



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

A List for All Seasons

April showers in the spring, when a young man's fancy turns to love – the clear blue skies of summer – autumn's falling leaves – and the ornaments and glitter of winter's white snow are seasons for all to enjoy, to be sure. And old Gramps, in the autumn of his years but a mere child at heart, delights in each season. But, as I look over some recent seasons past, I find that April showers have taken on the steady drizzle of magnesium – the clear blue skies of summer are overcast with panels, parts, pods, sonobuoys and jettisoned ordnance – the falling autumn leaves frequently contain DZUS buttons and stress fasteners. Also, the Halloween witch has been nearly strangled and snatched from her broom by a jettisoned tow banner cable. The white glitter and tinsel of winter is very likely to be that of 12-gauge steel or aluminum sheeting. The ornaments which were supposed to be hung by the chimney with care, were scattered randomly 'round the countryside with great abandon! All this may give new meaning to the tune "I Fall to Pieces" but it doesn't put a song in anyone's heart.

Old Gramps has just finished sorting through a three-inch stack of computer printouts listing well over 1,000 reported such objects lost from aircraft during the last 15 months. Another list shows over 5,000 objects lost during the period 1975-1980. Please note the word "reported" because Old Singed Whiskers here knows – through anonymous calls and notes – that these lists may represent roughly only two-thirds of the actual losses.



Reporting the in-flight losses may not seem so significant; however, they are vital to the identification of troublesome areas, fatigued parts and poor engineering design, which may prevent further losses. And we appear to need all the help we can get.

Approximately 75 percent of these incidents were attributed to known or suspected material failure. A significant portion of this 75 percent also listed aircrew, maintenance, or supervisory personnel as possible or known contributing causes. One-fourth of all these losses were credited solely to personnel or supervision error. It is interesting to note that the narrative accounts of the reports show that, in many cases, the panels or parts

subsequently lost in flight were noted to be difficult to secure, or did not fit properly during the preflight inspection.

A good maintenance department should be just as aware of and concerned about parts that fail outside the aircraft as those inside. With the help of Benny Suggs this team should attempt to identify a remedy to the problem, if possible. An excellent case in point is provided in the 12-18 October 1980 issue #42-80 "Weekly Summary" which identified a problem with AH-1T fuel caps lost in flight. They designed a fix by painting alignment marks on the fuselage and fuel cap which verify the cap is locked when the marks are aligned and the cap is tight.

Can your safety, QA or trend analysis department identify the problem areas for the aircraft model you operate? Does your unit have a program to periodically check the fasteners, hatches and various panels for fatigue and proper fit? Have you designed or assisted in a fix to your problems? If so, old Gramps would like to hear about them and share the idea with others. If not, let's get hot!

Fortunately, we haven't injured anyone with this celestial trash dump – or have we? Could any of our unexplained aircraft losses have been attributed to damage resulting from lost or jettisoned parts? One near disastrous incident came mighty close as an A-4 target tow pilot dragged his target and tow cable off in the sea while trying to fly under a thunderstorm after being stuck by lightning – with tow cable acting as a lightning rod.

It's high time we ground these

airborne parts distributorships and DIVORCE ourselves from this jett-setting love affair. With DIVORCE meaning Detached In-flight Vehicular Objects Require Correcting Expediously!

Some Gramps Philosophy

Dearly Beloved:

We are gathered here for the pure purpose of flying — and enjoying it! I would like to take this opportunity to point out just how much akin this flying game is to entering into a marriage agreement. First of all, you gotta get down on your bones and beg the old man for an airplane, as scarce as flight time is today.

Then comes the license counterpart where you energetically bounce into maintenance control to review the yellow sheets. Keep in mind, when you sign, that you are saying “I do” or “I’m gonna” for the duration of this flight. And in signing you have solemnly promised to love, honor and cherish the old bird in sickness and health for as long as you both shall live/fly. The latter terms are not necessarily interchangeable since some flights are of much shorter duration than intended or desired.

Then we get to the part in the program where the man says, “Should any person here know any reason why this team should not be joined, let them speak now or forever hold the pieces.” This is where you come in, Skipper, or you, Safety Sam, or Mr. CDI, QA, Maintenance Chief, Supervisor, Plane Captain and, even you, Mr. or Ms. Aircrewman. More than one wise partner has backed out at this point, a temporary disappointment, perhaps, but they lived to fly another day.

Now for the preflight. Unlike marriage, you should insist upon a thorough inspection of the machine to ensure that “what you see is what you get,” and that all the vital parts,

whether they be something old, something new, something borrowed or something blue, will remain attached during the performance of the entire mission. If, for any reason, you are not certain about some of the parts, then you’d best consult the birds or the bees. To you, that’s Natops, maintenance pubs, and/or the wise old maintenance chief. He, like any protective father, takes a mighty dim view of chaps who, after an improper preflight, has the gall to bring his machine back to the line sans panels or vital parts. You just try returning a new bride to poppa with missing panel or parts adrift and you’ll likely be looking down both barrels of a double muzzler.

Should your trusty machine not be ready for flight, another word of

caution is in order lest ye be tempted. Fellow aviators take “that same dim view” of a wingman who lays lustful looks upon his machine.

Like marriage, the rewards for those aviators who perform these rituals with tender love and care (professional planning and execution) are most satisfying. Additionally, they foster lifelong longevity and, if nothing more, avoid confrontation with the most dreaded stress panel of all — the mishap board and its potential divorce decree.

Old Gramps wishes these unions every success for long and satisfying relationships. These can only be attained through dedicated efforts and attention to detail. We can ill afford an aviation divorce rate comparable to that of today’s liberal society.

