



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Dear Gramp:

Here is one for you to ponder on—**LIFE VEST TURNS DEATH VEST.** It's one of the things you read about but never think could happen to you. This is just the way it happened.

While testing a *Banshee* at 35,000 feet, I noticed that my life vest toggles had inadvertently been pulled just enough to gradually inflate the vest. My first thought was one of disgust because I had checked the vest prior to flight and noted that both toggles were safetied. As I had my parachute harness snug (as it should be) together with shoulder harness and oxygen mask, I could not look down to do anything, because the gradually inflating vest was shoving my head back and pressing under my chin.

I finally managed to loosen the quick-fit buckles on the parachute harness to relieve the pressure on my chest, but this released the vest and it shot up under my throat with a terrific pressure and choked off what little air I could get. I grabbed for my throat with both hands and held the vest away to get some breath and thought the situation out—no knife to puncture the thing and I could not look down to see the oral inflation tube because the mask was impeding this action.

The next thing that I could think of was to get down to a safe cabin altitude, so I could take my mask off and look down to see what I was doing, but every time I took my hands off to fly the aircraft, I started to choke. I pulled both engines back to idle and opened the dive brakes and forgot about the aircraft and concentrated on keeping alive until I could do something about the situation.

I finally got down to 15,000 feet on the cockpit and managed to get the mask off. By this time I was alternating between greying out from suffocation and breathing like a steam engine while I held the vest away from my throat to get some air. The vest



was now fully inflated and, even by holding the vest out, I could get only short, quick breaths because of the terrific pressure on my chest.

About this time I saw my mechanical pencil on my knee board and, by taking a large breath of pure oxygen and holding it, I got hold of the pencil and stabbed it through the sides of the vest. I spent the next five minutes fighting hypoxia and sheer exhaustion. I was breathing hard from the exertion, and the altitude on the cockpit still was too high to get enough oxygen, so I took a few gulps of 100% oxygen and forced myself to breathe slowly



until things settled down and my eyes came back into focus.

The reason for this story is obvious, and I can only recommend what has been recommended hundreds of times before: All pilots should carry some sort of knife just for such incidents as this. Most airmen are complacent about wearing one, but from now on I'll have one with *me* within reach. I seriously doubt whether I would ever have been able to get to a knife fastened to my vest, as I just couldn't move or see enough. I believe a knife on my leg is about the best bet. Maybe someone can come up with a better location, but this is certainly one situation that requires some prior preparation and thought.

ALC/AP, USN



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Glad to have you *back* aboard, Chief. Your answer to the problem is a good one as long as the knife is securely fastened in an accessible position where danger to the pilot is minimized. Furthermore, the knife could be mighty useful in the event of a forced landing or bailout in a sparsely settled area.

You're far from the first to have this happen, but as far as I know you hold the altitude record for inadvertent inflation.

Look Out!

The pilot of a large passenger-carrying Navy aircraft recently reported five near collisions with other aircraft while on a routine daylight transcontinental flight. Two of the incidents would have been disastrous had the plane commander not taken split-second evasive action. These near collisions occurred in *the clear on airways on an IFR flight plan.*



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

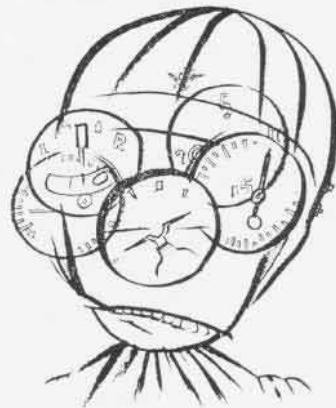
It scares ME! Everyone's talking about the scarcity of air space these days, but I wonder if these pilots weren't relying too much on their altitude assignment. An IFR flight plan is good protection from other IFR traffic, but on a clear day—look out! Pilots have to be aware

donned their life vests before swimming ashore.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

My initial reaction of "Was this trip necessary?" was based primarily on the fact that the helicopter received substantial damage when dunked. While some other method of freeing the fish may have been possible, this was probably the quickest and easiest means. After all, the heli-



colliding with him, I turned sharply away. I then lost contact with the flight and went on the gauges. The altimeter was unwinding at a terrific rate and I couldn't read my gyro horizon.

"After many frantic attempts to recover I decided to bail out. I opened the canopy, unbuckled my safety belt and tried to stand up. I was unable to effect a bail-out, so I sat back down and closed the canopy. Man, was I shook! I decided that I had 'had the course,' so I just started to horse back on the stick.

"I recovered from my split-S at an altitude of 800 feet—about 1000 feet below the overcast. I pulled about 8½ G's, greatly overstressing the aircraft. I found myself in a valley, with mountains on both sides ranging from 4000-5000 feet. Recognizing where I was, I proceeded back to the base and made a normal landing. Believe me, this is the last time I go IFR without proper clearance."



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Egads, lads, somebody could've got hurt! Presumably the other two pilots made non-aerobatic let-downs with less adrenalin expenditure. Even though the flight leader had a change of heart in the middle of the evolution and decided to call the whole thing off, what worries me is why these pilots executed an unauthorized join-up and endangered themselves and others by going on actual instruments on a local VFR clearance *when they knew better*. If they hadn't gotten a good scare out of it, I'm afraid they'd do it again. There's a mighty big difference between being sorry you did wrong and being sorry you got caught.

Any other pilot tempted to go IFR on a VFR clearance should remind himself that under circumstances such as these IFR really means "I'm Flying Recklessly."



of what's going on in the airplane, but they'd darned well better know what's happening outside too. Join the swivel-neckers! A well creased neck is better than none at all.

MEMO FROM GRAMP:

If you are looking for trouble, just glance over your shoulder. It's probably right on your back.

Understatement of the Year:

Assuming that I was clear of the plane, I pulled the ripcord two or three times and I seemed to slow down just before I hit the ground. The chute had obviously opened.

Pour Fish

Pilot, co-pilot, two passengers, and a goodly number of trout fingerlings in six 10-gallon cans took off from Kodiak in an HO4S. Mission: plant the fish in a nearby lake. The pilot circled the lake a couple of times, checking the wind (seven to ten knots), and came to a hover four to six feet above the water and a short distance from the lake bank.

Shortly after the passengers started dumping the fish, a sudden loss of power occurred and the wheels of the helicopter touched the water. By the time the fingerling freers had poured out the third container of fish, the can almost floated out the door. After a momentary rise the RPM again fell off and the helicopter dropped back into the lake.

The pilots extricated themselves from their sunken vehicle, then set out to rescue the passengers who were still in the cabin. Life jackets in hand, the passengers surfaced and, hanging onto the tail of the helicopter which protruded above the surface like a miniature leaning tower of Pisa, belatedly



copter is a mighty versatile vehicle, and there are few aircraft flights from which nothing can be gained in the way of training and experience. However, the pilots were all wet in not requiring that the passengers wear their life vests. Paragraph 39a of OpNav Instruction 3710.7 applies.

It was stated in the AAR that the cause of the engine malfunction was not positively known, but it was suspected that water was sucked into the carburetor air ducts while the fish were being poured into the lake.

Just For Fun

Over the field immediately after take-off, an AD-2 pilot and his wingman on local VFR clearance for simulated instruments spotted a buddy and joined up on him. The carefree trio decided it would be fun to climb into the soup and fly over to a bombing range.

In a tight triangle and climbing through 8000 feet on instruments, the pilot leading the flight decided maybe their idea wasn't such a hot one, and he began a gentle port turn back toward the field. In the words of one of the other pilots:

"When we started to turn we were still climbing, but I soon noticed that our angle of bank was increasing, and we were beginning to lost altitude rapidly. All of a sudden the lead plane turned sharply into me. To keep from