GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

A Matter of Method

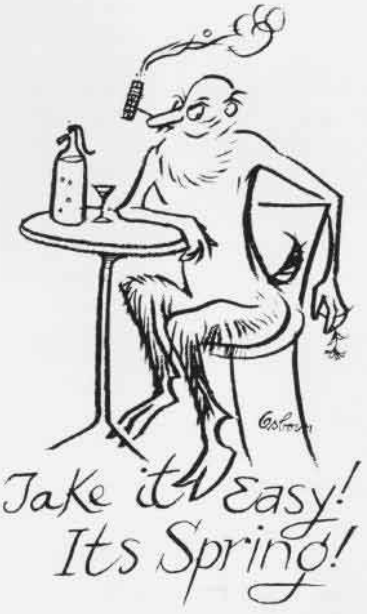
A chase pilot flying an F2H-2P at 15,000 feet discovered his radio transmitter had become inoperative. In order to inform his buddy, under the hood in the other *Banshee*, of the transmission difficulties, he decided to fly directly under him and pull up in front, relying on jet blast and slipstream to attract his attention.

In the pilot's words, "The vertical separation between our aircraft looked to be sufficient when I started under, and it is my opinion that I eased back on the stick unconsciously while looking up and back at the other aircraft.

"I felt the shock, and knew that my tail had hit the other aircraft. There was a violent pitch up and down, the aircraft rolled about 40 or 50 degrees from side to side, and I found that there was no pressure on the rudder pedals. Positioning my rear view mirror so I could see the tail, I noted that all but 18 inches of the vertical stabilizer had been sheared off. I realized I would have no airspeed indication since the pitot tube was mounted on the part of the tail that was missing."

Following the collision, both aircraft were tested for stall characteristics and both were landed successfully. The bob-tailed *Banshee* utilized the services of another buddy who flew wing on him and called out airspeeds during the flight test at altitude and the straight-in approach for landing.

The pilots made the following statements concerning how the accident could have been prevented.



Clipped Tail: "I should have maintained a satisfactory vertical separation from the other aircraft. In case of radio failure on an instrument hop, the chase pilot should pass the other aircraft to the side, and S-turn in front, rather than passing under and pulling up."

Scarred Belly: "I should have followed the squadron SOP (standard operating procedure) which calls for the instrument pilot automatically coming contact after any three minutes without radio contact with the chase pilot. In this case, the time interval between last contact and the collision was approximately seven minutes, but I was too engrossed in executing the climbout and changing radio frequencies to accurately note the passage of time and therefore materially contributed to the cause of the accident."

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Sounds like you both know *now* that this wasn't the smartest trick you ever pulled, but do you realize just how lucky you are to still be takin' on the old ozone? The odds are against both aircraft getting back on the deck complete with pilots after a mid-air tangle.

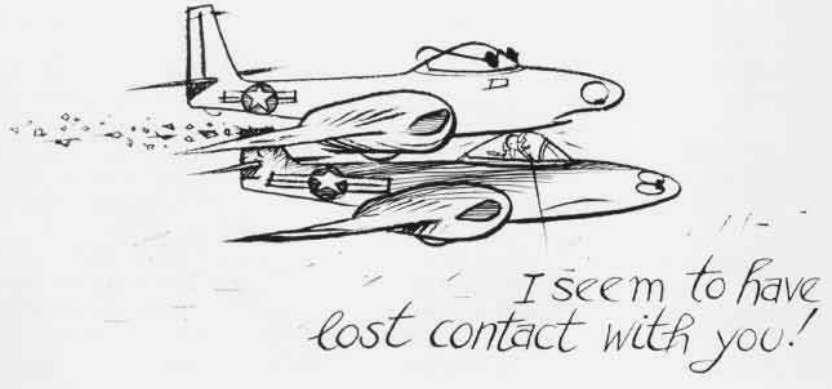
When you stop to think that a study made by the Safety Center people shows that 70% of the Navy's mid-air collisions occur during formation flying, the method of getting the attention of a buddy under the hood becomes purty important. Reminds me of the time little Johnny was out in the garden and he tried to get his Dad's attention with a soft tomato. He got it but it cost him a warm pair of britches.

Arresting Thought

In a recent ComNavAirPac Aviation Safety Bulletin encouraging the use of runway arresting gear the point is made that apparently many pilots are of the opinion that using the old chain to stop their flying machines dims their reputations as pilots. The Bulletin suggests that if such is the case each pilot ask himself the following question: *Where do I look the silliest, at the end of the wire and probably on the runway or in the boondocks up to my axles in dirt?*

To continue, "In practically every case where the aircraft overruns, parts are damaged and have to be replaced. This means the plane is in the barn awaiting parts and/or getting fixed which deprives the squadron pilots of a plane to fly.

"There are even times when the gear can save you from blowing tires and wearing down wheels and brakes.



If you are a little fast near the end of the runway, and have been braking hard, releasing the brakes and catching the wire may mean the difference between creating and eliminating the extra heat that blows the tire and damages the wheel and brake. Again you have saved a plane from being down for repairs."

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Howabout it fellers? **Sounds reasonable, doesn't it? Using the runway arresting gear causes a little inconvenience, but it is heavily outweighed by the time and money lost and the inconvenience that occurs when the plane overruns.**

Dear Grampaw Pettibone

Looks as though everyone reads more into the RADFACS than is in them, as well as into RON situations. The original *Timber-r-r-r* article (August issue) mentioned NAS DALLAS being closed for transient refueling after 2200 and your November lead item didn't uncloud the picture. NAS DALLAS has been open 24 hours a day for years except when we get the opportunity to conduct landing and taxi areas repairs.

The RADFACS does state AF-ANG closed for fueling after 2200. R5D pilots should read info for NAVY only.

LCDR, USNR-R, NAS DALLAS

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

Like I always say in cases like this, "First mistake I ever made. . . ." Thanks for setting me straight on the transient refueling situation at NAS Dallas. But why did you hold your tongue so long?

Just to make sure that my tired old eyes weren't failing me and that my thinkin' box hadn't konked out, I gave the RADFACS test to six local senior-type naval aviators and every dad-burned one of 'em misread or misinterpreted the remarks on NAS Dallas in the directory of aerodromes portion of the RADFACS just like I'd done. Now, mind you, I'm not excusin' myself for my faulty interpretation of the Navy refueling picture at your field, but when so many others made the same mistake it appeared to me that the facts should be presented in such a way that misinterpretation would require greater effort. I'm taking steps to see that this is done.

Whoops, Wrong Handle

After returning from a training flight, the pilot of an A4D-1 made the usual slow turn onto the taxiway following landing rollout. Feeling uncomfortably warm, he decided to open the canopy. Instead of actuating the canopy control as intended, he momentarily moved the landing gear control to the UP position. Immediately realizing his error, he restored the control to the proper position.

The landing gear retraction safety latch failed to perform its function of preventing retraction of the landing gear. The nose gear and starboard landing gear collapsed, the *Skyhawk* coming to rest on its nose and right wing tip.

Prior to transitioning to the A4D, the pilot flew approximately 400 hours in F9F's in which the canopy control is located in the same relative position as the A4D landing gear control. On one occasion some six weeks earlier, the pilot had reached for the landing gear control handle instead of the canopy control but checked himself in time.

According to the flight surgeon, the high cockpit temperature may have served as a stimulus for a conditioned response or reflex with no conscious thought involved in his actions. Since the pilot had only 37 hours in the A4D, the habit pattern formed in the F9F appeared to be dominant in the unconscious.

Grampaw Pettibone Says:

The pilot—a senior, very experienced gent—admits that he goofed on this one. When actions get too automatic, there's nothing but trouble ahead.

Except for the mechanical failure of the landing gear retraction safety latch, the pilot could have goofed and got by with it. But mechanical failures do cause accidents, and this one would have been avoided if the pilot had paused to think before moving the handle.

There's a need for greater standardization in cockpit design so it won't be so easy for a preoccupied pilot to goof. Many accidents are caused by pilots and other personnel, but a good many others are caused by design, material failure and mechanical malfunctions. Any safety effort worth its salt reaches from the drawing board to actual flight ops and requires the helping hand of all hands along the way. And the pilot still has to remember that his hops are flops when his thinkin' stops.