

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Don't Kill Your Friends

The pilot of an FH-1 checked his instrument gauges before take-off and they presented normal indications. During the run-up prior to releasing the brakes for take-off, the oil pressure reading was 75 pounds per square inch. Upon releasing brakes and initiating take-off roll, the pilot heard an explosion in the right nacelle. The compressor of the right engine shattered and some of the compressor rotating blades sheared off and pierced the compressor case and severed several electrical cables and dented the engine nacelle.

The accident board was of the opinion that this accident was caused by failure of the number one bearing *due to the lack of lubrication during prolonged inverted flight and probable inadvertent application of negative "G" by another pilot who had flown this plane earlier in the day.*

Here is the story behind the accident. The pilot who flew this FH-1 in the morning before the accident pulled off to one side of his formation and rolled over on his back. He remained inverted until the fuel warning lights came on and then rolled back to level flight. By the time he regained a normal position the fire had gone out in his port engine.

He picked up 200 knots and started the dead engine using the air-start switch. After he got this engine started, he noticed that the oil pressure on the starboard engine was fluctuating between 20 and 60 lbs per square inch. He immediately pulled the starboard throttle back to idle position and told the flight leader that he was returning to base which was about six miles away.

He did not use the right engine on the remainder of the flight except for a few seconds during his final approach. In reporting the discrepancies he simply wrote on the yellow sheet, "Oil pressure of right engine fluctuates." He did not specify the amount of the fluctuation or his other experiences with the plane until after the accident had occurred on the following flight.

Since it is normal for the oil pressure of the J-30 engine to vary or fluctuate with engine speed, the plane was only given a routine pre-flight check before releasing it for the afternoon flight on which the engine exploded.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

When I read something like this I'm really ready to blow my top. For gosh sakes, why not give the maintenance crews a chance to correct discrepancies before they cause accidents. It only takes a minute or two to fill out a yellow sheet correctly and to write down enough information so that satisfactory inspections and repairs can be made.

Fortunately the pilot who was attempting a take-off in this plane was not injured. If the explosion had occurred a few sec-



onds later, however, he might have been in very serious trouble. Any time you have reason to believe that you may have injured an engine, or exceeded the "G" limits on a plane, or damaged it in any way, report the trouble in full as soon as you land. Don't kill your friends!

Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

I would like to get your opinion of a flight that I recently made from Columbus, Ohio to St. Louis, Mo. The flight was made on 5 April 1948. I am a Naval Aviator in the Volunteer Reserve, and I had completed a two-week training cruise at NAS ST. LOUIS, on 31 March 1948. During the 18 days preceding this flight I had flown 30.8 hours in the SNJ, the majority of this time being cross-country flights. My total time to that date was 1875 hours. Here is the story of the trip as it happened:

Sunday morning Ens. — and I had flown to NAS FLOYD BENNETT, N.Y., where we spent the night. On our return flight the next day, we landed at Port Columbus, Columbus, Ohio, where we refueled the plane and filed a clearance to Lambert Field, St. Louis, Mo. We were going to get a late start from Columbus (1700 EST), but we figured that it would be possible to get to St. Louis before dark. We filed VFR and aerology at Columbus advised me to fly as low as possible to get away from strong headwinds. I flew at 500 ft. and followed the highway that runs west out of Columbus through Indianapolis and on to St. Louis.

The weather was relatively good all along the route until we got just east of Effingham, Ill., where I dodged one or two rain squalls. After we passed Effingham, I started to fly by my map and stayed north of the highway. We still had plenty of ceiling, but the visibility was decreasing due to the fact that the sun had disappeared behind a large cloud bank in the west. I was flying a course of 245 degrees at a point about 60 miles ENE of the field at St. Louis when I ran into a very heavy rain. I turned NW to get out

of this rain as it cut the visibility down close to zero.

I could now see that the whole St. Louis area appeared to be covered by a large thunder storm. There was an exceptional amount of lightning in and around this storm. As my last red instrument card had expired about two years ago, I had no intention of going near this storm. I thought that I might enter St. Louis from the West or NW so I flew to the north of the storm until I reached a point that was about 20 miles Northeast of Lambert field. I saw that I could not make it to St. Louis VFR so I started to look for a place to land.

The time was now 1830 CST and we were 15 minutes behind our ETA. At 1835 I throttled back to conserve our gas. I had broken the crystal of my wrist watch at Columbus so that I made time checks with my passenger. I turned on the running lights at about 1830. The landing lights checked OK, but I was unable to get the cockpit lights to work. I headed north towards Gillespie, Ill., where the nearest field of any kind was located. It was dark when we reached Gillespie, and I circled the town and looked for the grass field that was supposed to be located just west of town. It was now completely dark and I thought of Springfield, Ill., as it was the nearest field with paved runways. I headed north again towards Springfield.

On the way I circled just southwest of Virden, Ill., where there was another grass field. I didn't find it, so I continued on towards Springfield. I did not like the idea of landing in the dark at a small grass field that would probably be soft due to heavy rains, but I realized that I would soon have to land somewhere as we would be out of gas at about 1930.

At about 1905 I could see the glow from the lights of the city of Springfield. I knew that there was a new airport with paved runways just NW of the city, but the tower was not as yet in operation. I called Springfield Radio and asked them to contact the new airport and have them turn on their runway lights. I spotted a rotating beacon with a green light and headed towards it. At 1910 I saw the runway lights and heard Springfield Radio calling me. They were saying something about obstructions and that I could land at my own discretion.

There was a lot of static and the radio was very hard to hear. I was planning on dragging the field once to check for obstructions on the runway. I was to land north-east on runway 4. I circled at 1000 feet to the left and made an approach to drag the field at about 50 ft. When I got down close to the ground and saw that the runway was clear, I made a landing and taxied in to the hangar.

I closed my flight plan with Patterson flight service and filed an R.O.N. My time of landing had been 1915 CST. I learned

that the obstruction that I was warned against consisted of a 400 ft. radio tower east of the field. When the plane was gassed the next day, it was found that I had only seven gallons of gas remaining in the left tank. The right tank was empty.

Here is my question: What did I do wrong that caused me to be flying over Springfield, Ill., at night with about 20 minutes of gas left? Was I wrong in leaving Columbus as late as I did? Should I have made an emergency landing before it got dark?

Respectfully yours,



Grampaw Pettibone says:

After studying the flight clearance which you enclosed, I think that your initial mistake was in attempting to make St. Louis that late in the day with marginal weather en route. Also, as you may have noticed, the clearance was made out on the basis of the 1500 weather sequence so the information that was given you would be close to four hours old by the time you approached your destination. With this in mind it would have been a very sound idea to listen for the weather sequences en route.

However, your big mistake was in not effecting a landing shortly after 1810 when you first ran into instrument weather 60 miles from St. Louis. If you had turned around right away and returned to any one of the three airfields within 50 miles of your position at that time, you could easily have been on the ground before dark.

Anyway, many thanks for writing us about your close call. I know from an experience many years ago just how scared a fellow can get when he watches the gasoline indicator approach the zero mark and can't find a place to land at night. I'm sure you won't get caught like this again and let's hope that your story deters a few others from making this mistake.

Heads Up, Please.

A group of VRF pilots were ferrying three F6F's in close formation, when the following accident occurred:

The lead pilot had experienced complete electrical failure and had just turned the lead over to the pilot in the number two plane. As the former leader eased into position on the starboard side he observed that both the new leader and the pilot of the third F6F were looking down in the cockpits of their planes which were converging at an angle or two or three degrees.

They appeared to be studying charts or occupied in some way with something inside their planes. Since his radio was dead he had no way of warning them. The collision occurred a few seconds later with the propeller of the overtaking plane cutting through the fuselage of the other F6F. The impact was not violent but the prop cut through the lead plane aft of the cockpit, shearing off the tail section.

One pilot was killed and the other bailed out and was seriously injured when he was blown face first into a tree as he approached the ground in his parachute.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

An unfortunate case and one which should never have occurred. Mid-air collisions don't just happen. They are

caused. In this case the error was mainly on the part of the surviving pilot who was in the over-taking aircraft. He states that he was busy shifting gas tanks at the moment the collision occurred. Incidentally the testimony of the pilot who was originally in the lead indicates that this group had been flying with about 40 feet of clearance between planes. I fail to see any necessity for flying such a tight formation on this ferry flight.



Where's My Engine?

The F8F above parted company with its engine shortly after the second bounce in a slipstream landing accident. The pilot states that he was maintaining 85 to 90 knots in his approach when he hit the slipstream of the plane ahead. He was then 300 feet from the end of the runway and at an altitude of about 35 feet.

The plane went into a 70 degree bank with the left wing down and despite corrective action hit some 200 feet short of the runway. The left landing gear buckled on this impact, and the prop dug in on the second impact. The engine was torn out of its mounts and went bouncing up the runway ahead of the plane. Meanwhile the F8F slid up on the runway, spun around, and stopped about 200 degrees off its initial heading. MORAL: DON'T GET TOO CLOSE TO THE PLANE LANDING AHEAD.

A Word To The Wise

A check of incoming Aircraft Accident Reports indicates that many activities are lax in submitting these reports within the proper time limits. The AAR should be on its way to the Navy Department within 10 days after the accident. If the investigation requires a greater length of time, a preliminary AAR covering all known details must be submitted within 10 days. Instructions contained in ACL's 119-45, 113-46 and 36-48 demand prompt attention.

It is to the advantage of the entire aeronautical organization that these reports be submitted promptly and accurately. If this is accomplished, the cognizant officers in the Office of Naval Operations and Bureau of Aeronautics can take speedy action to implement the recommendations in the accident report, and to correct any indicated deficiencies in material or training.

Something Snapped

Several line crew men were having a difficult time manually spreading and locking the wings of an F6F. On the third attempt the Ensign in the cockpit saw that a crewman had his hand near the wing stub and

thought that it was in danger of being crushed if the wings were spread just then.

He reached out of the cockpit with his left hand to signal for an emergency stop. Just at that time, the wing was unlocked and swung down. The edge of the flap struck the palm of the pilot's hand, driving his elbow back against the cockpit enclosure and his wrist snapped.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Ouch! Sorry you got clipped while you were trying to keep someone else from getting hurt. Your injury should serve as a warning to other F6F pilots to follow the directions in the Handbook and keep their flippers inside the cockpit when the wings are being unfolded.

They Won't Run Sans Gas

The pilot of an SB2C-4 took off from Aberdeen, South Dakota for NAS MINNEAPOLIS with enough fuel in his plane for an estimated 1 1/2 hours of flight. The distance to be covered was about 265 miles. After fifty minutes in the air the pilot discovered that he had drifted south of his intended course, and attempted to check his position on the Minneapolis range. He was still quite some distance from the station and all he could pick up was static. He had been flying at 8000 feet and 185 knots, but at this time he decided to get down low in the hopes of spotting the name of a town or city on a water-tower, or some similar marking.

Because he was at such a low altitude he failed to see any one of four airfields within a radius of 20 miles of his position. An hour and twenty minutes after



take-off, his fuel was exhausted and he made a wheels-up landing on a smooth plowed field.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

This is another prize example of a flight that simply wasn't planned. Even with the most economical power settings, it is doubtful that the plane could have reached its destination with the fuel aboard at take-off. By flying at the high cruise power settings necessary to maintain 185 knots at 8000 feet, the pilot destroyed whatever slim chance he may have had of making it to Minneapolis.

Then to top off the whole miserable performance, he became lost despite excellent weather conditions. The spot where he made his forced landing was more than 100 miles from his destination.