



grampaw pettibone

Tricky Stuff

As an AF-1E (FJ-4B) pilot took off on a VFR night cross-country flight, the weather at his destination, which was also home base, was clear with three miles visibility in smoke and haze. En route, he received current weather broadcasts and found no change at all. Not a cloud in the sky, just some smoke and haze to cut down the visibility a bit.

He started a gentle letdown about 20 miles out and soon had the lighted field in sight. Orbiting overhead at 2,500 feet, he could plainly see the entire airfield and the neighboring areas but was informed by the tower that the field was IFR with ½-mile visibility and that he would have to contact approach control for a GCA landing.

Proceeding to a radio beacon some eight miles from the field and orbiting there, he had no success in contacting approach control and finally got a clearance using the control tower as a relay. All this time he had the airfield in sight. It didn't seem possible the field had only ½-mile visibility. It was a real puzzler.

After being assigned a GCA frequency, he made contact immediately and was given a vector for a dogleg approach to the runway. GCA cleared him down to 1,000 feet, had him dirty up for landing and informed him the arresting gear was not rigged for this runway. The wind was calm, and visibility was now ¼ mile and deteriorating rapidly. The pilot rogered, said he had the field in sight and shortly after this touched down right on the center line, but just a little fast and about 500 feet past the normal GCA touchdown point. He had about 5,500 feet of runway remaining for the roll-out.

The pilot had the sensation of being in a ball of cotton. Only the runway lights to either side of him were dimly visible. Visibility ahead was absolutely zero! He braked as hard as he felt he



could do safely for what seemed an endless time. Suddenly the threshold lights on the bitter end loomed up close ahead! Shutting the engine down, he jammed both feet hard on the brakes, heard the right tire blow and then hurtled off the end into the shallow waters of the bay which virtually surrounds the airfield. He had about 50 knots when he hit the water and went some distance out before stopping.

His radio was still running, for he heard GCA calling him, so he answered up, saying he was in the water, not injured, but to come quickly.

The first man on the scene was the pilot's GCA final controller who illuminated the wreck with his truck's headlights, then waded out and assisted him into shore.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sufferin' catfish! There's nothing more treacherous than ground

fog, for it usually suckers you in with an apparently good view of the runway and surrounding area and then smothers you in a white blanket right at flare or touchdown points. And that landing roll-out can be sheer horror, kinda like fallin' into quicksand!

Once you touch down and that old fuel state forbids any further excursions into the blue, you've pretty well had it. The only solution is to go to an alternate before trying a letdown and while fuel permits. When temperature and dewpoint are hangin' close together and the wind is calm, you can expect ground fog, especially in coastal areas, and plan accordingly. There's more to a weather broadcast than just ceiling and vis. (March 1963)

Don't Take It for Granted

It was only a training hop but the pilot of an SBD-5 was in a hurry. He checked rudder and ailerons but neglected the elevators. Upon commencing the takeoff, he found that it was necessary to force the stick to get it forward. However, he continued down the runway. When the pilot tried to level off after the plane became airborne, he discovered that the stick was jammed in the backward position. He cut the throttle immediately, to land on the remaining runway, but the plane ran off the end of the field, sustaining major damage.

During a ground check after the crash, all controls moved freely. Some .30 caliber cartridge cases were laying on the cockpit floor and were believed to have jammed the controls.

The commanding officer assigned 50 percent error to the pilot for not making a complete preflight check of his controls and for not cutting the throttle immediately after he noticed that it was necessary to force the stick forward. The remaining error was attributed to other personnel. The commanding officer previously had ordered radiomen to remove all empty shells and cartridge cases after each flight and to make preflight cockpit checks for loose gear.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

It is always better to be curious about difficulties than to assume they will work themselves out — and then be sorry.

Beside their life insurance value, regular and thorough preflight checks also indoctrinate your maintenance crew to be alert. (May 1944)

Button Up Your Overcoat

Before departing on a routine gunnery flight, the pilot of an F6F noted that two of the dzus fasteners on his



port wing gun cover were loose. He reported this to the plane captain, who attempted to secure them but was unable to do so. The plane captain then told the pilot that he thought the gun cover would hold even though two of the fasteners were loose. Being in a hurry, the pilot considered the problem no further and took off.

A short time later, upon recovering from an overhead run, the gun cover tore loose and seriously damaged the tail section. The airplane immediately was thrown out of control. After fall-

ing through the overcast, the pilot managed to recover and subsequently effected a safe landing.

To prevent recurrence of such an accident, the investigating board recommended a closer check and replacement of all defective dzus fasteners by plane captains and engineering crews. This unit now prohibits any flight unless all such fasteners are secured.

► **Comment** — Since one loose fastener may completely wreck an airplane, frequent check and replacement of all inoperative fasteners should be a must. (January 1945)

Smoke Gets in Your Eyes

A pilot was scheduled to ferry an AH-1J *Cobra* from a midwest airport to a coastal airfield. He had over 2,000 hours, with more than 250 in H-1s. Preflight, start-up and departure were without incident.

Fifty-five minutes after takeoff while at 2,500 feet, 145 kias, the pilot noticed the dual loadmeter pegged at maximum amperage. He immediately turned toward a nearby airport intending to make a precautionary landing. En route he secured some electrical components.

Smoke appeared from the forward cockpit area and rapidly filled both cockpits. Because of the smoke, the pilot elected to make an immediate emergency landing in a farmer's field. With outside and cockpit visibility

rapidly deteriorating, he opened the canopy to the intermediate position.

The canopy stayed open about 15 seconds before the slipstream forced it closed. At this point, the pilot had to hold the canopy open with his right hand while maintaining control of the aircraft with his left.

As the *Cobra* approached 200 feet AGL, the pilot abandoned all efforts toward eliminating the smoke. The canopy was closed. Outside visibility was nil and inside the instruments were completely obscured. The pilot concentrated on landing blind. The aircraft landed hard. The left skid broke off. The main rotor head and transmission separated from the fuselage.

The pilot egressed via the aft cockpit canopy, got a breath of fresh air and reached back into the smoke-filled cockpit to turn off the fuel. The engines were still running.

The pilot was uninjured but the aircraft was a total loss. The investigation determined that the smoke resulted from an overheated battery.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire — or should I say smoke! Superficially looks like this gent did a good job. But when you stop and consider all of the adverse factors such as lack of any attitude reference (actual or artificial), and a cockpit filled with toxic fumes — he did a great job!! I'll ride with this gent anytime!

