



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Dilbert's Helper

The US-2A, utility version of the *Tracker*, was taxiing to the runway for takeoff from a mid-continent naval air station where the lieutenant pilot and his ADR1 copilot had stopped for fuel on a cross-country ferry flight. A sweeper was noted parked just off the right edge of the taxiway. Several other S-2's had gone by, each steering to the left of center line to avoid the truck. The US-2 continued blindly ahead until the right wing tip struck the left rear of the sweeper, inflicting moderate damage to the S-2 wing. The copilot crewman made no comment at all to the pilot regarding the close proximity of the sweeper.

Three days later the same crewman departed a mid-continent Air Force base in the left (copilot) seat of a UH-34J *Seahorse*, a different lieutenant in command. About 35 minutes into the flight, the petty officer saw the en route chart fall to the deck near the rudder pedals. He had previously placed this map between his thigh and the seat to hold it out of the way. In order to retrieve the chart, he uncoupled his lap belt, scooted forward

on the seat and reached down and picked it up. As he repositioned himself in the seat, the helicopter's engine quit.

He then noted his lap belt "D" ring had fallen over the fuel shut-off switch and that the switch was in the off position. He immediately turned the switch on and placed the mixture



control to rich, but it was too late. The bird was flared for auto-rotative landing by the pilot. It struck the uneven ground, bounced into a sand dune, and then toppled backwards and onto its side.

Not being strapped in and without his protective helmet, the petty officer was somewhat battered. He wasn't sure how to leave the helo and was assisted by the pilot who, though also without his helmet, was uninjured.

As they cleared the crippled bird, it caught fire and rapidly burned to the ground. The stranded crew walked to a nearby highway and hitched a ride into town.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

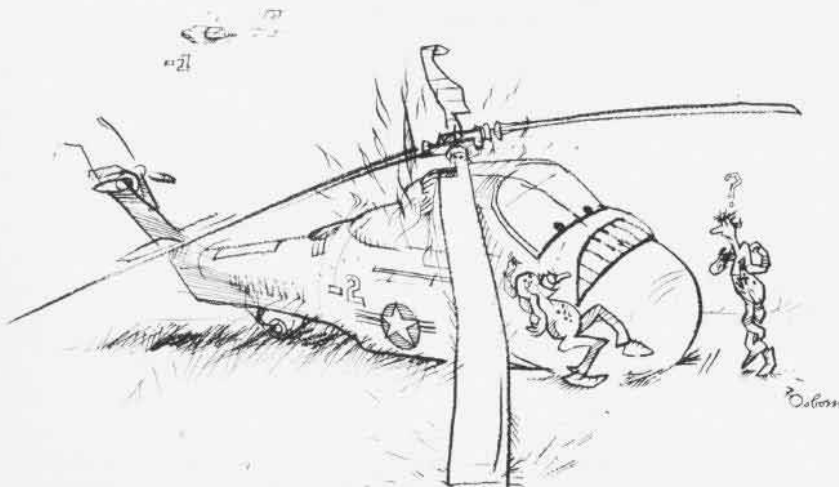
Sufferin' catfish! and shades of Walter Mitty! I thot I'd heard 'em all. Methinks this crewman should be taken off flight skins, toot sweet. Seems too much to be all just coincidence. Pilots have enough trouble without that little guy with the black cloud followin' 'em around.

Better to have no one at all in the other seat than someone you must depend upon and can't. Is it really necessary to dispense with a fully qualified copilot in these aircraft just to get them moved from one place to another?

## The Leans

Boilerplate 106, an F-4B, was launched at 2100 one dark and gloomy night from the deck of a CVA for a radar air intercept training flight. When they completed their mission, the pilot, a lieutenant junior grade, and his RIO, an experienced lieutenant, marshaled and commenced their approach routinely in clear skies above a low overcast.

CCA instructed them to intercept the 12-mile arc of the ship's TACAN and arc to the final approach bearing, which they did, maintaining 1,500-foot altitude to stay above the dense cloud deck. On final, the *Phantom* de-



scended into the clouds, and the pilot immediately began to be affected by vertigo. As customary, the RIO assisted the pilot by providing a running commentary on attitude, airspeed and altitude. This helped a little, and CCA instructed them to "go dirty" at six miles. By the time the aircraft was stabilized on SPN-10 (final control), the pilot really had it bad. The *Phantom* lined up well but was low and fast all the way at 150 to 152 knots. On the meatball, the pilot's vertigo dissipated, but he was unable, despite the LSO's attempts to help, to get back on glide slope and was waved off at 1/8 mile.

His case of vertigo returned immediately and was made all the more severe by flying in and out of the bottom of the thick stratus overcast. The sensation was of rolling to the left, and constant attention and concentration were required to fight the instinct to roll the aircraft to the right. Boilerplate 106 struggled through the bolter pattern in this condition. CCA vectored him poorly which, along with his "leans" to port, put him to the left of centerline. After making a substantial heading correction, what powers of concentration the pilot could muster were devoted to the meatball.

The lieutenant, sufficiently concerned by his pilot's condition, was "glued to the instruments" and offered no more commentary. Seeing a high ball, the JG took off power and lowered his left wing to realign with the centerline. The airplane decelerated

rapidly and, seconds before it reached the deck, descended through glidepath. Sink rate was so excessive that in spite of military power, then afterburner, the main landing gear, stabilator tips and left wing tip struck the ramp and deck. The damaged tailhook missed all wires and the *Phantom* staggered into the air, nose high and left wing down.

The pilot, his vertigo suddenly completely gone, levelled his damaged heavy left wing and tried unsuccessfully to raise the landing gear. A gear-down bingo to the nearest shore air station was computed as the wounded craft headed for the beach.

Some confusion regarding TACAN channels delayed rendezvous with an airborne tanker while en route ashore, so an emergency low-fuel state was declared with the tower. Approach control vectored the flight for a dog-leg approach and, even though he had a normal landing gear down indication in the cockpit, the pilot executed emergency gear extension procedures. The SAR helo and crash crew were standing by.

Just prior to a slightly fast touchdown, the pilot added power to ease it on and landed 1,000 feet down the long runway.

He then brought the throttles back to idle, and the aircraft rocked forward in a level attitude per a normal landing. Then the left wing dropped and a bright flash was observed as the *Phantom* swerved left. Unable to control the swerve with full right

rudder and stick, he yelled to his RIO to get out and initiated command ejection with the alternate handle.

The Martin Baker system duly deposited both men, unhurt, beside the runway, two hours, eight minutes and three seconds after takeoff. The SAR helo gave them a lift to the dispensary.

Their *Phantom* left the runway after 1,000 feet of travel, crossed an arresting gear chain and continued another 1,000 feet diagonally across a wide dirt and grass area. The nose gear collapsed as it came to rest 120 feet from a C-119 which was taxiing sedately to its line area. The small fire was extinguished immediately by the crash crew.

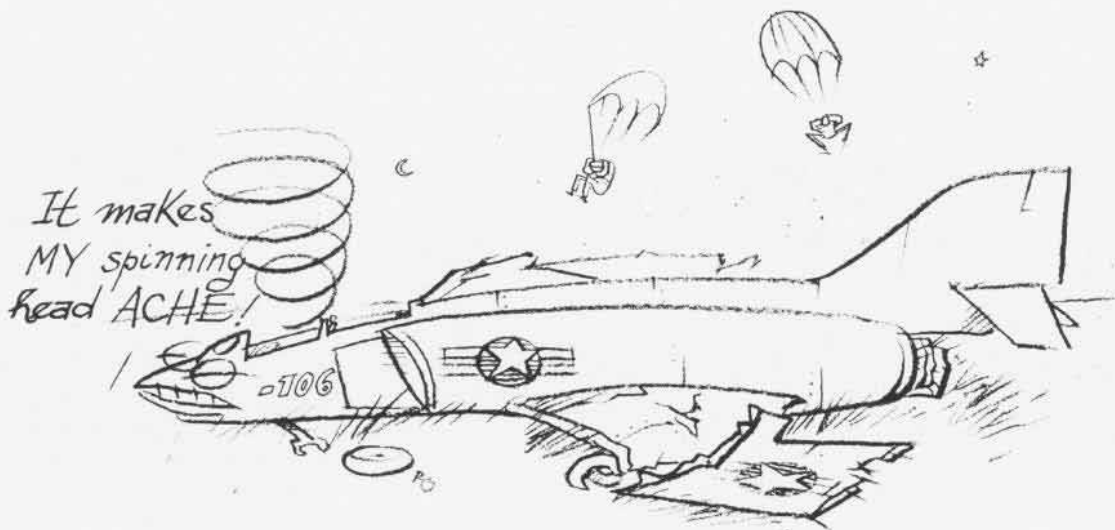


Grampaw Pettibone says:

Whew! I'm sure glad that un's over. That was a mighty rough night. This young, above average aviator, with a history of smooth, steady night approaches, temporarily got in over his head. Even the best of us can become oversaturated, 'specially at night behind that ship. He needed all the help he could get and didn't get it. CCA didn't get him lined up right. The LSO let him get too far without waving him off. The wave-off lights flashed only 1 1/8 seconds before impact. Even his RIO went silent when things got really tough.

Why in heck didn't this pilot let someone know he was having trouble. Vertigo is no disgrace. He'd a sure had more help if he'd asked.

After the fact, no one told him he had hit the ramp and damaged his aircraft severely. He thought he'd just dragged a wing tip. All in all, once he got rid of that demon vertigo on his back, he handled the situation purty cool. Those two are durned lucky it ended so well.



It makes  
MY spinning  
head ACHE!