



## THE LIFE & Flight Time of Gramp

IT WAS a hot autumn evening in the dusty Mexican border town of Calexico, a few miles south of El Centro, the Navy's parachute testing station.

Several naval aviators were strolling down the street. Chancing to look in a corner drug store, one spotted an embarrassed-looking pilot standing by the window. He was in a flight jumper. Helmet and goggles were in his hand.

Curious to know what a flier in summer regalia was doing in a drug store at that time of night, the pilots went in and asked questions. He turned out to be a Marine pilot from El Toro. He had started out across the desert to El Centro, but his navigation was poor. He missed a few check-points such as Palm Springs and Salton Sea.

Before he knew it he was lost. It was almost dark when the gas in his SNJ ran out. The worried Marine put his plane down in a beet field. Walking out to a road, he accosted a man in a cotton truck who turned out to be a Mexican who "no spika English". Pointing northward, the pilot conveyed the idea he wanted a ride north, so the peon gave him a 50-mile lift to Calexico while the pilot figured an alibi.

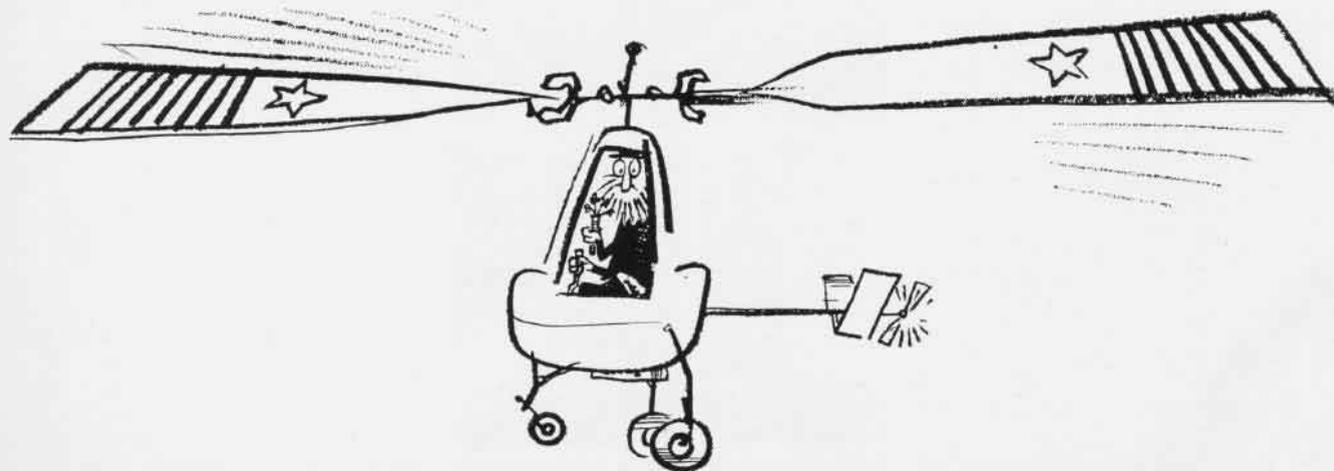
He had just been trying to call El Centro long distance to advise the station why he hadn't finished out his flight plan when the Navy pilots arrived.

After hearing his story, one threw a chill of chagrin into the lost Marine by threatening: "Wait till *Grampaw Pettibone* hears about you! Boy, he'll sure blister you!"

The *Grampaw* referred to was none other than *Naval Aviation News'* own sage of the airways. This month *Gramp* passes his 10th birthday. Ten years of handing out verbal spankings to brain-lazy pilots have made him the most popular and widely-read military aviation writer.

There is no way of knowing how many pilots' lives and how many millions of dollars worth of airplanes *Grampaw* has saved by his constant preaching against the flying sins of pilots. But it is certain both figures are high.

Over the years, Navy and Marine pilots have almost feared to fill out accident reports, knowing they might wind up in *Grampaw Pettibone's* "All-American Dilbert Club". When they did, fellow pilots usually made their lives miserable by "riding" their pals.



NO one knew who Grampaw really was but all pilots want to know. Whenever they met a member of the NEWS staff, their first question invariably was: "Who's *Grampaw Pettibone*?" The NEWS will reveal only this much—Capt. Seth H. Warner dreamed up *Gramp* back in 1943 and built up the colorful character until he retired after the war. But let's take a look back over *Gramp's* 10 years . . .

A month before organized resistance by the Japanese on Guadalcanal ceased and VMF-124 put the first F4U-1's into combat, the Navy decided to do something to cut down aviation training accidents. At its score of training bases, cadets were killing themselves right and left. They forgot to switch fuel tanks, tried to turn back to the field on engine failures and neglected to watch out for other student pilots in the landing circle.

Bureau of Aeronautics established the chair of "Aircraft Safety Counselor" and guess who was picked to occupy it? *Grampaw Pettibone*. On the January 15, 1943, the BUAE NEWS LETTER, as NAVAERNEWS then was called, introduced Capt. Warner anonymously to its readers as follows:

"Gentlemen, meet an old-timer, P. S. ("Post Script") Pettibone, long since retired, but now back in parachute harness. He started flying back in the days when airplanes were built out of cigar boxes and baling wire; when an airplane was considered a success if the pilot could coax it 50 feet in the air, and a successful landing was anything you could walk away from."

*Grampaw*, it revealed, was a guy who had made all the errors himself and was a ripe one to pass them on to student pilots. "There is no need for you to repeat them," the introduction said, "May you profit by his mistakes!"

"His log book is studded with 'firsts', dating back to such things as: 'first to take off in a seaplane carrying 250 pounds of useful load' and 'first to make a four-hour endurance flight.' In the last war he used to dogfight in a flying boat and use a Colt .45 to help out his combination gunner and bomber in the bow."

HOW did he get interested in naval aviation again after being retired for high blood pressure and a rheumatic back? *Gramp* was a fishing enthusiast and one day in 1942 was whipping the stream that ran through his farm. A student pilot crashed a few hundred yards away.

"Fortunately, the student wasn't injured, but the airplane caught fire and burned. The reminiscent smell of his burning airplane was too much for *Grampaw*," the *News Letter* recounted. "He stopped only long enough to locate his lucky helmet and returned with the student."

He had a hard time talking himself

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The chances are, your squadron commander won't even remember P. S. Pettibone, but those steeped in the ancient lore of naval aviation will recall the many aero-

THIS IS THE WAY GRAMPAW'S FIRST COLUMN LOOKED IN JANUARY 1943 ISSUE OF THE NEWS

past the physical exams of the Navy but his personal desire for "action" and the Navy's awakening to the critical situation in training aircraft accidents opened the gates. *Gramp* was in!

In that very first issue of the *News Letter* introducing him, *Gramp* began lowering the boom on sloppy-thinking pilots. One primary student, he revealed, got lost in misty weather and lost sight of landmarks. He tried to land in a grassy field and his plane nosed over when the landing gear hit a log.



*Grampaw Pettibone Says:*

Reminds me of the time I got lost. Landed out of gas, in a cow pasture about sundown. When the farmer came out, he said, "Well son, we got only two beds . . ." but maybe I better not tell that story—might only lead to more young fliers getting lost.

*Gramp* went on to recount how Lind-

bergh got lost on a cross-country in Mexico but found himself by recognizing a church. "He'd studied his route so thoroughly that he knew all the landmarks within 50 miles of his course," *Grampaw* related. "Mark my word, it's hard to lose a chap like that. Genius is 99.44% perspiration."

*Grampaw* went over the dozens of accident reports every day and winnowed out the things which seemed to bother most pilots in training. There was one F4F pilot who tried to bring in his *Wildcat* high and fast, by side-slipping and fish-tailing violently. He ran off the end of the runway.



*Grampaw Pettibone Says:*

Not worth a thinker's damn, except in helicopters.

Then there was the SNJ-4 pilot who glanced at an outlying field's windsock and then landed parallel to it but downwind. Result: groundloop and nose-over.



SILK GABARDINE UNIFORM ON EARLY GRAMPAW



ENSIGN PETTIBONE PATTERNED AFTER WARNER

That Brodie caused the Aircraft Safety Counselor to mutter in his beard and come out in print saying: "This fool maneuver has been going on ever since the first wind sock was invented. This indicates that Darwin's evolution business is working out mighty slow, at least as far as Navy pilots are concerned. Better rely on the old rule-of-sock: Fly out of the sock, not into it."

**B**UCKLING safety belts or harnesses was something young pilots frequently neglected, but seldom lived to do more than once. One F4F pilot bailed out from his spinning fighter at 6,000 feet. His parachute opened but came down empty, the chute leg straps dangling. The pilot had unbuckled them while flying, for greater comfort. They dug him out of a six-foot hole.

Many years before that, at elimination base at Oakland, Calif., a seaman second class forgot to buckle his safety belt in the rear seat of his N2S. An irate instructor kicked the stick forward and out popped the cadet to straddle the tail and then fall off. His chute was fastened though and he lived to lampoon others as a successor to Capt. Warner when he retired again after the war.

As naval aviators began to read *Grampaw's* columns in the *News Letter*, his sage comments took on more weight. Fliers whose numbskull exploits made his columns anonymously were unmercifully razed by their fellow pilots. Soon *Gramp* was able to point to quarterly flight figures showing accident decline. But he cautioned, "Now don't get cocky! That's what goeth before a crash."

Then there was the TBF-1 pilot making field carrier landings, who spun in but was unhurt because his shoulder straps were tight.

 **Grampaw Pettibone Says:**

I knew it! There's always a certain percentage of smart fatalists who think nothing will happen to them. They're the type that never take out insurance. And this shoulder harness is the best accident insurance that's been offered to aviators since the invention of the parachute and the safety belt. It's the kind of insurance on which you, instead of your next of kin, collect.

Maybe this harness does take a little time to adjust, but so does a broken jaw.

Two months after writing up the F4F pilot's empty parachute, *Grampaw* recounted another *Wildcat* collision. One pilot's chute was spotted by another plane, the leg straps dangling open and no one in it.

*Grampaw* stormed: "That one cured me! It's the second similar accident in the past few months. I'll admit I've occasionally unbuckled my harness to be a



LT. OSBORN, CREATOR OF GRAMP'S DRAWINGS

little more comfortable . . . Anyone catching me that way again, please kick my parachute seat clear up to my clavicle."

And still the pilots went on doing foolish things. *Gramp's* hammering went over well but there is no cure for knot-headedness. Sometimes *Grampaw's* comments sounded as though he were losing hope. There was an SB2A pilot who went into a 14,000-foot dive without his dive flaps open. He observed woefully: "A pull-out begun at normal altitude, from a dive made with dive flaps closed, is seldom completed above ground."

Three student pilots in a row tried to get back to the field when their engines failed soon after takeoff. All spun in.

 **Grampaw Pettibone Says:**

Why in blazes do so many of you try to make it back to the field when this happens? . . . Unless you are in the proper position and have plenty of altitude, you should land straight ahead."

Probably half the fun of reading *Grampaw Pettibone's* monthly pages in the *NEWS* has been to chortle over his pithy and frequently irate comments on the accidents. There was the pilot of a brand-new JRF-5 who landed wheels-down in the water. He pleaded "temporary preoccupation."

That brought a snort from *Gramp* that rattled the rafters. "Temporary preoccupation, my ankle! They wouldn't print what I call it!" he shouted.

The Sage of Safety went on to tell about the torpedo bomber pilot who transferred to float planes. On his first flight he tried to land on the runways of his new station. Only the radioman's frantic warnings stopped him.

"Then the pilot circled the field and made a good landing in the bay," *Gramp* said. "After taxiing up to the ramp, he got out on the wing and turned to the radioman and said, 'Good work! That



SELF-PORTRAIT OF WARNER'S COLLABORATOR

certainly was a dumb stunt, trying to land on the field on floats.'

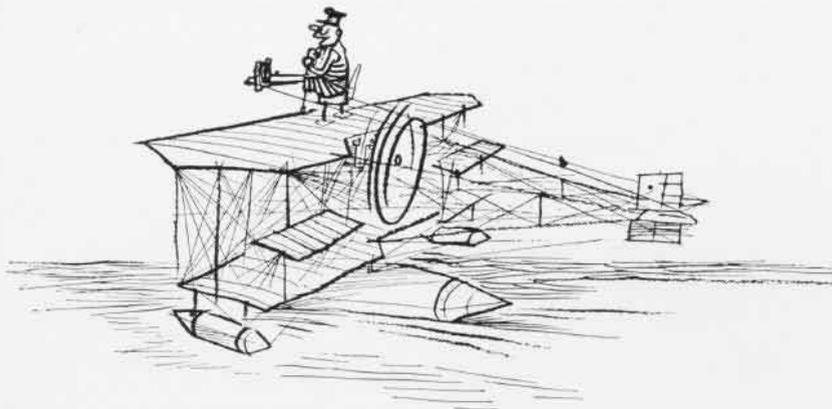
"And with those few kind words, he jumped from the wing onto the field—I mean into the water up to his neck."

One day a pilot took up a fighter to get some slow-time on a new engine. Instead he did stunts and promptly set the engine on fire, which caused *Grampaw* to lament, "A guy that would punish a new engine like that probably would beat up little kids in a dark alley."

**A**LL OF the accidents reported by *Pettibone* in his columns have not been routine, oft-repeated mistakes. One mech got too close to a jet tailpipe and got all of his hair burned off. He bought a wig and went back to work. On his first day the jet intake sucked his wig into the engine. All *Gramp* could think of to recommend to that worthy was "Brother, you've had it! Maybe you ought to get into some other line of work."

Probably the most famous and unbelievable series of mistakes ever made on a single flight were revealed to the aviation world by *Grampaw*. The story involved an F9F-2 flying off the *Essex*. The pilot bounced on landing and instead of going into the barriers he tried to fly it off again. He picked up the nylon tape off the Davis barrier on his hook, clogging it.

On the way up the deck, the *Panther* hit another plane with a pilot in it, knocking off the canopy and doing other damage. The errant jet flew off the end of the deck and skimmed the water, the nylon barrier tape dragging in the jet exhaust-churned wake. Before his next time around the *Essex* cleared the deck and installed a line of tractors behind the barriers to stop him. Without one flap and port wheel, which he knocked off on the first pass, he came in.



GRAMPAW FLEW EARLY PUSHER NAVY SEAPLANES DURING HIS TOUR OF DUTY WITH AIR NAVY

His hook jammed, the plane missed the wires. The pilot poured the coal to the jet again. The F9F sheared off the other two wheels on the tractors, skidded up the deck on its belly, knocking off the remaining flap and damaging the wing tanks and fuselage. Thus torn up, the *Panther* soared off into the air again while the ship tried to figure out what to do next.

About that time the pilot radioed in the understatement of the century: "This is becoming a rather rugged flight." He was ordered to try to fly to the beach and make a belly landing ashore, but ran out of gas 20 miles out and ditched.

*Gramp's* exhausted comment after that million-dollar mistake was to observe that the pilot had turned in his wings and "doesn't give a hoot about ever trying another carrier landing".

*Gramp* also was the first to publish the story of the AD pilot at NAAS CHARLESTON who actually took that high-powered attack plane off the runway with his wings folded. He got it 250 feet in the air before it went into a slip and crashed. Aviation experts claim such a feat is impossible but *Gramp* investigated fully before he wrote up the adleppated pilot who did it.

We have told how Capt. Warner came back on active duty in 1942 and headed the Flight Statistics and Safety section of BUAER. Where did the *Grampaw Pettibone* name come from and who did the drawings for the bearded old gaffer?

Official statistics on accidents were too dull reading, so Capt. Warner dreamed up *Gramp*. He appeared on the scene in the NEWS almost full blown. His great age made him all-wise. This, and his low boiling point, plus the fact he had come back from retirement just to do a job on flight safety, all left him free to come out swinging and shoot off his mouth at will on any and all subjects. This he did—and was immediately successful.

The *Gramp* name came from his old age and the *Pettibone* just came out of

a hat, altho it tied in to his great age too. *Gramp* was given character by the individualistic cartoons of LCdr. Robert C. Osborn, former teacher with a flair for caricatures. Osborn is also known for his *Dilbert* and *Spoiler* cartoon posters which decorated every air station's classrooms and bulletin board. Osborn and Warner dreamed up *Gramp* as he is known today—he hasn't changed in the 10 years since he was "born". He looks a little like Warner, in fact.

Osborn got a start in drawing because his father's lumberyard folded and he had lots of stationery and account books to draw and paint on. At Yale he got tossed out of art class because he drew a caricature of G. B. Shaw instead of drawing an egg-shaped cast.

From there he graduated to sketching nudes at British Academy in Rome and Academie Scandinav in Paris. Then for six years he taught painting, Greek philosophy and coached football and trapshooting at a Connecticut school. He began drawing caricatures for his friends when he was ill for several years, then enlisted in the Navy in 1942.

In the service he dreamed up *Dilbert* the Pilot and *Spoiler* the Mechanic. Posters, *Sense* pamphlets and cartoons soon poured from his facile brush—2,000 posters and 1,800 cartoons—in addition to drawing *Grampaw*.

Both Capt. Warner and Osborn, incidentally, were so successful in the field of flight safety that they were awarded Legions of Merit for their work at the close of the war.

During Warner's flying career, he had many kinds of experience, including command of a dive bomber squadron, a scouting squadron and a patrol squadron. He has his share of "sea stories" to relate about his flight training, such as the time he and his room mate, now VAdm. H. M. Martin, ComAirPac, did some dogfighting in HS-2 "flying coffins" with pusher props.

On one pass they started at the same altitude and dove the seaplanes toward each other at the bottom of the "V". "As

we pulled out, however, nothing happened," Warner recalls. "Our weight and inertia kept us going right down the 'V'. Evidently our poor aim kept us from colliding, but we whoshed past each other so close we could see the whites of our . . . cheeks. And so we learned about dog-fighting. Understand they have different methods of teaching it now."

Warner was mum about it, but VAdm. Martin recounted another one on the future *Gramp* when he was a cadet. One day during bombing practice, Warner dropped his "eggs" on the rake station repeatedly—then wondered why there were people under the target. Adm. Mar-



HARD-HAT PETTIBONE KNEW HOW TO FLY A JET

tin also recalled both he and Warner were "beached" after their close shave in the HS-2's.

Then there was another time when he was sent out in a *Jenny* (Curtiss JN-4) minus a compass to make a triangular navigation flight on a cloudy day. He missed his check points and ran out of gas 50 miles east of Pensacola. After putting down in a hay field, his plane turned over in a soft spot.

His wingman landed and they found the damage was a busted rudder. Two hours later he was back with a rudder and mech, only they had brought an N-9 rudder instead of a JN.

"After much squeezing and bending, however, we got it on," Warner recalls. "When I got in the air, I found I had to use full right rudder to fly straight. Whenever I eased up, the plane swung around to the left.

"The only way I could get back on course again was to continue turning to the left about 340° more, and then try to hold it. Boy, was my leg sore. I can still feel it." They got back home in the pitch dark and landed with the light of three buckets of burning gasoline—his first night landing.

One day Lt. H. M. (*Beauty*) Martin, then CO of VF-2, asked Warner to fly a plane aboard the *Lexington* for the winter cruise. Full of confidence at landing on such a big flattop after quali-

rying on the *Langley*, Warner came into the groove unable to locate the LSO, who then wore ordinary fliers' clothing. At the last minute, he saw the cut being flashed and crossed the stern as they sounded the crash alarm.

"I saw the arresting wires go by like a picket fence. I hooked the last wire and got out of that with only a blown tire and one busted windshield where my head had crushed it vertically." That was in pre-shoulder harness days.

WHILE WITH VP-10 as skipper, Warner led a mass flight of 18 PBY-2's from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, the longest mass flight attempted up to that date, 1938. They ran into heavy weather and had no oxygen, but the planes soared to 15,000 feet trying to go over it. One plane's radioman passed out. Warner looked at his co-pilot and saw blood dripping from his nose.

Less than halfway across the Pacific, *Gramp* discovered he had used more than half his gas. Rather than turn around and face the bad weather again, he took a chance and led the 18 planes westward, depending on a predicted 12-knot tailwind and lighter gas load to pull them through. They landed safely at 3 a.m. at Pearl Harbor although most of the pilots had never seen the place be-



GRAMP'S HOT TEMPER RAPS KNOT-HEAD FLIERS

fore. No plane had less than 100 gallons of gas in tank which would carry a plane farther in those days than today's gas-gulping jets.

From experiences like these, Capt. Warner drew a knowledge of aviation do's and don't's which formed the basis for his *Grampaw Pettibone* comments in later years. He was no "perfect flier", he'd been through the mill and knew the wrong things pilots can do. He'd done most of them himself—and lived to warn others about them.

During his 10 years of following naval aviation rhubarbs on the seven seas and ashore, *Grampaw Pettibone* has built up a huge following of readers who turn to his sage advice as soon as they get their hands on a copy of the NEWS.

Proof of the readership of *Gramp* was established when the Navy hired National Research Council investigators to

talk to 500 pilots and 46 squadron leaders at various air stations. They asked, in a sort of sexless Kinsey Report, which of the Navy's flight safety programs were of the most value.

The survey discovered that 88.2 percent of the 500 pilots always read *Grampaw's* pages in the NEWS; 10.8 percent read them frequently and only 1 percent said they seldom looked at his Advice to the Airborn. Asked which flight safety program did the most good to cut down on flight accidents and save pilot lives and dollars, 77.2 percent selected *Grampaw* on top place.

When the questioners asked the pilots how to improve the *Pettibone* pages, the pilots most frequently answered: "Leave it alone and don't spoil it."

*Pettibone's* great popularity has long been a source of mystery to NANEWS editors who have caught housewives, schoolboys and other non-aviation people also reading his stories avidly. Proof of his influence over fliers can be seen in the fact he once promised to send a book "Grampaw Looks at the Corsair" to anyone who would write in and ask for it. He was snowed under by 850 letters asking for copies—after the Navy already had distributed it widely to all *Corsair* squadrons.

*Gramp* is also sort of a friend-of-man to many Navy pilots. He even gets letters from pilots who want his help in swinging some change-of-duty orders. If he makes an error, as happens once in a while, he really hears about it. On an off-day he mentioned that tachometers measured propeller revolutions. The response was deafening. Letters from all over the world bawled *Grampaw* out—any rube knows they measure engine rpm's.

Sometimes pilots write in to inquire why *Grampaw* doesn't pat good performances on the back instead of crab-

bing about accidents. *Gramp's* columns are based on flight accident reports and his shoulders are bowed by his attempts to keep some of those pilots alive and their planes flyable. Occasionally some squadron writes in to brag about a good record and *Gramp* passes out back-pats along with the brickbats if they are earned. It is really the expensive and fatal crashes that worry *Gramp* most.

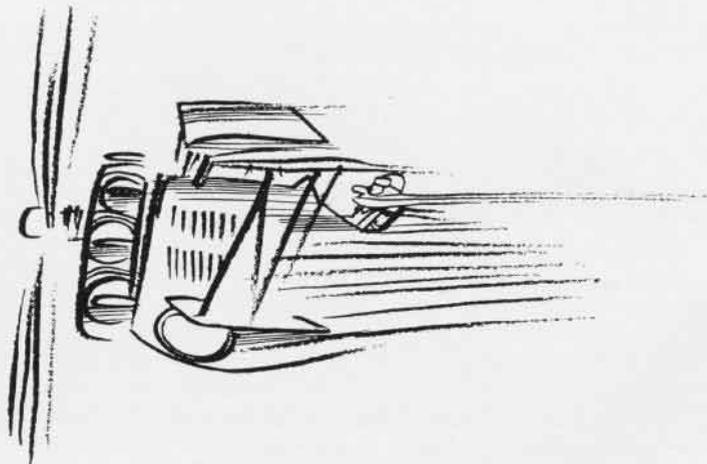
JUST TO prove *Grampaw* isn't always infallible here's another story. His radio out and unable to locate his SNJ light switch at night, he made a downwind landing at Squantum Reserve station after five circuits trying to orient himself. Besides that he picked the wrong runway and almost ran off into the bay. In the control tower, meanwhile, word got around who the pilot overhead was. One staunch reader argued that it "couldn't be, because he's *Grampaw Pettibone*," and *Gramp* wouldn't be so stupid as to not follow tower instructions.

But it was *Gramp*. When he walked into the operations office, rows of sailors were all lined up, reading a certain *Grampaw Pettibone's* pages in copies of the NEWS. Just to be sure, Squantum officials, after razzing him for his landing, refused to clear him to leave unless he promised to write himself up. They sent in the following poem:

Grampaw, dear Grampaw,  
Your face must be red!  
Perhaps you'd be safer  
At home in your bed!  
'Cause landing downwind  
Is not very bright,  
Especially when  
You do it at night.

To which, *Grampaw* humbly replied:

Dear Squantum Reader  
You're so right.  
From now on I'll  
Stay home at night  
And try to forget  
That Grampaw "P"  
Forgot to observe  
The Squantum tee.



SPEED-KING GRAMPAW ALWAYS GAVE HIS NEW ENGINE PLENTY OF TIME TO GET BROKEN IN