GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

How Are Your Nerves?

On his fifth flight in an FJ-2, which was also his first section tactics flight, a pilot took off and climbed to 35,000 feet. His section leader attempted to get him to fly in a parade formation, but he seemed very reluctant to fly in close and kept dropping back during gentle turns.

During one of the turns, the section leader lost sight of his wingman entirely. After a gentle left turn for a few minutes waiting for the wingman to join up, the section leader called for a position report. The wingman answered that he was over such and such a point at 30,000 feet. The section leader instructed him to orbit until he joined him.

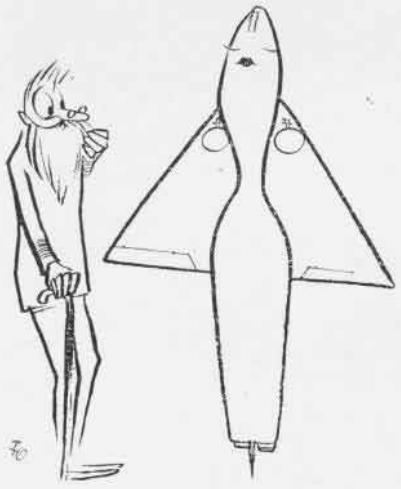
Upon arriving over the point, the section leader did not sight his wingman. He requested a long count from his wingman and received an ADF bearing toward the southwest, which, if correct, would put the wingman about 20 miles away over another point similar to the point the section leader was circling.

The section leader headed for the second point and upon arrival received a call from his wingman that his hydraulic alternate system light was on. The section leader advised him to check his flight control system selector switch to be sure it hadn't been accidentally moved out of the normal position. This transmission was rogered for in a highly strained and nervous voice. This was the wingman's last transmission.

Observers on the ground first became aware of the FJ-2 when it passed through the sound barrier on its way down. Just prior to contact with the ground, the aircraft appeared to start levelling out and actual contact was made in a 10° nose down attitude. The pilot was fatally injured.

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

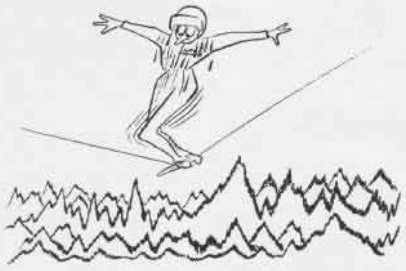
This one was a pure and simple case of anoxia. The pilot was on 100% oxygen for one hour and 12 minutes, not to mention the fact that he was wearing a borrowed helmet which was too large and a borrowed oxygen mask, small size. At least, all the evidence points to anoxia as the immediate cause of the accident.



But there is more to this story than meets the eye. This pilot was nervous and high strung from his first airplane ride. He lived with it day and night, but his luck just ran out.

Sure, we all get nervous now and then. But I am not talking about the tightened up feeling you get when checking out in a new model aircraft or making that first carrier landing or making a let-down IFR low on fuel. I am talking about the kind of nervousness that makes you lose sleep, gives you the "shakes," makes you smoke weeds by the carton, and even forces you to report to the sick bay for a belly ache like this lad did three days before his accident.

This was his second trip to the pill parlor in five days, the first trip because of inability to clear his ears and breathe freely. He knew he couldn't make the grade, yet he was grasping for the least excuse to stay out of the air without loss of pride. Pride is what forces us to keep going when we know we are living on borrowed time. It's a real killer, because there is not much protection a man can or will give himself from it.



In my opinion he was the type of pilot who needs someone to tell him he is in the wrong business. There may be others like him who are sticking it out. Much can be done to discover and weed out this type of pilot by commanding officers, the senior pilots, and the flight surgeons. The "Buddy" business is fine at a beer muster or in the ready room, but when men's lives and expensive equipment are at stake, you have to be realistic about situations like this.

Strictly Nonsense

A pilot of an AD-4L manned his aircraft one night, cranked up, and taxied to the warm-up area. He completed his pre-flight run-up and mag check and requested clearance for take-off. He was cleared to take-off position where he applied power and commenced his take-off run. As speed increased the aircraft began to swerve to the left. The pilot attempted to correct this with rudder, but was unable to move the rudder. Even right brake was ineffective.

Realizing that he could not straighten the aircraft out, the pilot added full power and pulled back on the stick in an attempt to become airborne and clear the obstacles in this flight path. The aircraft leaped into the air and crashed on its left wing about 75 yards from the point of take-off. By the time it stopped, the only thing left intact was the cockpit and the wing stubs.

The pilot escaped with minor injury. An inspection of the wreckage showed the rudder batten and both pitot covers attached.

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Great #?!$%&*#@??)($!!! The next time you want a close shave,

son, take my advice and head for the nearest barber shop!

I guess it's possible for a pilot to strap a flying machine on his back some dark night without checking for battens. After all, a man gets in a hurry now and then, and the battens are seldom, if ever, left on. I can even see how a pilot might taxi to the warm-up area without discovering the battens. When there is no wind blowing it takes no rudder and very little brake. But there comes a point where a little common sense can compensate for a lot.

I like to think of this point as being similar to the last service station for 150 miles on a desert highway. Five miles before reaching the station you are hit in the eyes by several signs. They read:

"Last stop for gas—5 miles ahead"

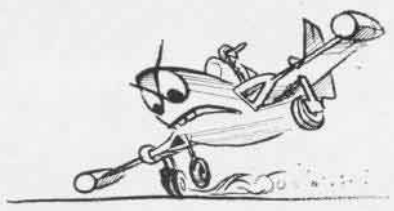
"If you think you can make it—good luck"

Now if it takes gas to run a car you wouldn't try crossing a desert on an empty tank, would you? Of course not! When it comes to flying, you wouldn't think of taking off without checking the controls, would you? Of course not!

My aching ulcers! How anyone can try to avoid the inevitable by taking a chance on the obvious is beyond me.

The Accident Board had the sure solution — ". . . that the individual pilot responsibility inherent in accepting an aircraft for flight be re-emphasized, and that unrelenting vigilance be maintained to insure both ground and flight personnel are constantly and acutely aware of the absolute necessity of conducting a scrupulous pre-flight inspection."

Let's have no more of this nonsense!



MEMO FROM GRAMP:

No pilot is any better than his last landing.

First Things First

Upon completing the eighth FCLP landing, a pilot in an S2F commenced his take-off run. At an altitude of about 100 feet, the port engine lost power and the port propeller appeared to be windmilling. The pilot diagnosed the trouble as starboard engine failure and immediately feathered the starboard prop. The aircraft lost all power necessitating a forced landing in a grassy area adjacent to the runway. The plane rolled through the grass, cleared a drainage ditch, hit an embankment, and flipped over on its back. Both pilots were injured, and the aircraft was a complete strike.

The pilot stated, "I started a clearing turn to the left and noticed immediately a considerable lack of power. My first impression was that I had lost my starboard engine and without checking either engine instruments or warning lights, I acted on this impression and feathered my starboard propeller. I immediately experienced a total loss of power and assumed I had lost my port engine also. Had I taken a few seconds to check my instruments, I believe this accident could have been avoided, with probably a single-engine landing the only result."

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Let's just hold on a minute, Bub! First things first, you know. If, Heaven forbid, you should find yourself in the same situation again, and you start looking at engine instruments first, you'll probably be right back in the boondocks with another airplane wrapped around you. One hundred feet in a turn on single-engine calls for some pretty quick action and the first thing to do is advance BOTH throttles and level off! When you have it trimmed up and are sure you are able to maintain airspeed and altitude, THEN look for the engine that needs securing.

A young b'ar hunter said once, "Be sure you're right, then go ahead." This covered a lot of territory back in the days when a split second decision was a matter of ducking a tomahawk. But it sure ain't fittin' for aviators. Such a course of action requires time for a little reflective thinking, and you don't find many cases where a pilot can take the time after trouble hits.

"Know what to do in emergencies," is about the dullest sounding piece of advice I can give, but it sure covers any situation you can name.