



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Blaze of Glory Agony

The venerable C-45, *Sneeb, Bug Smasher, Beechcraft* (would you believe *Navigator*) has almost faded from the Naval Aviation scene. Not without its trials and tribulations, however, as many a CRT proficiency pilot can attest. It has also probably hauled more people and more parts more miles than most other Navy aircraft combined. Old soldiers never die, they just fade away; this one, however, went in a blaze of ?

Three proficiency types, a Marine lieutenant colonel, a major and a Navy lieutenant departed an East Coast air station at 0630 one blustery Sunday morning en route home from a weekend cross-country. After takeoff, the lieutenant colonel plane commander gave up his left seat to the copilot, and the lieutenant moved into the right seat. This enabled the lieutenant colonel to get some extra shuteye on the way home — he had been out rather late and had gotten only three hours' sleep.

As they approached home station, the pilot awoke and exchanged places



Chaboss

with the lieutenant in the right seat. A GCA was performed and, as they broke out VFR, he took the controls and made an uneventful landing.

Shortly after turning off the duty runway, the pilot radioed the tower that his landing gear was folding and requested permission for an immediate downwind takeoff on the taxiway. The tower operator was too shocked for an immediate reply, and the lieutenant colonel called again for an emergency downwind takeoff and stated that his

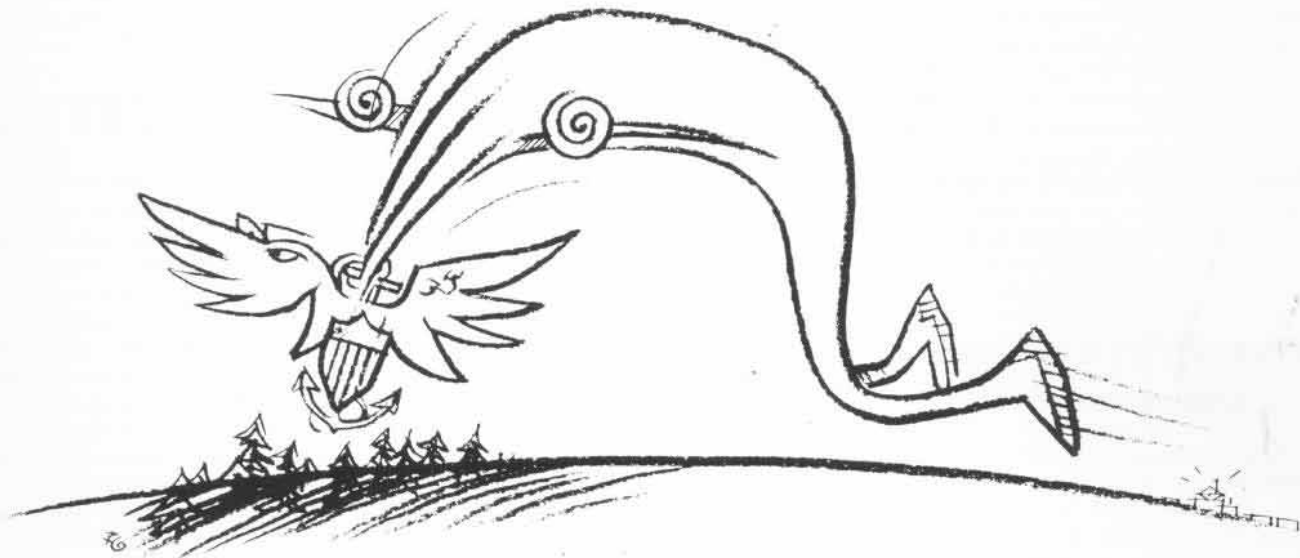
fuel was minimum. He wanted an immediate right turn. By the time the tower could give emergency approval, the *Beech* was airborne.

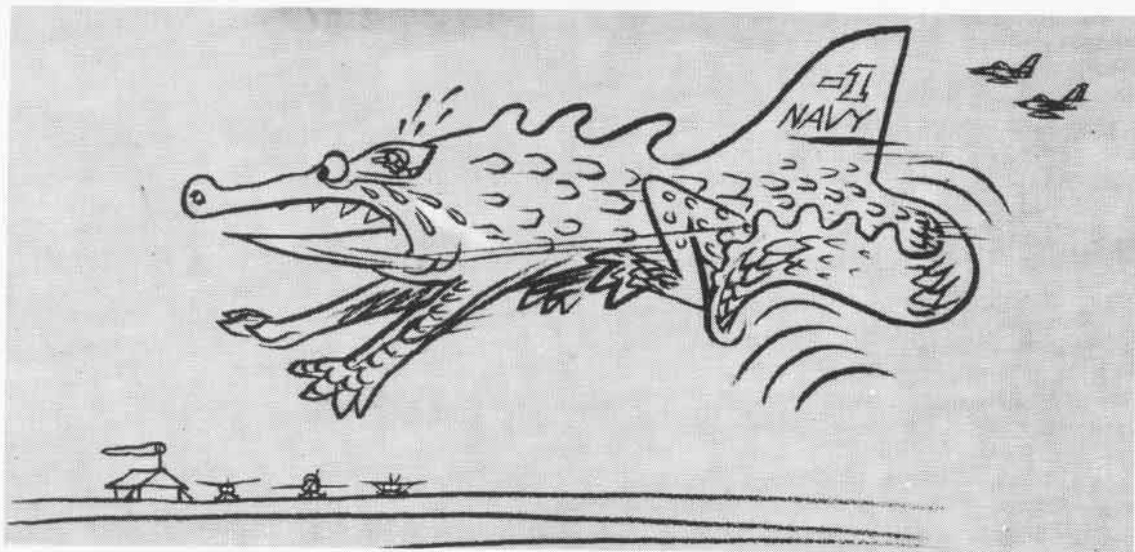
Several seconds later the aircraft began a right turn, followed immediately by a left turn. The *Beech* then began to lose altitude and went into the trees shortly thereafter, at about 40° off runway heading. The C-45 immediately began to burn. The lieutenant colonel escaped through a broken open section of the cockpit and the lieutenant through the cabin door. The major did not get out of the aircraft. Neither of the pilots had his shoulder harness fastened.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Great gallopin' gremlins! How in thunderation would you ever explain that one? It just don't make sense, no matter which way I turn it. It turned out that the bird took off with the fuel selector on an empty auxiliary tank. And attempting a takeoff to prevent landing gear collapse is about the most stupid thing I ever heard of, and I've heard 'em all. What was goin' on in that pilot's mind? Perhaps he was still befuddled from the night before.**





## Again?

The Marine captain and his first lieutenant wingman, on an instrument proficiency flight across the southern part of the country, briefed and took off shortly before noon. Checking with metro (weather services) en route, they decided to turn back from their mid-continent refueling stop and land at a desert base to re-group. While there, they ran into a major who was also en route east in an A-4 *Skyhawk*. All three briefed together and took off again at 1535. After consulting metro again, the major decided to re-file to a closer southern air force base.

It was dark by the time they arrived at the north initial point for a landing to the south. The first lieutenant who had been flying wing had not had an opportunity to review the approach plates but was appointed to land first. He had 1,300 pounds of fuel in his fuselage tank but he also had 1,300 pounds trapped in his left drop tank. The duty runway was 17 and the winds were called at 270°, 20 knots, gusting to 27 knots. His first pass resulted in a waveoff because of excessive yaw into the wind. With fuel down to 950 pounds, he declared an emergency. The tower asked him if he had the field in sight which, of course, he did.

On the second pass, he touched his *Skyhawk* down at about the 1,000-foot point and concentrated on keeping on the runway. Not seeing any distance markers, he dropped his hook. There didn't seem to be any arresting gear and the end came up pretty fast. The

A-4 rolled several hundred feet off the end of the runway into a ditch at 20 to 30 knots. The slightly shaken pilot secured the plane and climbed out to find that he wasn't at the air force base after all, but at the local county airport.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Crumblin' crocodiles!!! Don't that wilt the lily on the vine. That young'un sure worked hard, tho, 'n kept his cool. I really gotta hand it to him for keepin' that *Skyhawk* on the runway (laterally, that is) with those wind conditions. Way outside of NATOPS limits, too.**

**That's like winnin' the battle but losin' the war; or puttin' the bombs right in the middle of the ammo dump, then findin' out it was your own dump.**

**Gotta hand it to those two fearless leaders, too, for settin' him up fer it so well. It's a wonder they didn't land right behind him. Who's going to be next? It'll happen *again* in about six months.**

## Testimonial

**Nothing says it like someone who has been through the mill. If there was ever a testimonial to NATOPS this is it.**

The pilot was forced to bail out of his A-1H *Skyraider* while returning to the ship after his aircraft took a hit in the engine accessory section while over enemy territory. He was on the sick list for two weeks for a neck whiplash, a sprained ankle, and a few cuts and bruises. The mishap occurred several years ago, but the story was just recently told.

The A-1 is no longer with us; however, the pilot's golden words are as

valid today as when they were written and apply to any aircraft. Let's take up with the story as he tells it. "I can only say thank God I was wearing my sun visor down, had my gloves on and was wearing sturdy combat boots, because, after 24 years of Navy flying, I needed all of them at the same split second.

"The memory that lives most vividly in my mind (relating to my bailout from a burning aircraft) is that as I was going through the actions of opening the cockpit canopy and locking it open, positioning myself in the cockpit preparatory to getting out — including even the proper positioning of my hands — I was keenly aware that what I was doing was precisely in accordance with NATOPS. I was actually feeling complimentary toward myself because I had recited the bailout procedure aloud in *every* preflight briefing since I was first exposed to NATOPS. Running through my mind was the thought, 'Gee, this is great, I'm doing exactly what NATOPS says I should be doing — and it's working.' I don't mean to be patting myself on the back, *but* I have always worn my goggles or visor down, have always worn gloves and have never rolled up my sleeves. Otherwise, with the fire that I had on my hands at the time of bailout, I think I would have been seriously burned. It might have been disastrous if I had had to take the time out to do any of those things because seconds after I left the bird, she exploded. I wish I could imbue every fledgling aviator with the knowledge that safe practices *really* are life insurance."