



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Goodnight Ladies!

Flight time for many these days is anyway you can get it. Two young lieutenants, junior grade, recent graduates of the Navy's jet flight training program, found themselves stationed at one of our overseas island air bases with no jets to fly and very little to challenge their blooming enthusiasm. The station U-11A was available. Although the *Aztec's* ADF was out, leaving it with a VOR receiver only and the attitude gyro and gyrocompass precessed a great deal more than normal, they briefed for a night IFR ground controlled approach practice mission. The plan called for about ten GCA touch and goes. After about a 30-minute delay for the duty forecaster to get back from supper and give them their IFR weather brief, they launched VFR with local weather 1,800 broken, 8,000 broken, 15,000 overcast, and visibility eight miles.

Immediately after takeoff, the GCA controller advised them that there was a large intense thunderstorm extending across both the downwind leg and the final approach course and he would be unable to vector them around the storm. Apparently both pilots had been to "hackit" school for the reply was, "That's why we filed IFR."

The J.G. in the left seat, the least qualified, made the first two approaches. He was waved off each time because he was far too far left of centerline — in the direction of the mountains which paralleled the field. The GCA operator, from his experience with the plane on previous occasions, surmised that the directional gyro must have varied from 20 to 50° off heading.

The pilot-in-command took control of the *Aztec* for the next approach, reading the instruments — which were mostly on the left side — from his right seat position. Because of an ill-fitting right-hand cabin door, both pilots wore sound attenuators to reduce the noise. As the plane turned on final, the GCA controller reported that Center had advised that they could not be cleared for continued IFR ap-



proaches since they did not have the capability of executing any lost communication procedure. They were advised to maintain VFR, if they could, and return to the field.

They could then see the ground and accepted the clearance, but right after switching to tower frequency, they went into the clouds. The pilot-in-command immediately began to climb, hoping to break out VFR on top. Because it was difficult to read the wet compass, he decided to climb in 360° turns — to avoid flying in the wrong direction.

GCA was still monitoring their progress and, after calling the tower operator on the phone, advised that they were heading for the mountains and to "turn right and pull up immediately."

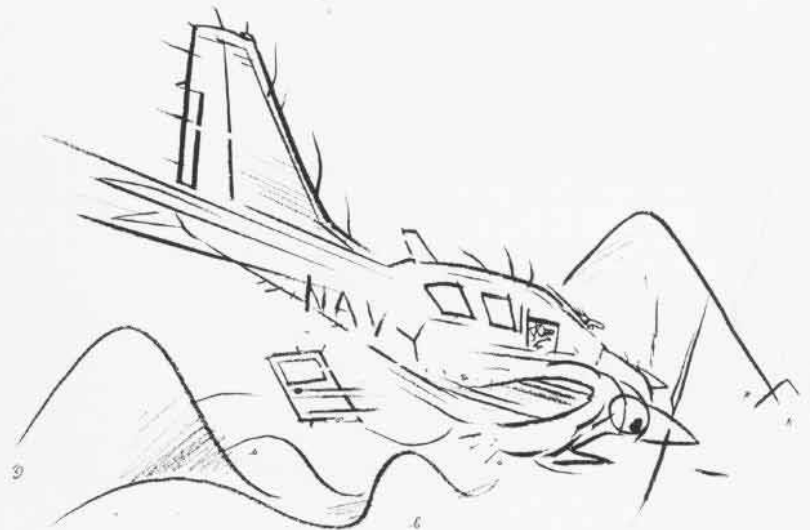
The pilot increased his angle of attack and the airspeed dropped rapidly toward zero. The aircraft stalled and entered a left spin. They were still above 4,000 feet, but the altimeter began unwinding rapidly. Completely on the gauges now, the "p.i.c." neutralized the stick, applied right rudder and then, as the turn needle centered, began to pull the nose up. Considerable excess G's were encountered during the recovery and the starboard cabin door ripped off, damaging the right engine cowl as it went.

The copilot watched the altimeter level at 1,500 feet and, with GCA still vectoring them via the tower controller, they proceeded out over the ocean, soon broke out VFR, descended and made an uneventful landing.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Holy Hannah! Purty darn narrow squeak! N' now you know why Gramps has white hair — from livin' through all these hairy experiences with Naval Aviators for so many years. My knees still feel a little weak. Only their laundryman knows how scared**



those two were that night. Whew! The GCA controller estimated that, in the area where he plotted the spin, the terrain rises to 1,325 feet msl.

Why must most pilots learn a healthy respect for thunderstorms and night IFR conditions the hard way? Was this mission really advisable in the first place? Hardly.

### Night Beach Party

Gramps recently heard a true tale from an old friend which, though it happened many years ago, proves a point or two. The squadrons at North Island in those days were two VF, two VS, two big boats (F-5L's) and the station planes consisting of a little bit of everything from trainers to one or two current types.

The duty pilot was assigned from all attached aviators (a pilot was supposed to do everything, anytime and no foolishness — like qualifying in type). Wings meant you could fly, period. There was no such thing as a utility squadron — that came several years later. There were over 60 pilots on the ready pilot watch list and few emergency calls, so the duty was not particularly onerous. Just be on telephone call (15 minutes).

One Saturday afternoon, a call came in that a man had been injured at Catalina Island and to please send a flying boat to take him to the hospital. The hour was late, but the station prepared an F-5L and called the duty pilot and standby — two young J.G.'s from one of the VF squadrons.

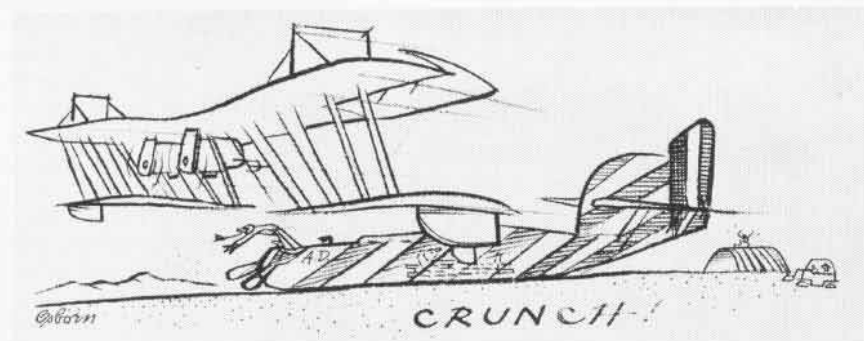
Flight plans had not been invented yet, but a quick estimate of the situation by the two pilots was about one hour up, one hour to load and one hour back. The weather was perfect, but who knows when the fog will come pouring over Point Loma. And sometimes the ground mist gets bad and for sure the landing on the return would be after dark. The pilot said certainly he was qualified for night flying. (He had over 10 hours at night.) The copilot said he only had a few turns around the field after dark but he was confident he could make it, and brightly said, "How about the moon?" Unfortunately, investigation proved it was no help.

After heaving out the pet seal kept by the crew of the plane (no use carrying extra weight) and checking a full 300 gallons (enough for the round trip and a reserve — there were no fueling facilities at Catalina — they took off and had a fine trip up. They landed at Cata-

lina, took the injured man aboard from a small boat, and were off in the twilight for home.

Then it got dark. Very dark, very suddenly. The pilot used his head, though. By riding his left rudder, he picked up the coastal lights and followed them down the coast at seven or eight hundred feet for a very smooth flight. They passed over La Jolla and the lights of San Diego flared into view.

A conference between the pilots identified San Diego, Point Loma, Coronado and North Island. The black areas were water. They decided it would be easy to miss the ships an-



chored in the bay — they were lit up — but the pilot remembered the harbor was cluttered up with a lot of buoys and platforms on stilts which could be deadly if hit, and he was afraid some of the ships might light up their searchlights and blind them.

Then they remembered that the sea had been a flat calm on takeoff from Catalina and probably was here. It had been calm all day. The decision was made to head north past the Hotel del Coronado, an excellent landmark, at 100 feet, do a power-stall landing toward Point Loma and then taxi in.

The hotel passed close aboard the starboard wing. The lights from the houses on Ocean Boulevard were an excellent reference. Easing down on the throttles at a bare 50 kts, they suddenly made contact. WHAM! It was hard and sudden — almost like an arrested landing on the Langley. Quickly they chopped throttles and turned switches off. A look over the side verified the fact that they had landed on the sand on North Beach, between North Island and Coronado!!

Now, let's go over to the naval air station. Back then, there was no control tower, but the duty officer had stationed an experienced chief in the tow-

er of the administrative building and a man on top of the balloon hangar. The chief in the tower had access to a telephone and duly reported the plane coming over Point Loma and circling south of Coronado. "It looks like he is landing in the ocean off Coronado!!" and, finally, "Looks like he cracked up in the Spanish Bight, but he ain't on fire."

The duty officer, right on his toes, pulled the crash alarm. Two ambulances and the crash truck — ever on the ready — roared away from the sick bay to the crash site on North Beach. The duty officer jumped in his own car

and halfway to the Army side of the field, he almost hit the first ambulance. It had run out of gas and was stalled in the middle of the road. At North Beach, he found the second ambulance stuck in the sand and the crash truck, trying to pull it out, was also stuck. He immediately sent for a tractor from the patrol squadron. It quickly freed both.

Meanwhile, the crew of the plane walked up to the rescue party and reported in with no injuries. The OOD, being very thorough, ordered them into the ambulance. At sick bay, they were pronounced fit for duty. The flight surgeon then casually asked, "Where's the injured man we have been standing by for all evening?" "Holy mackerel, he's still on the stretcher in the tail of the plane — let's GO!!"



Grampaw Pettibone says:

How about them apples! That's really the old tiger spirit. Talk about NATOPS. What's that? Bet those two fighter pilots were really qualified in that twin engine seaplane. They made a successful landing though. It only took two days to get it back afloat. But the poor patient got the short end of the stick. Hope the other ambulance didn't run out of gas going after him.