



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

It Can't Happen to Me!

Here is one of those accidents which might have been assessed "cause unknown" except for one detail. The pilot escaped. The setting is familiar . . . a dark night, over water, and no horizon. This is how the pilot tells it:

"On the night of the accident I was launched from the ship at 1800 with three other *Banshees* for a routine CAP



flight. Upon completing the flight we returned to the force and let down through broken clouds at 5500 feet. The section ahead of us broke downwind, and we broke shortly thereafter. I had seen the ship clearly as we passed down the port beam.

"After the section leader broke, I lowered my hook and continued on for about 10 or 15 seconds and broke at an airspeed of 210 knots at 1500 feet, brakes out, at about 80% power. I immediately commenced a descending 180 degree turn, half on instruments and half visually by reference to the ships and other aircraft. I rolled out of my turn on a heading approaching the ship, which was then four miles ahead.

"At this point my instruments indicated 500 feet straight and level at an airspeed of 180 knots, decreasing. At this time I lowered my landing gear and added about 5% power. I had determined to lower my gear and flaps on the upwind leg in order to get squared away as early as possible, and as there were three other planes ahead of me, I anticipated no trouble in picking up a good interval.

"My console lights (illuminating the gear indicators) were out, and as I



would have to check this by flashlight, I also wanted to do this as soon as possible. I broke out my flashlight at this time, and the gear indicated down and locked. I remember thinking that in a moment I should lower the flaps. I then looked at the ship ahead and tried to estimate my relative position to its course. I also looked at the three planes in line ahead.

"At this moment I had a sudden feeling that I was getting low. I added full power and came back on the stick and had no more than checked my wings level when I felt the thud of my landing gear striking the water. I was immediately back out of the water but felt a thrust loss and saw my RPM decreasing. I knew immediately that I had flamed out and that I would have to ditch.

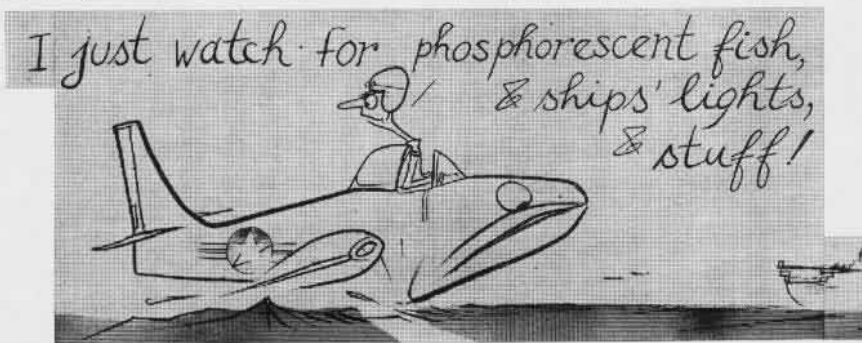
"I pulled my speed brakes in, dropped my flaps, checked my shoulder harness, and put out a short transmission that I was ditching. I held a slight nose high attitude on the gyro horizon

and, as I felt what I took to be the tail hook striking the water, I remembered I had not jettisoned my canopy, which I did just as the aircraft dug in the water and spray came over the cockpit. I did not consider the deceleration unduly hard, although there was an uncomfortable lurch to the right at the last moment.

"I pulled myself out of the cockpit and found myself standing up with the plane right side up and fuselage apparently intact. I could not tell if the wings were still there due to darkness. As I stepped out of the cockpit with my chute still on, the plane sank from under me. I was picked up about 15 minutes later by a destroyer.

"Looking back on the period between the time I broke downwind and the moment before I hit the water, I am painfully aware that I had fallen into the old trap of failing to establish an instrument scan under instrument conditions, instead, relying on the half instrument—half visual system of orientation that is so often fatal. I was fully aware of the hazards of this procedure and had flown around carriers enough at night to know that you must fly by instruments under no-horizon conditions, sparing only an occasional glance at the ship. I have seen other pilots fly into the water under similar circumstances, but had adopted the old belief that "it can't happen to me."

"I consider my failure to establish a proper instrument scan immediately after the break and before I commenced my downwind turn to be the primary cause of the accident."





Beware of $\frac{1}{2}$ on $\frac{1}{2}$ off
Pilots!



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Now, this is what is called getting the word straight from the horse's mouth. You lads who sit back and think such a thing can't happen to you would do well to change your thinking habits.

The pilots who disappear during night carrier operations are not just proficiency pilots out logging a little night time. They are trained in night FCLP's and night flying and are usually at a maximum stage of proficiency in flying the visual-instrument system necessary for night carrier operations. If it can happen to one of them it can happen to anyone else who gets lulled into a sense of security from over confidence.

Those of you who still aren't convinced, do me a favor, will you? The next time you go out on a black night with no horizon and persist in telling yourselves, "It can't happen to me," qualify it slightly by adding "if I watch my attitude, altitude and airspeed." The only thing you'll prove by flying into the water is that you are a bold pilot and we already know that or you wouldn't be out there.

Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

The official record will no doubt confirm the accuracy of my tale but, just in case it lacks a moral, what do you make of this version?

Dilbert, cleverly disguised as a Commander, and his cousin Filbert approached a JRB from the rear (probably because it was the shortest distance from the base operations), entered the plane and proceeded to start the engines. Noting that the line crewman did not come out to attend the plane,

Dil instructed Fil to be ready to depart the rear door for the nearest fire bottle in the event of engine fire. There was no fire and still no line crewman, so Dil asked for and received clearance to taxi out for take-off.

After taxiing about a foot and a half, while carefully checking the area ahead, a loud noise and strong vibration in the vicinity of Dil's engine caused him to shut down immediately and secure the cockpit. You can imagine his surprise when he stepped outside and discovered an old beat-up fire bottle tangled up with a bent and battered propellor.

Cousin Fil swears to it that Dil's

We are too
hurried
to walk
around
a plane!



last words as he headed for the woods were, "Doggone it! When I get in a hurry, even three stripes don't keep me out of trouble! You go thataway, Fil, and I'll meet you after dark."

So help me, Gramp, that's what Cousin Fil said he said.

Regards,

CDR USN



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Teh! Teh! I'm afraid I can't say much for anyone who goes around leaving fire bottles in front of airplanes, especially with Dilbert on the loose. Of course, it might have helped considerably if one of the pilots had kinda scrutinized the outside of the plane, as is the SOP. But that's the way it goes. You can fly heads-up for years and stay out of trouble, then one day you get impatient and take a short cut.

Now, the odds are umpteen thousand to one that you'll never taxi into a fire bottle, but there is one GOOD way to make sure you won't and that is to take a look first. It is practically an impossibility if you follow the rules and wait for a taxi director. But it seems that no matter what the odds or the disguise, Dilbert always finds a way.

Incidentally, we heard that Dil stumbled into a gas pit and broke his nose while fleeing the scene of the crime, which only goes to prove that when you find yourself in a hurry, you can blunder from one thing into another.

Dear Grampaw Pettibone:

See if you can top this one. Another pilot and I prepared to take off in an SNB-6 the other day. After religiously going over the check-off list, waiting for 20 minutes for an airways clearance while drawing gas on number one tank, a routine takeoff was made. At about 75 feet with gear retracted both engines quit simultaneously. The airspeed indicated 90 knots. The nose was pulled up, the gear lever slapped into the down position and a normal, but somewhat sloppy landing was effected prior to reaching the end of the runway. Gear locking and runway touching had been simultaneous.

Upon checking the tanks later, traces of water were found in the gas.

Very truly yours,

CDR USNR-R



Is that sweat or water??!



Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Bub, that's what I call getting a close shave without the benefit of a razor. But since it wasn't pilot error and you didn't have an accident, about all I can say is you gotta watch those sloppy landings. Anyway, we're mighty glad your reflexes were well oiled that day.

A less cool head might have looked over at the co-pilot and said, "Egad, Ridley, no engines!" About that time he'd have had no wheels, probably no runway, and surely no alibi. This is sometimes known as raising the landing gear too soon on take-off or not clearing the engines properly after idling for too long a period of time.

In either case, it doesn't get many sumps drained, and that is the best way I know of to find water in the gas.

UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE YEAR:

The aircraft landed hard between number two and three barriers.

MEMO FROM GRAMP:

Stretching a glide on dead stick is like shaking hands with a consumptive undertaker. It's the coughin' that gets you.