

GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

He Had a Hard Time

Editor's Note: After meeting monthly deadlines for seven years, the powers decided that *Grampaw* was entitled to 30 days leave all at once. Just before shoving off, the old boy warned the office force that he didn't want "any young squirts lousing up his page." He said he had been saving this pilot's statement for six years for just such an occasion. After reading this hair-raising account of an accident that didn't happen, we wonder if *Grampaw* has any more yarns like this in his files . . . if so we might let him go on leave again in 1957:

"At 1100 on the morning of 10 Nov. 43, I took off from NAS GLENVIEW, Illinois, as pilot of a TBF-1, leading the second section of a division composed of one SNJ, three TBF's and one SBD-4. Our mission was to qualify in carrier landings aboard the USS *Wolverine*. (Note: This was one of two coal burning, side wheel, flat tops that operated in Lake Michigan during the war).

"We reached the carrier and shot six landings when we had to secure operations due to heavy snow fall. At 1415 we commenced landing operations again. On my second landing of the afternoon, I was told over the ship's speaker system that I was qualified and to circle the ship after taking off. A plane handler climbed on the wing and handed me a note stating that I had qualified and gave the bearing and distance to Point Option at 1430 at 297°, 25 miles. After taking off I made a wide circle around the carrier and fastened my chute straps, then joined up on the SBD, who was flying in the #3 position with the other two TBF's.

AT THIS time, about 1435, it started to snow again and the clouds were closing in all around the carrier. Visibility was about three miles and the ceiling less than 2000 feet. We circled the ship once, then the SBD, seeing me on his wing slid out and flew wing on me while I led the second section. We circled the ship a number of times always passing into the clouds ahead of the ship, then emerging comparatively free of them on the bow. Each time we circled the carrier a little tighter and as the weather continued to close in, the signal was given by the lead plane to lower wheels, and both planes in the first section lowered their wheels and turned on the downwind leg.

"In the meantime the carrier ordered us by radio to continue circling the ship and not to come aboard. The SBD was trailing way behind me so I decided to stay clear too and I left the formation as they turned upwind. I flew close aboard to starboard of the carrier at 500 feet altitude and noticed the SNJ which was to lead us home



parked on the bow as though to make room for us to come aboard. I turned at the bow of the carrier and again went into overcast, but came out on the port bow. The carrier was now sending blinker and the SNJ was being pushed toward the stern for take-off. Again she called and told us to keep circling. I tried to read the blinker but flew into the overcast at the stern of the ship.

I IMMEDIATELY turned 180° to port on instruments and then flew straight ahead for about half a minute then made a 30° bank, 180° turn to port and broke out into an open space, but could not see the carrier. I let down to 200 feet turned port 180° and proceeded to try to fly a square search to find the ship. I flew on instruments continually tightening the square search then I started expanding it but did not sight the carrier. At 1450 I heard the carrier call the SNJ and say that one plane bore 160° distance 7 miles. I was in a thin overcast then and could see the water from 200 feet, but no sign of the ship. I immediately turned to 340° and flew for four minutes on instruments and did not sight the carrier. I started a square search again, flying at 200 feet but after five minutes with no luck I flew two minutes toward the center of the area I had searched then headed 297° toward Point Option.

"I climbed to 500 feet since I was afraid of hitting some high building or water towers. After eight minutes I did not break out so I turned to 284°, which, had I been at Point Option, would have taken me to the air station, distance 7 miles. Again I did not break out so I decided the best thing to do, for the time, would be fly east and west and perhaps I would break out somewhere.

"I flew east 5 minutes, west 10 minutes, then I flew a square with six-minute legs starting on heading 030° and ending on 300°. Then I turned to 075° and flew diagonally across the square and then I turned to heading 090°. At 1600 180° was my course and I maintained it. My decision was that it would be best to try and fly out of the storm to the south since it seemed impossible to break out here in the north.

"I had been cruising at 150 knots with 1700 RPM and 25 inches of manifold pres-

sure auto lean mixture and decided that was best to maintain since speed in getting out of the overcast was more important than maximum economy. My cylinder head temperature had been 100° for over an hour, but the engine was running smoothly so I had not worried. I now tried to bring it up by putting the prop in low pitch and opening throttle to 35 inches for three minutes, but it did not rise, so I returned to my former power and RPM setting and ceased to worry. Most of the time I flew 1000 feet, but occasionally would fly at 500 feet for ten minute periods, often descending to 200 feet in an attempt to break out. Twice I climbed to 10,000 feet trying to get above but with no luck.

"I switched to alternate air at about 1630 as the outside air temperature continued to drop. 1715 rolled around with still no luck and I decided I had better stay at 300 feet. I went down to 200 feet at 1730 and came out into a snow storm. I could see farmland, houses and barns through the snow. I began looking for a field solid enough to set her down in. I passed over a field which was brown and which looked like an ex-wheat field that had been pastured in clover. I turned to port to take another look and passed over a town of about 10,000 population. I went down to 150 feet and passed over the field again and saw two cows and several hogs on the north side, but the south side looked solid and free of obstructions.

"I DECIDED to see if I could find some smoke to tell where the wind was from so I flew back to town. I figured I had better put the carburetor air on direct ram to fly over town so I pushed the control lever in and started looking for chimneys and smoke stacks but could find none with smoke coming out. I circled the town twice then figured the falling snow should tell me the wind so I turned until it was falling thickest and I noted I was heading 270°. Then I turned to 180° and passed over town again and the snow seemed to come from my starboard hand so I headed east toward the field again and passed over at low altitude to the west. I was convinced the wind was from the west and, as I passed by the house, I noticed the farmer and his wife on the back porch pointing a flashlight toward the field I had chosen.

"I climbed to 200 feet at which altitude I could just distinguish the field and tried to change the throttle setting but she wouldn't move. I broke it part way loose and turned on the alternate air but the motor started sputtering as I came into the downwind leg. I put the wheels and flaps down, closed the throttle as much as I could and the engine quit. I immediately forgot all about the engine and made a 180° turn into the field from 200 feet and set her down tail wheel first, never touching the

brakes. She rolled to a stop about 20 yards from the fence headed directly into the wind, the prop just coasting to a stand-still.

"I shut all the switches and gas off, locked the elevator and ailerons with the safety belt, climbed out and shook hands with Mr. _____, the owner of the farm. He said I was two miles east of Greensburg, Indiana. We took the engine cover out of the radioman's compartment and covered the engine then made a lock on the rudder out of boards, I got my chute and we went into the house where I called NAS GLENVIEW, Illinois.

"The Indiana State Police guarded the plane that night while I got up five times to see if she was OK. Next morning a TBF, piloted by Lt. _____, landed at Howell Field, Rushville, Indiana, with two mechanics and 60 gallons of gasoline for my plane. The State Police brought them to Greensburg. They succeeded in starting the engine at 1645. 1700 I made a three point attitude take off out of the field, circled it three times and headed north following state road #3 to Rushville as I had been instructed to do. At the time of take off I had 160 gallons of gasoline and we figured that if I ran low we could refuel at La-Fayette, Indiana, on the way to Glenview.

"I FOLLOWED Road #3 and evidently passed over Rushville and proceeded on to Newcastle before I realized that I was too far north. I had inspected every town along my track for a field with a TBF in it but saw none. I now turned south and circled each town with all my lights turned on but could find no airfield. Back at the town which must have been Rushville, as I could see what looked like an unlighted airfield to the right of the road leading into the south part of town, I could see no airplanes. I circled the town for 15 minutes, called Lt. _____ on the *Wolverine* frequency and Navy Glenview frequency, but got no answer.

"Darkness had set in now and I decided that I could not find Mr. _____ here nor could he find me. I headed 340° hoping to make Stout Field, Indianapolis, and find Mr. _____ waiting there. At 1810 I had not sighted Indianapolis so I figured I must be too far east and probably somewhat north by now. I drew a rough map of Indiana on my flight overalls and plotted in Fort Wayne and LaFayette and my presumed position. Roughly I guessed the heading to Ft. Wayne as 010°, allowing for a 15 knot wind from 270°. I headed 010° and reduced RPM from 1600 to 1450 and manifold pressure to 23 inches and cruised at 130 knots, altitude 2500 feet. The moon had risen and the night was clear, cold and beautiful. I could easily distinguish the outlines of the snow-covered fields below. I circled several larger towns looking for airports and often flew off my course for 10 or 15 miles to inspect flashing beacons and larger towns but found no airfields. By 1845 the fuel pressure had dropped to zero on my left wing tank and my center main and I was on my last 20 gallons in the right wing.

"I tried to lean her out some more but with no success so I looked and prayed twice as hard. At 1855 I picked up the

flashing course lights of Baer Field, Fort Wayne, about 30° on my starboard bow, distance 15 miles. I headed for them but could see no obstruction or runway lights, just those two flashing dits. In three minutes I could see one lighted runway, with the fuel needle bouncing below the 10 gallon mark I circled the field, blinked "I'm coming in," with my turtleback light, got a green light from the tower and made a Navy approach and set her down using the runway lights.

"At three minutes past 1900 she was parked in maze of DC-3's eight gallons of fuel aboard, but safe and unscratched and looking very proud and defiant.

"ONCE AGAIN I called Navy Glenview and next day, November 12, they sent an SNB piloted by _____ with Lt. _____ to Baer Field. I had her fueled and checked and the Army put an engine heater on her and once again she was ready to go.

"This time Lt. _____ climbed into the cockpit while I climbed into the passenger's seat in the SBD. By 1630 we were all back at Navy Glenview.

"Looking back on the past two days I can only wish, as I did then, that I had had proper maps, a Mark III plotting board and a computer, just these and a Dalton computer. Perhaps I did wrong, made the wrong decisions, and miscalculated the time from Greensburg to Rushville, but certainly I did the best I knew under the conditions and at all times I kept the safety of the ship foremost in mind.

"I regret the delay I have caused the Navy in regard to using the ship and the time it cost the officers and men who so ably came to my rescue. I am happy that I was able to bring her through three hours of instrument flight to a safe landing, got her off again and safely into another field with no help other than my compass. Certainly God was with me all the way.

"I wish to request that, whatever action is taken in regard to my conduct during the past few days, no change be made in my present orders from operational training to the fleet.

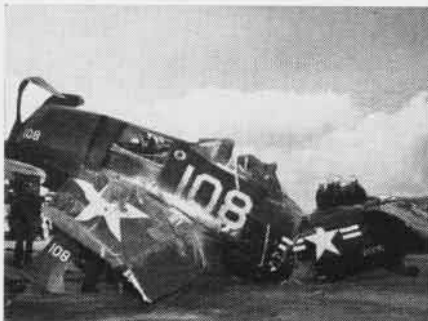
Respectfully,

ENS. _____, USNR

P.S. A check of the records shows that this student's wish was granted. He completed operational training and was assigned to a carrier squadron. However, just a year later, he lost his life in a mid-air collision north of New Guinea.

Protective Helmet Pays Off

The pilot of this F8F received an early wave-off in FCLP, applied throt-



tle, but got no response from his engine. The *Bearcat* hit 500 feet short of the LSO with the left wing down. The wing tip broke off on impact, and the plane was righted and rolled 300 feet angling across the runway. When it hit a soft area the F8F flipped over and skidded about 35 feet on its back.

The pilot's shoulder harness and safety belt were tight and he was wearing a protective helmet—result—NO INJURIES!

Ride 'em Cowboy!

The pilot of this F6F had some trouble with his landing gear when he returned to the field after a flight of one and a half hours. He lowered his gear, but noticed that his right landing gear indicator did not register full down although he had 1450 lbs. of hydraulic pressure. The pilot raised and lowered his gear for a period of 15 minutes.

The CO-2 emergency system was used. Another aircraft flew alongside, but the pilot couldn't say for sure that the wheels were fully down and locked. The F6F pilot then flew past the tower twice and the gear appeared to be fully down and locked, so he was instructed to land. He was also cautioned not to attempt a turn off the runway until the gear had been visually checked after the landing roll-out.

The pilot made his approach directly into the setting sun, and was partially blinded by the glare. He attempted to keep the plane's weight off the right gear and hesitated to apply right brake when the plane swerved to the left of the runway. He did not see that he was heading directly for the GCA truck until he was within about 60 yards of it. The starboard wing of the F6F hit the front of the GCA truck which was parked 150 feet from the edge of the landing runway. The aircraft then swerved



sharply to the right and nosed up. The fuselage broke aft of the cockpit.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Say, that F6F looks like a bucking bronco! I think it's understandable that this fellow tried to keep the weight of the plane off the right gear, but it would have been worthwhile to wait a minute or two rather than land with the sun setting so close to his line of vision that he was unable to see where he was going.