efforts of all those around him to screw him up. I don't hold it against this lad any more than I do his flight leader, the maintenance officer and his C.O. for allowing such slipshod operating procedures in the first place. This accident would never have occurred in a well run, properly supervised, really-on-the-ball outfit. What kind of line procedures were in effect that a plane could be signed off for flight by the plane captain and accepted by the pilot without being refueled?**

**You can show a pilot the checklist, tell him why he should never fly without using it religiously, set a good example for him by using it yourself, take harsh action against anyone who violates NATOPS by not using it, but, in the final analysis, it is the pilot, alone, who will live or perish by what he does when alone in that bird in the blue. Perhaps the two-man crew will save a few. There is another story I could tell, which starts out exactly the same way, but that time, when the *Skyhawk* caught fire because of an unsecured fuel filler cap and the pilot ejected, he perished because he was in too big a hurry to strap himself into his parachute and ejection seat.**