



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Missing Tail Feathers

Two senior officers, currently at the controls of a couple of LMD's (large mahogany desks), still found it exciting to arc around the sky in the T-28B *Trojan*. Things didn't really get exciting, however, until they were back in the traffic pattern doing touch-and-go landings and were advised by the tower that their left horizontal stabilizer was missing. A hasty final landing followed and upon inspection, sure enough, not a sign of the tail piece or elevator. The right one was also crumpled and severely warped.

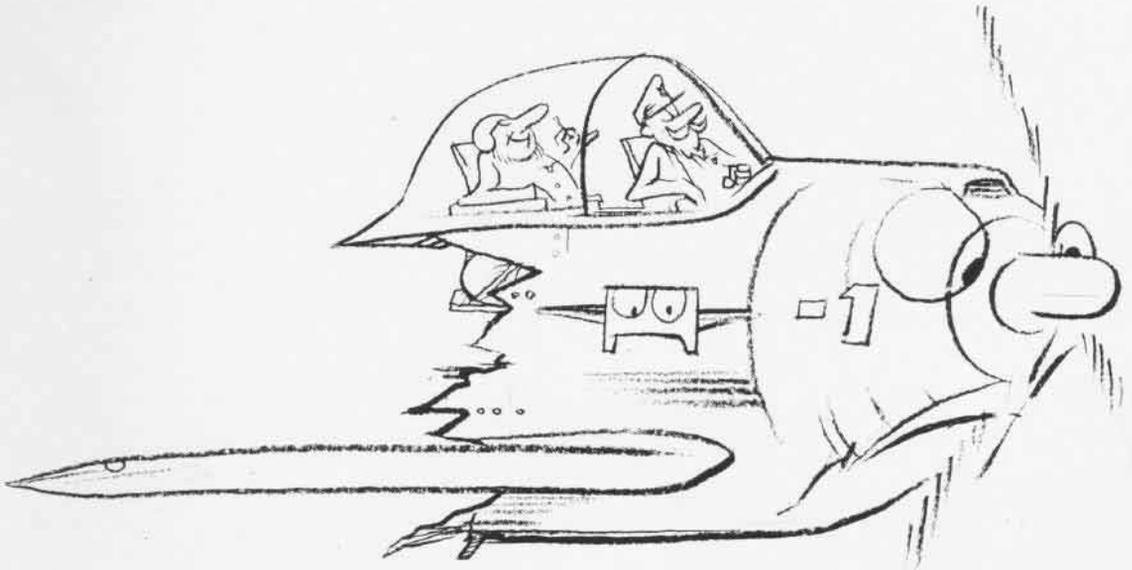
The flight had been scheduled as a NATOPS check but, in order to liven things up a little, they climbed to 10,000 feet, and the copilot in the rear seat did a left spin, losing about 3,000 feet. He then climbed the *Trojan* back

up to 10,000 feet and did another spin to the right. Both maneuvers were normal with no excessive forces of any kind involved. Following this, he executed two smooth aileron rolls. Then the pilot took the controls and demonstrated some high-speed accelerated



stalls. Pushing over to reach 6 to 7,000 feet and 200 knots, he banked the aircraft to 90 degrees and pulled back on the stick. As the plane started to buffet, the pilot felt the stick "pop" back. He immediately released the back pressure and the *Trojan* rolled lazily through about 180 degrees. The accelerometer read 6.2 G's. The copilot then took the controls and repeated the same maneuver to the left. No unusual forces were felt by either pilot.

The desk pilots then returned to home field to perform practice emergency landing approaches. The first was to a wave-off. As they touched and went on the next approach, ground observers noticed the missing stabilizer and notified the tower who advised the pilot of his missing tail feathers. An uneventful landing followed.





Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy Mackerel dere! What's going on back there in the land of CRT (combat readiness training)? These ham-fisted jet jockeys musta' been thinkin' pure thoughts all week. How they could fly a T-28 around the sky for half an hour with a missing tail and not know it is beyond me. Could they really be that rusty? Three years behind a desk don't make a guy the world's hottest fighter pilot.

The accident board determined that the stab failed due to excessive G loading with not a sign of any fatigue. Maximum permissible smooth air acceleration in a symmetrical pullout is 5 G's at 170 knots. According to the operations flight strength chart, this *Trojan* was overstressed by at least 2 G's.

Who got the down on the NATOPS check? They pretty obviously hadn't read the book and didn't even know what maneuvers were required, let alone proper operating procedures and limitations.

Fly carefully guys. It's not just cars or aircraft that can be recalled by their makers. The defect in this case was certainly not in the aircraft structure.

Whitewash

Lt. Coolstone was launched at 2350 hours one dark night in his F-8J *Crusader* from the small deck of a deployed 27C-class CVA. His was the second aircraft on a barrier combat air patrol mission. It was his second flight that day; however, he had gotten seven and one-half hours sleep in between.

Immediately after the catapult stroke, the afterburner blew out. However, a re-light was obtained, and the mission then proceeded normally — with one exception. The airborne tanker was unable to get its drogue out, so the flight couldn't refuel. Heading back to the ship early, the flight of two was immediately diverted to a shore air station for refueling and told to catch a later recovery.

After refueling in the pits ashore, they were airborne again in about 20 minutes. Marshal instructions were given by the carrier for a normal Case III (IFR) carrier controlled approach recovery at 0315.

The flight leader trapped on his first pass, but Lt. Coolstone forgot to lower his hook and made a touch-and-go instead. On his next two passes, he let the aircraft go a little high, in close,

and thus bolted each time. Still using the approach power compensator automatic throttle (APC), on the next pass, he started a little high, went low halfway down and corrected back to the glide path. When the LSO said, "Don't go high," in close, he pushed over, but too much. The APC brought the power way back and the *Crusader* headed for the spud locker.

An immediate wave-off was given by the LSO on the radio and with lights. The pilot went to full power, but an excessive sink rate had been established, and the plane struck the ramp at 0332. The starboard main landing gear was sheared off and the port gear, tailhook and aft fuselage were damaged. The lieutenant was able to keep the aircraft flying as it went off the angled deck and was instructed to divert ashore. He had enough fuel for a clean bingo but couldn't get his gear up. A tanker was directed to rendezvous with him but, after join-up, the *Crusader* driver couldn't get his refueling probe out.

By then it was too late. Not enough fuel remained to make it ashore, and it was too far back to the carrier. Heading back toward the ship while they rigged the barricade, Lt. Coolstone reached 16 miles out at 5,000 feet

when the fuel gauge reached 0. He advised all, by radio, that it was time to leave and ejected. The time was 0358.

He was picked up by the plane guard helo and returned uninjured to the CVA by 0419.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Giminentlies guys! Seems to me there have been other flights like this one in the past few years. Bet we run out of F-8's before we run out of small carriers.

The gaps, omissions and commissions in this accident report would fill a book. The board chose to railroad the poor pilot who was just a victim of circumstances prescribed by his superiors. The poor guy erred because he was beat. He'd spent over four hours in the cockpit on this flight and certainly was doin' his best to avoid an accident. Where was his buddy, the pri-fly observer? No one on deck seemed to be very concerned about the condition of that aircraft after the ramp strike. They might'a told him he'd lost a landing gear and to check for a hydraulic failure, before binging him toward the beach.

Half the accidents we have are caused by other people in the chain of command over which the guy in the cockpit has no control. Was this mission really worth the risk? Or could it have been handled some other way?

Confucius says: "Kindly do not touch electric heater with wet hands until you have paid your bill." Or was that the proprietor of the hotel I stayed at in Japan last cruise?

