



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Rough Ride

At 0802, a U-11A *Aztec* departed NAS Gulf Coast for NAS Inland. The aircraft's crew was a lieutenant commander with over 4,000 hours (400 in fixed wing) as the pilot-in-command and a lieutenant with over 2,000 hours. The passenger was a commander with over 4,000 hours, primarily in helos. The pilot had a total of 66 hours in the U-11A with five hours in the past three months. The flight to NAS Inland was mostly on instruments in smooth air, and the aircraft landed at 0915 after an uneventful flight.

During the next hour and 45 minutes there was shower and thunderstorm activity in the immediate area. At about 1100, when the three aviators returned to operations, a heavy thunderstorm was over the field. But the forecast called for improved weather; the pilots proceeded to the snack bar. At about 1130, the lieutenant commander presented his flight plan to the duty forecaster. During the weather brief, the pilot and the forecaster noted that the weather radarscope indicated prominent returns on the 60-mile scale. At 1145, the pilots submitted their flight plan to the operations duty officer and reported to their aircraft.

At 1204, following instrument clearance, the aircraft departed and received radar vectors to the first checkpoint, approximately 13 miles away. The U-11A entered the overcast at 1,800 feet and continued to climb to the assigned altitude of 3,000 feet. The pilot contacted the center and requested radar vectors around turbulence and thunderstorms. Center informed him that radar contact was lost and passed frequency (132.25) information for the next controlling center. At 1217 our copilot lieutenant requested a lower frequency and the center told them to work on 122.6 or 123.6 en route. The flight continued IFR in relatively smooth air with the copilot attempting to establish com-



munications with en route radio or the center.

During this period, the aircraft entered a thunderstorm of unknown size and subsequently encountered darkness, heavy rain, hail and severe turbulence. Unusual G-forces were encountered as the aircraft's attitude, altitude, heading and airspeed varied abruptly. Control of the aircraft was minimal even with both pilots on the controls. In extreme turbulence, the pilots literally were recovering from one unusual attitude after another.

The pilot had turned on all interior lights, and the copilot abandoned his efforts to establish communications. They descended to 700 feet msl about ten minutes after entering the thunderstorm and established visual contact with the ground. They circled for several minutes looking for a possible path through the weather. Not finding one, the lieutenant commander elected to land in a field. The passenger and copilot agreed.

They were still encountering severe turbulence and intermittent rain as they descended in a right turn. The pilot missed his lineup, executed a waveoff and, seeing that the field was

plowed, raised the landing gear and made a left turn to line up for another approach. As the U-11A crossed the trees, the pilot directed the copilot to cut the mixtures, which he did just as the aircraft entered a rainshower. At 1255, with about 100 knots airspeed, flaps up, a left crosswind and forward visibility virtually zero, the pilot landed the aircraft by visual reference to the ground.

It touched down in a relatively flat attitude, and the left propeller made initial contact about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down the field. After the aircraft had traveled approximately 40 feet, the right propeller impacted. The left and right propellers were bent as the aircraft touched down and the U-11A slid 440 feet in a gradual turn to the left. It entered the fence row, passing between two trees which tore both wings off and ruptured the fuel cells. During the final deceleration phase of 40 feet, the empennage and after fuselage were severely damaged as the aircraft tore through the various obstructions. During the rapid deceleration, the right passenger seat failed; the passenger, still strapped to the seat, was thrown forward and out of the aircraft. The pilots, restrained by their seat belts, received head injuries as they were thrown forward. The passenger released his seat belt and left the area. The copilot assisted the pilot from the wreckage.

Post-emergency landing secure procedures were not accomplished because of gasoline fumes. Although the aircraft was destroyed, the pilot, copilot and passenger received only minor injuries.

Investigation revealed that the forecaster on duty was a stand-in; however, he did, apparently, possess the experience necessary with considerable time in this field. During the weather briefing, there was no mention of a significant meteorological report concerning thunderstorm activity a few miles to the southwest. The communications system for passing weather in the area was termed inadequate. And

the forecaster did not use the available radar summary charts at the briefing, nor did the pilot ask about them. The field was in thunderstorm condition I, but no one told the pilot. The forecaster did advise VFR, but the pilots filed IFR anyhow.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Egads! Pass me another aspirin! Ol' Gramps is not disputin' the decision to land once the aircraft was rattled around like a Mexican jumpin' bean, but I'm mighty upset at a lotta people who contributed to this mess! First the pilot, although briefed that it would be better to head east, headed southeast—a shortcut home. The "weather guesser" was a big help, giving the pilot a poor brief which did not include thunderstorms in clouds or a forecast of them. Supervisors got their licks in, too, by acknowledging that their communication system for passing significant weather developments was inadequate—after the accident! The operations people allowed the pilot to clear with an improper flight plan—no alternate, even though one was required. Although this latter item did not contribute to the accident, it is indicative of the complacent attitude of many that were involved. Of course the accident board minimized the fact that in accordance with local directives the pilots' NA-

TOPS qualifications had expired! Hey fellows, do you think that if he had his NATOPS check, the check pilot would have detected that his VHF couldn't receive on certain frequencies? Hummm? Sounds like everyone involved had "cornered the poor judgment market."

Does this situation exist elsewhere? How about all you "weather guesser" supervisors reviewing your methods and communications as to how quickly your unit is receiving significant weather developments.

The Cat Got a Bird

An SH-3A returned to the ship after a routine uneventful training flight. It was recovered on the forward part of the angled deck with the right main landing gear on the inboard waist catapult track. About two minutes later, the helo was shut down, chocked, and four tiedown chains had been installed.

The aircraft commander had just left the aircraft and the rest of the crew were preparing to leave when the number three catapult shuttle struck the starboard main landing gear strut chock, collapsing the strut and sponson. The *Sea King* rolled to the right and came to rest on its starboard side. Two flight deck personnel who were

standing near the right side, near the cargo hatch, narrowly escaped injury as it rolled toward them.

The copilot and two crew members still inside the helo exited shortly thereafter. They received multiple bruises and were somewhat shaken up. The aircraft sustained a fuel puncture when it hit the deck but, fortunately, there was no fire. There was substantial overall damage to the helo.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

My achin' ulcers! This accident falls into the category of the "most preventable kind." There is no possible excuse that would hold water! Gramps does not agree with the statement made by one supervisor during the investigation that this particular catapult crew was well qualified. A catapult crew that allows the catapult to be repositioned or fired without properly clearing the track is *not* a well qualified crew or a well disciplined crew or a well trained crew or a well supervised crew! This particular accident had catastrophic potential for a flight deck fire. Nuff said!

'I feel that the weather should be a major factor in this accident ...the warm sun made me sleepy.'

