



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

High and Dry

When a jeep found the going too tough in the mountains of the Dominican Republic, a helicopter was dispatched to take over the job of transporting some equipment from the spot where the jeep had bogged down.

On the first trip one passenger, familiar with the location of the equipment, was flown in to accomplish some necessary re-packaging. The pilot of the HTL-4 made a successful landing in the mountains and idled his engine at 2200 RPM, while the passenger disembarked. In an effort to speed things up, the passenger tossed a hammer in the direction of the equipment. Evidently, he should have had one less bowl of Wheaties, or have been briefed on the proximity of the rotor blades. The hammer traveled in a neat arc and hit a main rotor blade,



splitting it along almost its entire length. This had the unfortunate effect of stranding the pilot, passenger, and helicopter along with the equipment which had initially been off-loaded from the jeep. For a while the prospects of getting the helicopter out looked a little grim . . . particularly since some of the parts needed for repairs were a few thousand miles away.



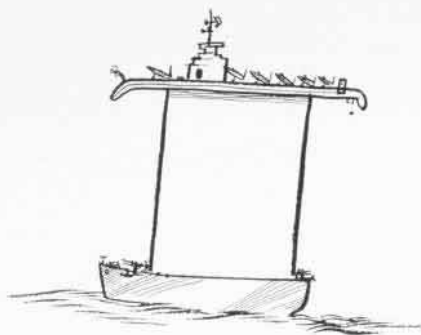
Gram paw Pettibone Says:

By the time they got this beast of burden out of the mountains under its own power, everybody seemed to feel that it would be a good idea to require the heavy-handed-hammer-heaver to swim back to the States with one hand tied behind his back—and no shark repellent.



The young man & the Sea

Although this accident was a little different than most, the fact remains that a good many helicopter accidents occur on the ground when personnel unfamiliar with their peculiarities become involved in some phase of loading, unloading, tying down,



High dive platform /

or fueling. Anyone who is going to ride in a helicopter or assist in handling it on the ground should be carefully briefed on the proximity of the rotors and other safety precautions to be observed.

Those Flares Again

Everybody and his brother wrote in about the Mk-13 day and night distress signal after the critical letter which appeared a couple of months ago—including some who credit the flare with their existence on this earth and some who agreed that it would be nice to have one that was easier to use under the difficult conditions which usually follow a ditching or bailout.

Word has been received that a stock of approximately 50,000 of these signals has been restricted from service use, but is available for demonstration purposes. These restricted signals are available upon request to the Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance and no limit is placed upon their issuance and/or expenditure.

Looks like there is no excuse for not getting some practice, since this stock is in addition to the annual training allowance of two flares per pilot per year.

Scratch Two

Two ensigns, each with about 500 hours of total flight time, and valid instrument ratings took off from Robins Air Force Base, Macon, Georgia, on a night cross country flight direct to Tampa and direct to Key West, Florida. After they had been airborne for a few minutes each noticed that his left main fuel gauge was reading "Empty," so they returned to Robins AFB.

The left main fuel tanks were found to be empty, and after the refueling was completed, the ensigns filed a two-plane VFR clearance over the same route.

The correct track from Macon to Key West is 167 degrees magnetic—a fact which the flight leader apparently didn't bother to check. He reported later that he wanted to make good a course of about 185 degrees and since a south-southeast wind of 5 to 10 knots had been reported that he planned to hold a heading of about 180.

The second takeoff was made at 2110 and little difficulty was encountered for the next hour although the flight was drifting considerably to the right of the correct track.

The coast of Florida was crossed between Apalachee Bay and Cedar Key. When it was apparent that the heading used was taking them out into the Gulf, a turn was made to a heading of about 120 until the west coast of Florida was sighted. Course was then altered to 160 magnetic. Excessive radio static caused considerable interference on the ARC-5 receiver, and the flight leader noticed that his remote indicating compass was fluctuating between 20 and 30 degrees. Numerous changes of course and altitude were required during the next few minutes as the flight encountered increasing cloudiness.

At 2245 the flight leader lost his wingman while in a climbing turn to port to avoid a large cloud formation. After circling a short time, the flight leader contacted the wingman on VHF and informed him that they would rendezvous over Tampa.

From then on the troubles of the two ensigns began to multiply. The flight leader's range receiver went out, and he adjusted his radar to racon and flew headings of 060, 090, and 120 for 10 minute periods in an unsuccessful attempt to receive an identification signal. Shortly after midnight his instrument lights went out and he used his flashlight to see the instruments for the next hour. At 0100 he started broadcasting "MAYDAY" signals. A total of 14 Mayday signals were heard by Cross City Radio, Navy Jacksonville Tower, Tampa Approach Control, and MacDill tower, but no VHF/DF bearing was established.

At 0125 the pilot bailed out. The aircraft was last seen by the pilot to go into a gentle right bank and crash into the water.

Here's the pilot's description of the

events of the next 52 hours:

"When I could see the water pretty close, I unbuckled my chest strap. I hit the water and unfastened my leg straps and pulled out raft to inflate. It inflated and I hooked my chute to it and climbed aboard. I kept the chute hooked to the raft for about five hours. The water was rough and the chute was causing raft to take water. I then unbuckled chute and let it go. It seemed to me I was drifting north all day Monday and Monday night.

"Tuesday it was calm and no apparent drift. Monday at about 1515 to 1525 I sighted an airliner and tried to signal him with mirror, flares and dye maker. He passed on, then at 2100 I sighted another plane which I signaled with light. He turned on his bright lights and I shot off two night flares. He banked over me and went on. I then made some drinking water figuring he would call my position.

"The next day I saw two ships and tried to signal them with flares and mirror, they passed me by and about 0300 Wednesday morning I saw this ship coming. I signaled him with light and whistle. He saw me and pulled along side and took me aboard. They stated the only reason they investigated was because they heard the whistle.

"The crew of the ship and everyone I met were very interested in my welfare and did everything possible to make me comfortable."

The other ensign fared somewhat better, although he too did not arrive at Key West. He climbed to 10,000 feet and stayed on a course of about 160 for the next hour or so after becoming separated from the flight leader. He had circumnavigated some large cloud formations to the west and decided to change course to about 135 to get back on his track. He encountered considerable static on his range receiver and his radar was out of commission before takeoff. When he felt that he was in the vicinity of Key West, he started a square search which he continued for about 40 minutes. Then he commenced to let-down on a westerly heading and broke out 25 minutes later at an altitude of 300 feet. He spotted a light which turned out to be a ship. Here's the way his flight ended:

"I decided to ditch the plane so I circled the ship twice at mast level, locking the canopy open and tightening shoulder straps and safety belt. I then leveled out on the ship's course on the starboard side at which time the engine quit. The ship's course was approximately downwind at the time of landing. I then lowered the tail hook and pulled the prop into high pitch and slowed

down to 80 knots. The water was extremely rough so my depth perception was fair when my belly lights reflected off the water. When I felt the tail hook drag the water, I started easing the plane's nose up, holding the wings level by the gyro horizon. When the airspeed started dropping off to 70 knots, I jerked the nose up rapidly and hit the water tail first.

"The plane hit very hard and then skipped and hit again, and the nose dug in and it stopped and settled back into the water. The waves were then washing over the canopy, so I unhooked my safety belt and got out on the starboard wing and jumped into the water over the leading edge and swam about 25 yards away from the plane. I then inflated Mae West, but the chute was so buoyant that it forced my head under the water, so I pulled it under me and sat on it. I then reached down and pulled the CO₂ bottle of the life raft and it partially inflated. I pulled it the rest of the way out of the packet and pulled the toggle again and it inflated fully. I then took the parachute off and hooked it to the raft and climbed aboard.

"During this time I lost sight of the ship having landed about two miles forward and due to the deep troughs in the water. I lit a flare and finally saw the ship steaming straight toward me. I lit my flashlight and attempted to stay in the ship's path by paddling with my hands. I paddled up to the side of the ship and they lowered a rope and Jacob's ladder. I secured the raft and chute to the rope and then climbed aboard the ship."



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Some folks would be better off in bed—all the time.

Lack of flight planning got these lads into trouble right from the start, and lack of satisfactory in-flight checks kept them from knowing about their mistake for quite a while. The type of checks that they were using told them how fast they were going, but not where they were going.

According to the weather reports for the night in question, the flight could have been made VFR at any altitude below 12,000 feet if they had just stayed over Florida instead of wandering over the Gulf.

Each plane had over three hours of fuel, and the pilots became separated after only an hour and 35 minutes of flight. There were a lot of ways out at this time. One of the nice things about Florida is that it is flat—no mountains to worry about—so why not head over land at relatively low altitude and get a fix. Florida also is noted for the number of available airfields. In short, if you have to get lost, there are few better places to be.

The trouble with these fellows was that they wouldn't admit they were in serious trouble until it was too late to do much about it, except rely on their survival gear.



Down the Drain

This P2V with a broken back wasn't damaged in flight, or while taxiing, or while being towed. The \$1,000,000 loss occurred while it was parked.

Shortly after the pilot started the starboard engine, the main landing gear retracted. Pilot, co-pilot, and plane captain state that the landing gear handle was in the "down" position. However, the landing gear locking pins—stiff knees—had been removed before full hydraulic pressure had been obtained.

Since it is impossible to remove the stiff knees if the system pressure is applied to the "up" side of the landing gear actuating cylinder, they should be removed only after full hydraulic pressure has been obtained.



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

This accident happened some time ago, but it's not the first of its kind. I ran a picture of another broken-backed P2V several years ago. It too was the victim of premature removal of the stiff knees. In that instance, the gear collapsed while the plane was being towed.

In the case of the plane pictured above, the main oleo seals had been replaced by the local FASRon detachment with the help of two members of the flight crew. To facilitate this operation, the landing gear selector valve was manually held in the "up" position for over thirty minutes while the oleo seals were being replaced. When the work was completed, the gear was locked in the down position by gravity alone. Hydraulic pressure was not used.

Inspection after the accident indicated that the landing gear selector valve seals were swollen and torn and a deposit of soft foreign matter was found in the unit. Considering the above, it is probable that the selector valve stuck in the "up" position, even though the gear handle was in the "down" position.

Had the landing gear been drop checked after the work was completed, these discrepancies probably would have been discovered, but this was not done.

Finally, had the stiff knees been left in position until after full hydraulic pressure was obtained, it would have been impossible to remove them with the selector valve stuck in the "up" position.

Follow the rules and give the poor taxpayer an even break.

● NAAS CABANISS FIELD—Pilots of ATU-4 breezed through 331 hours of flight time in one day, setting a new record for single-engine aircraft in the Training Command.