



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## Under the Weather

An instructor pilot briefed his two student Naval Aviators for an airways navigation flight in a TH-1L helicopter. The instructor, a Marine, had considerable experience in helos including a combat tour. The weather called for reduced visibility and ceiling, generally below 1,000 feet. Following an uneventful preflight, start and taxi, the helo departed home base.

The first leg of the flight was to be IFR with destination weather forecast as 500 feet broken, 1,200 feet overcast with three miles visibility in light rain and fog, and occasionally 1,200 feet broken with one mile visibility. Upon takeoff the aircraft encountered a ceiling at 700 feet and broke out on top at 2,500 feet.

The flight soon went into the soup and, for 60 minutes of the 70-minute leg, the pilots were in actual instrument conditions. At their first stop, the weather was 1,200 feet broken and 500 feet scattered. The pilots had the helo refueled and prepared for the second leg of the flight.

For this leg the instructor intended to fly a student-syllabus VFR tactical navigation hop at low altitude, with the student navigating and the instructor flying the aircraft. The destination weather was forecast 1,000 feet overcast with five miles visibility in light rain and fog. Forecast en route weather called for minimum ceilings of 500 feet.

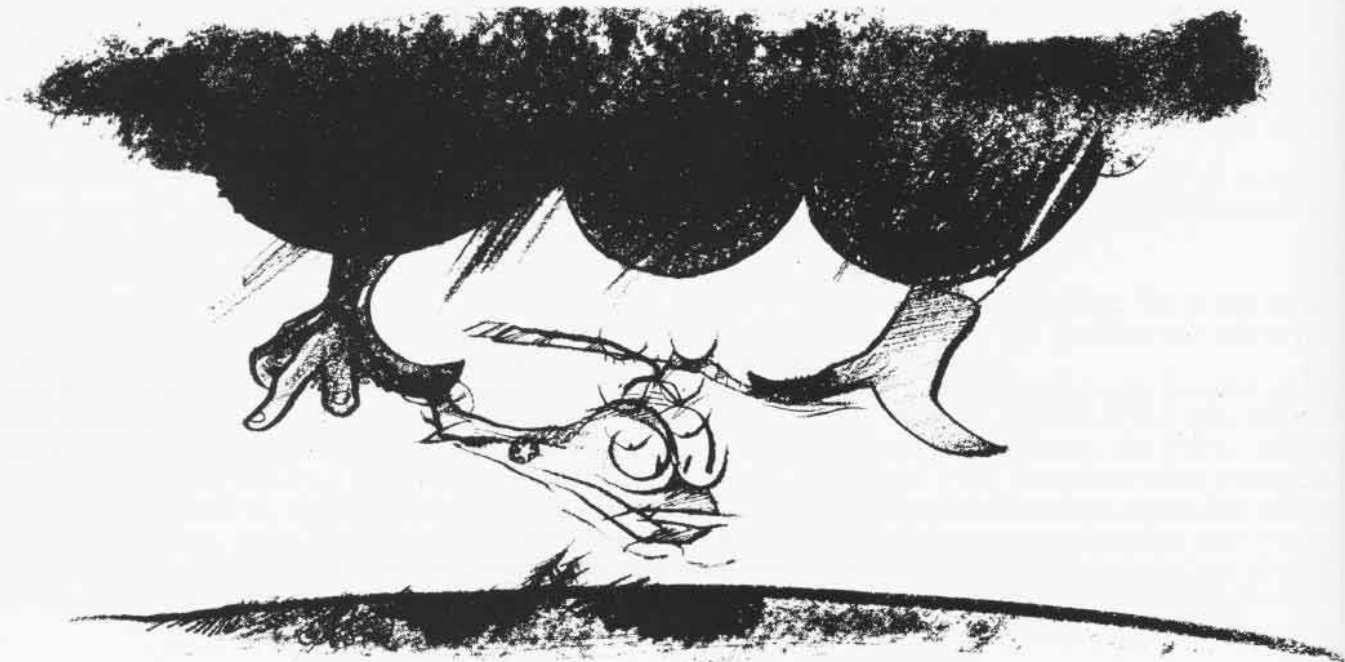
The helo made an uneventful departure. The pilots had a 400 to 500-foot overcast with seven miles visibility at takeoff, and 400 to 600-foot overcast during the first half of the flight. When they were approximately halfway to their destination, the ceiling began to drop and it became necessary to decrease altitude to maintain VFR. Deteriorating weather conditions made navigation increasingly difficult, and the pilot decided to land in a farmer's field so the crew could positively fix their location with the help of local residents. The landing was uneventful.

The instructor then used a local resident's telephone to call the local flight service station (FSS). At this time he closed out his VFR flight plan and informed FSS that he would give



them a call on the radio to file the remainder of his route when he could get airborne. While talking to FSS, the instructor obtained a brief of the current weather at destination which he understood had a 400 to 600-foot ceiling. He also received advice concerning the best VFR route to take.

The weather had now shown some improvement, an estimated 300-foot ceiling with 1½ miles visibility. The TH-1L left the farmer's field with the instructor intending to follow a major highway to his destination. Because of their altitude, the crew was unable to



contact FSS. After following the major highway for approximately ten minutes, the aircraft encountered a small cloud which limited forward visibility for approximately five to ten seconds.

The aircraft was slowed and power reduced to descend and maintain VFR. The flight continued along the highway under 200 to 300-foot ceilings and one mile visibility. About one minute later, the helo made an uphill right-hand turn, followed by a downhill left-hand turn. While in the right-hand turn, with 15-degree bank, it entered unexpected IFR conditions and the pilots had no visual flight references.

The instructor then began to shift his scan to the instruments and told the student copilot that he was "experiencing vertigo, back me up." He then raised the nose and reduced power to return to VFR conditions, but with his peripheral vision he saw that he was approaching trees and added power to prevent settling into them.

He realized that contact with the trees was inevitable. He leveled the aircraft attitude, adding power to cushion the impact.

The uninjured crew exited the aircraft after impact. The instructor secured the engine which was still running, to minimize the possibility of fire. The helo was a total loss.

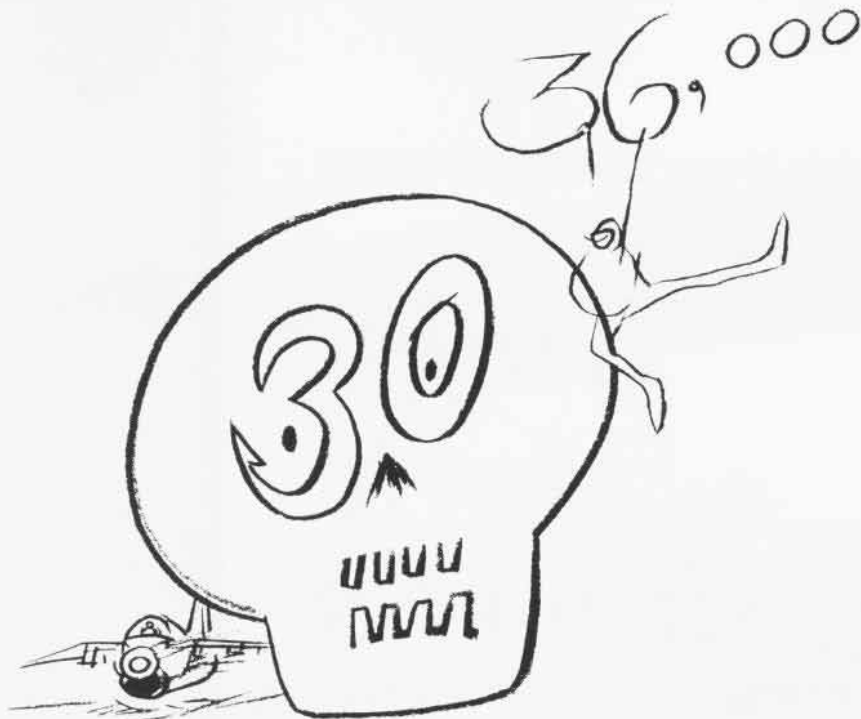


**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

Great 'gallopin' ghosts! I thought we stopped this kind'a accident long ago — apparently we still have pilots who try to "sneak under the weather."

This pilot violated so many regs that there ain't enough paper to list 'em. However, the biggest violation is that of "lack of common sense," i.e., the decision to continue the flight VFR after the first stop and a similar decision to continue the flight from a farmer's field when conditions were below VFR minimums.

This particular gent had an outstanding flying reputation and was particularly known to be very safety conscious. However, in this case, he used extremely poor judgment. I believe the correct word for him is "overconfident." For years we have been sayin' that "complacency kills." Can overconfidence also kill? Think about it!



### Wrong Weight

A young Naval Aviator was scheduled for a night tanker mission in an A-7 Corsair. As is the policy in the launch, the junior officer carried the aircraft weight sheet, which indicated the launch weight of the aircraft, to the flight deck control personnel.

The aircraft's gross weight was correctly indicated at 36,000 by the squadron duty officer. Preflight, start and poststart were normal in all respects and the Corsair was the fifth aircraft launched. As the aircraft stopped behind the jet blast deflector, the checker held the weight board up. It indicated 30,000 pounds. It was not acknowledged by the pilot. The weight board checker then positioned himself beside the flight deck director who was standing just forward of the deflector, approximately 30 feet from the A-7. Just as the aircraft was being taxied forward, the pilot acknowledged the 30,000 gross weight. The checker had put 30,000 in the window because he failed to notice the tanker configuration or the aircraft side number.

Because of the delay in acknowledgment, the checker felt he was getting behind on launch. After showing the weight board to flight deck edge control and receiving acknowledgment, he proceeded to center deck control. He

received positive acknowledgment from center deck control and from the catapult officer. Subsequently, the A-7 was launched with a steam pressure set for 30,000 pounds, resulting in a reduced catapult end speed. Even after repeated calls to the pilot to "keep it climbing," the aircraft impacted the water in a wings level, flat attitude approximately 300 yards in front of the ship. No ejection attempt was observed. The aircraft appeared to explode in a small fireball. The pilot was not found and only a small amount of debris was recovered.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

Holy Hannah! The number of people who allowed this aircraft to be shot at the wrong weight is awful; the launching officer, the control console operator, the weight board checker and, of course, the driver himself!

In addition, NATOPS requires that the weight be written on the aircraft — it weren't. I shouldn't be amazed anymore when so many wrong things fall into the right place to cause an accident, and no one does anything to stop its happening. In many cases what is "wrong" may be minor; however, if personnel on the scene do not take immediate corrective action, one additional "minor wrong" works out to be catastrophic. When will we learn!?!?!?