GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Next Assignment—Mars

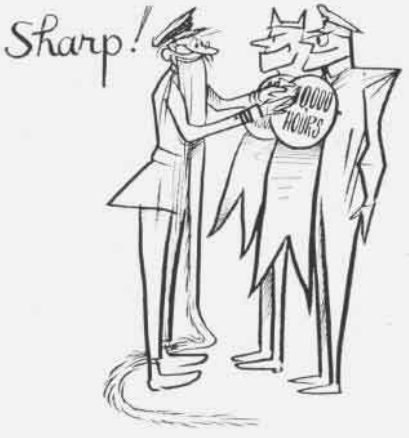
A few months ago I tooted the horns of a couple of lieutenant commanders who had racked up better than 5,000 accident-free hours during their Naval careers. For a while it looked as though these lads were in a class by themselves and deserved every bouquet that could be tossed in their direction. There are a lot of pilots scattered around the Navy who have over 5,000 hours, but it's hard to find one who has never had an accident, at least it was until the fact was mentioned.

I've been informed that a little outfit down Corpus way that answers to the name of ACTRU (it was disestablished September 1) has *six* pilots who have 5,000 accident-free hours wired. Not only that, but two of them have over *10,000* accident-free hours! That's about one-and-one-sixth years of continuous flight, which makes them candidates for a trip to Mars.

My first reaction to this was to tell those lads they oughta quit while they're ahead. It reminds me of a shooting match I got involved in years ago. One of the local boys was forever patting himself on the back for his prowess with a rifle, allowing as how he could shoot the head off a match at fifty feet. Well, he did . . . on his second shot. I was lucky the first time and refused to take another shot. That fella swears to this day I couldn't do it again and I'm not about to prove he's right.

But here are two lads who are working on their second 10,000 hours of flying and have never had an accident. I'd be right happy to hear from them personally on just how they accomplished such a feat.

It takes a pretty cool head to keep from being a pilot error statistic in this racket, and it takes downright ability with a little luck thrown in to beat material failure at one time or another. If it didn't, I'd have to go back to shooting heads off matches. Probably couldn't see one at 20 feet now.



No Sky Hooks

An HO4S-3S was returning to the carrier after a local flight. The pilot was signalled to come aboard near the island between two rows of parked aircraft. There was a better landing spot back aft, but, as is usually the case preceding an accident, something didn't work. In this case, it was the radio.

The pilot couldn't argue with the LSO and made his approach to the designated spot. According to the pilot, the approach was fast, assisted no doubt by the fact that the relative wind was from the port side on a port approach. The co-pilot said the approach started out a little high also.

In order to slow down, the pilot tipped toward the relative wind and cut some power. Realizing his mistake when the rate of descent increased, he put the power back on and attempted to recover control. This action gave him enough control to turn away from the flight deck but did not stop the rate of descent. The helicopter hit the water at almost the same time as the power took hold and it climbed back into the air.

There might have been a happy ending to this story if the tail rotor hadn't struck the water causing the tail boom to disintegrate. As it was, the fuselage went into a violent spin. The co-pilot and crewman, who had unfastened their harnesses after the initial contact with the water, made like a couple of ping-pong balls in a wind tunnel. The pilot put the aircraft back into the water where it sank immediately. The pilot and co-pilot were rescued by helicopter.

The crewman, who swears that he met a couple of mermaids during his long trek back to the surface, was rescued by a destroyer a few minutes later.

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Some days you just can't make a nickel! Low and slow in the turns may be all right for balloons and kites, but not for gadgets that need power to counteract the force of gravity. Wise use of power is mighty good life insurance. Of course, if the helicopters were landed into the wind it wouldn't hurt anything either.

Whether whirlybird or fixed wing,
You'll wind up 'neath a flower
If you persist in making turns
With insufficient power.

Dear Gramp:

It seems to me that after years of preaching on the use of check-off lists and the continuing high rate of accidents for lack of use thereof, it would be well to back up a little and delve into the problem from the pilot's standpoint.

To begin with, pilots are indoctrinated to the word HASTE the minute they first step into an airplane. The pace is set as soon as the starter is energized. The schedule calls for a definite take-off time, and I have yet to see the

pilot who isn't pushed to make it at one time or another.

When the plane returns for a landing, the pilot must fit himself into the traffic pattern, watch for other aircraft, and get on the deck in as short a time as possible. Nothing is more disconcerting than having an approach interrupted by other aircraft, wave-offs, or by making a long, dragged out approach. But as the old saying goes, "Haste makes waste." Since there is no accepted way to avoid haste all the time, it is better to concentrate on a procedure which will eliminate the waste.

The damage is done when the pilot fails to use his check-off list and forgets to put the gear down. The reason for this failure is either lack of time or habit in not using the check-off list. It seems to me that the solution, until something else mechanical is invented, lies in a trick word that is simple yet catchy.

Something is needed to remind all pilots that they may be forgetting something, especially when under pressure. It must be a common word, and it must be all-inclusive. If it isn't, I can foresee many wheels-up landings while pilots are scratching their brains for the word that is to remind them of something they can't remember what.

There is a point in every landing approach where the aircraft must be in complete landing configuration. That point will vary according to pilots' tastes, but it should be somewhere before turning into the base leg. We'll call that *Point X-ray*. Now, all we have to do is indoctrinate all pilots that they must complete *X-ray* before reaching that point.

X—Check-off list

R—Report to tower

A—Altitude, attitude, and airspeed

Y—Yerk

Believe it or not, a secondary definition of YERK is "think hard". A little yerk at the right time has been known to cover a multitude of sins. I realize what a pilot will say to himself if he forgets the last item of *X-ray* and undershoots the runway, and I am sure his diagnosis will be correct. *X-ray* can be used for take-offs by substituting *and* for altitude, etc.

Yours for better yerking,

CDR, USNR

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Bub, I believe you got something there. If there is anything I like, it is an indication that flight safety is reaching *the* individual. I don't know how long such a word will work or if it will work, but if any of you lads try it for size and find it fits the bill, let me know, will you? I've been "yerking" for years to beat this problem and I am always happy to know that some of you realize we have a problem. With a little more thought in this direction by all pilots, maybe I can switch from aspirin to chewing gum.

Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

The letter in the July issue of NANEWS, presumably written by Chief Turkey Buzzard, Miami Detachment, brings to mind a similar problem we faced here in the Naval Air Basic Training Command with geese. We have licked this problem by the following methods:

1. Forbidding all naval aircraft from flying in a northerly direction in spring and a southerly direction in fall. This is based on the principle that geese have the priority on these directions by virtue of tradition.
2. Requiring all geese to be equipped with red passing lights to improve their being sighted by worried pilots at night and during periods of low visibility.
3. Forbidding all pilots from blowing their noses while in flight, especially during the mating season, as the resulting noise closely resembles the call of one goose to another.
4. Deputizing Pensacola-trained buzzards to conduct schools for geese. It is a well known fact that it is impossible to collide with a Pensacola buzzard. Everyone who has completed flight training at Pensacola can testify to this fact after having chased them all over northwestern Florida and Alabama.

Having adhered strictly to these methods over the past year, we can safely say that the frequency of collisions between geese and naval aircraft has been reduced considerably.

Very respectfully,
LTJG ————, USN

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

What you say may be O. K.
For birds that are migratory,
But in the end it's our settled friend
Who presents a different story.

A flight of geese you dodge with ease,
To decry would be to slander.
The rumor's loose that sauce for a goose
Is also sauce for a gander.

If this be true, let's take the cue
And set a standard rule,
Since the Pensy Bird now has the word
Send PILOTS to their school!

Dear Gramp:

I noticed in the August issue of NAVAL AVIATION NEWS that you were wearing a tunic, while eating watermelon. It seems to me that the uniform of the day in a watermelon patch in August would be an old pair of shorts and a towel. How about it?

Ltjg., USN

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Son, I get your message. In order to explain, I'll have to let you in on a little secret. I suffer from a rare disease called "accidentitis," the symptoms of which are high temperatures and extreme chills at the same time. They don't show, but there are two sets of woolen underwear under that tunic.

When you've been around as long as I have, you'll find that worrying about you young lads takes a lot out of an old man. Besides, if you'll look at the picture again, you'll notice that I was wearing a bib. While this item is entirely unnecessary, it is considered good practice when imbibing nutriments of high liquidity.

MEMO FROM GRAMP:

In this business of taxiing, you're on firm ground when you avoid soft shoulders and concentrate on the area up front.