# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Ricocheting Helo

Two Marine Aviators were scheduled to ferry a CH-46D *Sea Knight* from the overhaul activity back to home base. The ferry flight was to consist of two legs. The aircraft commander had over 400 hours in type and the copilot had more than adequate flight experience.

The first leg was uneventful and the aircraft arrived at its en route stop. The crew chief refueled the main fuel cells and the two internal range extension tanks that were used on this type ferry flight.

During refueling, the pilots were in base operations completing their flight planning for the final leg. They received a verbal weather briefing that minimum ceiling en route would be 2,500 feet. Prior to departing, they received a weather briefing that indicated a front located near their route of flight which was accompanied by a precipitation area, reduced visibility, and lowered ceilings. Based on a 2,500-foot ceiling and with fair visibility, the pilots elected to continue VFR.

As they were leaving base operations, the rain increased, lowering visibility to approximately two and one-half miles. They were given clearance to launch and maintain special VFR while in the control zone. Takeoff was at 1135 and they climbed to 3,000 feet and leveled off at 110 knots in visual meteorological conditions.

Initially, the crew chief concerned himself with crew duties such as checking fuel transfer and the inside of the aircraft. The copilot was concerned primarily with selecting and identifying navigational aids, while the pilot had control of the aircraft.

After a few minutes, a large area of precipitation appeared ahead and the pilot turned left toward a clearer area. This turn took him over the eastern shore of a bay. Initial clue to lowering ceilings was passage over and through several wispy isolated clouds. It then rapidly became apparent that they were about to enter a more substantial cloud formation, and the pilot announced that he was going on the gauges.

On entry into IFR conditions at 3,000 feet, the pilot commenced a level right turn, assuming that upon completion plus a few seconds, they would again be in VFR conditions. After the 180-degree turn completion on a heading of approximately 360 degrees, it was evident that IFR conditions were more extensive than anticipated. Assuming that they were over water or the adjacent coastal plain, they decided to commence a straight ahead descent to regain VFR conditions. Both pilots concurred, feeling that they had just been VFR and there should be visual conditions a few hundred feet below.

A 500 to 700-fpm descent heading




ILLUSTRATED BY Osborn

approximately north was begun while the copilot monitored the gauge and maintained lookout for contact conditions. While passing through approximately 2,000 feet indicated on the barometric altimeter, the copilot observed his radar altimeter low level warning light illuminate. The low level index was set at 100 feet.

The copilot's attention shifted immediately outside (down through the nose plexiglass) where he observed a dark mass of trees and vegetation coming up at them. His immediate response was to add power with the collective to stop descent, while he simultaneously broadcast "look out" over the ICS. At the same time, the pilot became aware of the situation and was increasing power by up collective to try to avoid tree contact.

The aircraft entered the trees and made first impact, heading in a level flight attitude. The time was approximately 20 minutes after takeoff. The flight path was through trees up to 15 feet high and up to six inches in diameter. The rotor blades cut an even swath through the treetops for approximately 20 yards. The aircraft fuselage broke down or bent over trees and bushes in the impact area. The starboard landing gear made a shallow depression in the soil for approximately 12 feet. The entire port landing gear assembly was broken from its mounting point when it contacted a 6-inch-diameter tree.

During this initial contact with the trees, the crew chief, secured by his gunner's belt, lay on the floor of the cabin just aft of the cockpit and covered his head with his arms. The copilot, after realizing that the pilot was already attempting a power recovery, positioned himself in the armored seat to gain as much protection as possible.

This initial impact was on the crest of the ridge and, as power was added, *they became airborne again* over the valley on the northern side of a ridge. The rotor rpm had decreased during impact and recovery, so the pilot lowered the collective to regain rpm and slowed the aircraft as he thought further ground contact was imminent.

He concentrated on slowing his airspeed and rate of descent while still in very low visibility instrument meteorological conditions. They descended approximately 100 feet before second, and final, impact. The crewmen escaped without major injury; however, the aircraft was a total loss.

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**My achin' ulcer! I hadda read this report more than once — couldn't believe my eyes. These gents just refuse to believe the "sign" — that is, the increased rain when they were leaving operations. This should'a told them the weather had progressed further than anticipated. Yet they still proceeded on a *VFR flight plan*. Seems to me that this at least violated the spirit of our general NATOPS! Appears that descendin' around mountainous terrain is a poor way to regain VFR, particularly with no one watching the radar altimeter.**

**I could go on about all the poor headwork involved. Suffice it to say that windin' up richocheting off hilltops may have made believers of our pilots! If they're still on flight status — that is!?**

## Head in . . . Sand?

An intrepid aviator was assigned to conduct demonstration flights for prospective Naval Aviation Candidates in the T-28 *Trojan*. The pilot, being a relatively senior type, had a considerable amount of experience, with over 6,000 hours in the air. In the morning, he flew approximately three and one-half hours with numerous passengers without difficulty.

While taxiing for takeoff with his first passenger of the afternoon, the pilot was cleared to cross the runway "without delay" because of two aircraft on final. He expedited his crossing of the runway and then turned right onto the parallel taxiway. While taxiing, he made a notation on his kneeboard and then accidentally dropped his pencil. He began to search for the pencil in the cockpit and, while he was doing so, the aircraft left the right side of the taxiway at an angle of about ten degrees. (The shoulders of the taxiway were composed of medium packed sand.)

The pilot looked up and, realizing his predicament, rather than attempt to turn the aircraft in the sand, elected to continue straight ahead and stop the *Trojan*. After traveling approximately 40 feet off the taxiway, the nose wheel strut failed. It appears that the aircraft pitched forward on its nose due to the combined effect of its forward speed and the twisting momentum caused as the propeller dug into the ground.

The aircraft came to rest in an inverted position. The pilot encountered some difficulty freeing himself from the cockpit because his head was wedged into the sand; however, he managed to free himself and he and the passenger departed the aircraft without injury. The aircraft sustained major damage.

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Holy Hannah! I, for the life of me, can't imagine an experienced aviator digging around in the cockpit while the aircraft is moving — with a passenger in the back, yet! This really impressed our prospective Naval Aviator who was last seen heading for the nearest recruiting office of our Air Force friends.**

**Head stuck in the sand — my foot! This gent's head was "stuck" all right; however, it wasn't in sand! Disgusting!**