



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Hot Flash

A section of A-4C (A4D-2N) aircraft departed a Texas base, headed out for El Paso on the second leg of a planned Nav training hop. This leg was to be a VFR low-level training flight and they leveled off as planned at an altitude of 1000 feet with the wingman stepped up in a chase position. Immediately after takeoff, the wingman made one brief radio check with the leader on tactical frequency and they headed out on course.

Twenty minutes later the wingman was experiencing quite a bit of discomfort from the rubber lip strap of his new oxygen mask and unstrapped the left side of the mask to relieve the pressure. As he pushed the lip strap with his left gloved hand, a sheet of white flame shot in front of his face from the mask! In intense pain as the flame burned his cheeks, nose, eyelids, and set fire to his eyebrows, he tried to beat out the fire with his left hand but was unsuccessful. The mask itself was burning fiercely. He could only push the mask aside as he attempted to release the mask clip on the right side with his other hand.

While this frenzied activity was underway, the A-4C careened wildly along its course without the pilot's guiding hand. The badly burned pilot suddenly realized the plane was out of control and was headed for the ground. He pulled back on the control stick, felt a shudder as the A-4C stalled and instantly reached up and pulled the ejection curtain.

The ejection sequence of the RAPEC seat worked perfectly although the automatically actuated bail-out bottle continued to feed the fire in his mask as he descended. He struck the ground only three or four seconds after his parachute opened and tore both his helmet and the smoldering mask off immediately.

Quickly unsnapping his chute fasteners and getting his bearings, the pilot hiked down a nearby road to a



more heavily travelled highway where he was picked up within a few minutes and given a ride to a nearby town where medical assistance was available. Other than the burns, which will need about 30 days to heal, he had no injuries.

His leader had seen the flash of the exploding plane and orbited while he called for help on the radio. Dyess AFB answered his MAYDAY and sent help to guard the wreckage and bring in the injured man.



*Grampaw Pettibone says:*

**Great balls of fire! A short in his mask microphone triggered off this miserable blaze. In an oxygen-rich atmosphere, the rubber of the mask and his oil-soaked left glove burned rapidly and intensely. Subsequent testing of the oxygen regulator which was recovered intact from the wreckage revealed it had an abnormally high rate of flow. When the insulator material below the diaphragm of the mike failed, the mask ignited. It just took one 28-volt flash to do it.**

Many would say "Why not turn the oxygen off?" That's just plain second guessin' and would be a hard-to-do job with a fire like that in your face. He did O.K. by my book.

Meanwhile, replace your beat-up lookin' mikes and go easy on the hard knocks. It's a small instrument, but it sure can cause really big trouble.

## Flathatter

Two UH-25C *Helos* (HUP-3) were cruising cross-country returning from the Bay area to their Southern California base. They had filed a DD 175 VFR for an intermediate fuel stop and with clear skies and unlimited visibility it was one of those ideal flying days seldom seen in the winter months.

For the first 1.5 hours the flight was conducted according to plan, cruising at 500 feet above the terrain and in a loose formation. The lead was changed several times while en route. After the flight leader again resumed the lead, the wingman gave way to impulse within 30 seconds of the lead change and descended to approximately 30 feet above ground level to fly up a river bed which wound its way through the countryside.

His descent was undetected by the flight leader who continued on course at the proper altitude.

Meanwhile the wingman cruised up the river, both he and his crewman keeping a sharp lookout for wires or other obstructions. This was sport.

Suddenly a set of high tension wires "looking as big as barrels" loomed up dead ahead and hanging only about 40 feet above the water! The pilot applied full AFT cyclic right to the stops and hard UP collective and the *Helos* zoomed up in a 30-degree climb, over the wires but losing airspeed. It rolled rapidly to the left in a 45- to 60-degree bank at an altitude of 150-200 feet and commenced to descend swiftly, the nose falling through to a nose level attitude as it fell.

The pilot was working like a beaver throughout these maneuvers with cyclic and collective in an attempt to regain control, but to no avail. At an altitude of 15 to 20 feet, descending, he successfully flared the aircraft with full AFT cyclic and full UP collective, and it struck the water tail first with very little forward motion.

The pilot cut the engine and all switches and both crewmembers fired

Very pistol flares and day smokes. There was no one in sight and only the sound of running water broke the stillness so they gathered up some gear and waded ashore.

Just as they clambered up the bank, the flight leader flew overhead and orbited as they waved and signalled they were O.K. Since there was no place to land safely, the flight leader headed off for the nearest military base to get help. Rescue and the subsequent investigation and salvage were routine from there on.



*Grampaw Pettibone says:*

Let me say it again! OpNav-Inst 3710.7A, Section 7, paragraph 2, which states that "no naval aircraft shall be operated below an altitude of 500 feet above the terrain unless landing or taking off or the mission demands otherwise" is just as binding on helo pilots as anyone else. It's best to remember it yourself rather than have a Board read it to you, just before they clip your wings for good. That's too late.

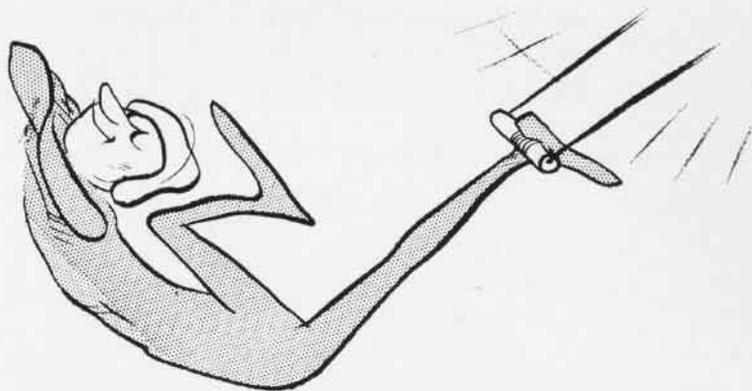
## Loner

A young A-4B pilot who had been more or less grounded with a bad shoulder for a full six months had been trying to requalify himself in the A-4B aircraft after getting back in a Group 1 status while awaiting reassignment.

On his own he reread the flight handbook, got a good hour in the OFT on emergency procedures and managed to get scheduled and flew a total of 7.3 hours in a local A-4B outfit's aircraft.

From another attack pilot, he borrowed a chart of a low level navigation route in the local area (within 250 miles radius, that is) and studied it pretty thoroughly but did not prepare a flight log. The next day he managed to have an A-4C(A4D-2N) assigned for an afternoon hop, a local area fam, and called aerology for the local weather forecast. He got just that, nothing in the way of weather along his proposed route having been requested. Local weather was 1500 broken, visibility 10 miles and no change expected before 1600 local time.

At the ready room and as he was suiting up, he was given a report of severe weather with heavy thunderstorm activity but interpreted this to be well to the west of his course. The local area weather reports now included scattered thunderstorms as well.



*One heel!*

He took off at about 1300 local with 9200 pounds of fuel and immediately headed right out on his planned low level route. For the first hour everything went as planned, fuel flow at 1000 feet altitude and 340 knots indicated was 3000 PPH and the broken overcast was a pretty steady 3000 feet MSL.

Ahead of him was a band of rain and low ceilings which seemed to go clear down to the ground and had a solid line of thunderstorms right in it. He was in a small hole, had about 5000 pounds remaining, so he climbed at full power in a tight spiral to 30,000 feet in an attempt to top the weather. The cloud still towered way above him and it was real trouble staying VFR, so he started an idle descent, still in a spiral, and leveled at about 1000 feet above the terrain. During the climb and descent, he tried to lock on several stations with his Tacan but was unsuccessful. However, he had the aft antenna selected and had been in a continuous turn during these attempts to orient himself. His ARA-25 UHF homer was never tried.

He made brief but poor radio contact with an Air Force base weather service and was able to request and receive weather at his home base. It was still good, but there were severe thunderstorms reported in the area. This was not news to him. He'd seen them.

The pilot now decided to retrace his course remaining VFR and, with 4000 pounds of fuel remaining, estimated he could make it with 800 pounds to spare. All went well for 250 miles, except for a higher fuel consumption

than anticipated, but when only 100 miles from home, he hit a band of rain and low ceilings which stretched across his route. He turned 60° to the left and flew for three minutes, then 90° right for three minutes, attempting to circumnavigate the weather. Fuel state was down to 800 pounds and he was no longer sure of his position. The pilot now began to request help on the radio, first on traffic control frequencies and finally on Guard channel.

He was answered by an AFB tower and got a Tacan lock-on 90° to the right of his course at 54 miles. Soon after, he also made radio contact with his home field, and radar gave him a DF steer at 40 miles. Just a few minutes later, at 1532 local time, as his fuel state dropped below 200 pounds and at an altitude of 3000 feet, he notified the home base of his intention and ejected! The ejection and subsequent recovery of the uninjured pilot were uneventful. The salvage job and investigation took more time.



*Grampaw Pettibone says:*

Great jumpin' Jehosophat! If this young feller sat down and planned it that way, he couldn't have broken more rules or pulled more bonehead moves. A loner like this is just about the most dangerous situation any command has got to contend with. Many squadrons require no less than a two-plane section—all the time. This helps kill the urge to bust the rules and usually assures at least one good head in the group. Refresher training should be more organized and closely controlled. We can't afford this kind of non-professional approach to flying complex and expensive aircraft.