



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Snow Job

The P-3A landed at NAS Northeast shortly before noon in January following a 3.2-hour flight after an RON at Southern AFB, Fla. The crew was released from ditching stations after clearing the duty runway. Four of the six members went forward to the flight station. The PPC elected to keep all four engines on the line at normal rpm to aid in taxiing on the snow-and-ice-covered surface. The top layer of snow on the taxiway and ramp had melted into slush, permitting effective directional control with a combination of nosewheel steering and asymmetric power.

The pilot made a turn from the taxiway onto the ramp entrance without difficulty. He determined that sufficient clearance existed for taxi between a large snowbank on the port side and a parked aircraft on the starboard. During taxi through the area, the nosewheel steering handle was jerked out of the pilot's hand as the aircraft lurched to port, apparently due to the nosewheel falling into a frozen rut (or the prop digging into a snowbank).

Looking out his port window, the pilot noticed that the #1 prop was in the snowbank. He directed that it be feathered and pulled the "E" handle (emergency engine shutdown) himself. The prop started to feather. Almost immediately the #1 prop and gear box separated from the engine and came to rest 100 feet to the starboard side of



the aircraft, after striking the #2 engine nacelle and prop, the port fuselage just forward of the radioman's station, and the flight station overhead hatch, causing it to fold in violently.

The #2 prop and gear box departed the engine after being struck by the #1 prop and gear box. A blade from the #2 prop entered the port fuselage just aft of the radio compartment and sliced its way entirely through the fuselage, coming to rest in an electronics bay on the starboard side of the aircraft. The rest of the #2 prop fell in the snowbank forward of the wing between #1 and #2 engines.

At this point, the crew did not know what had transpired nor the extent of the damage. The pilot saw an injured crewman in the flight station

and made an emergency radio transmission just prior to shutting down the #2 engine. The crewman had been struck by the flight station overhead hatch when it was forced inward by impact from the #1 propeller. Unconscious for several seconds, the crewman was eventually able to depart the aircraft, with assistance from others, through the main cabin door.

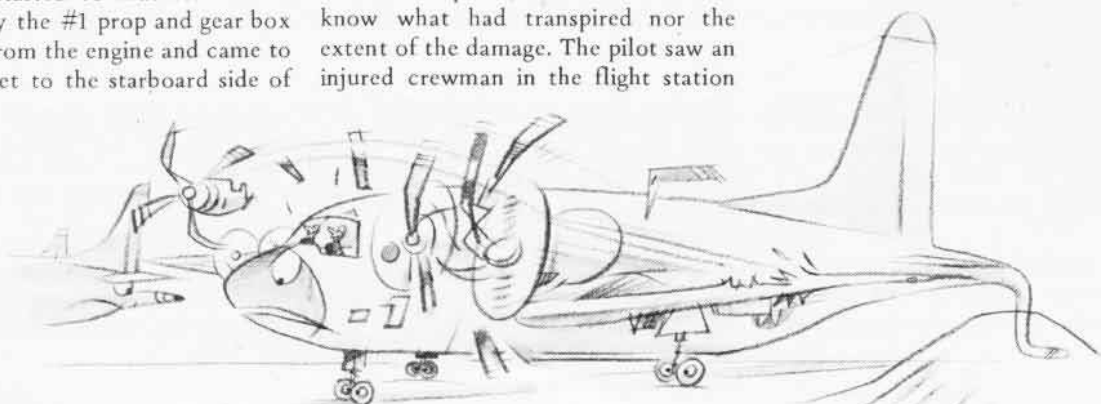
Difficulty was encountered in getting the exit ladder positioned due to the snowbank. The exiting crew carefully avoided a fire which was engulfing the #1 engine. Fortunately, the fire was promptly extinguished by the NAS crash crew.



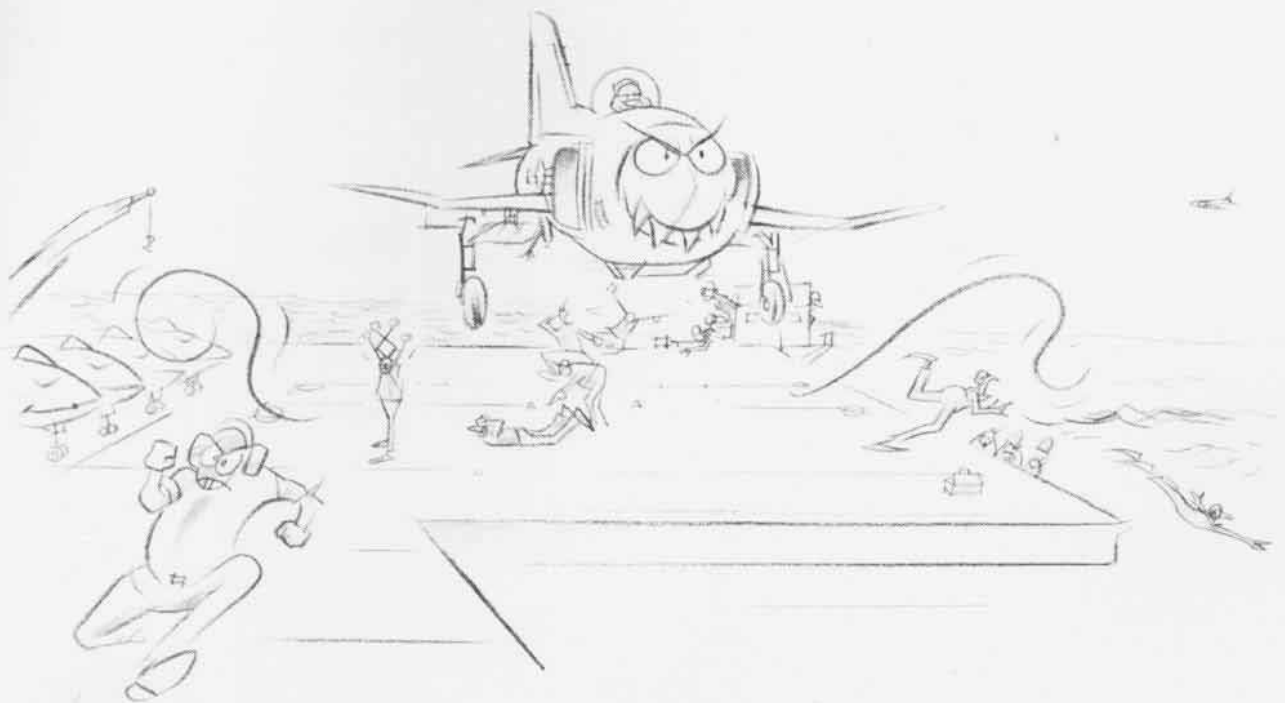
Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great sufferin' snowbanks! A highly experienced aviator, as this one was, shoulda known better than to fool Mother Nature, or snow Old Man Winter. This flyer let get-home-itis, complacency and disregard for standing instructions overshadow good judgment in attempting to taxi through a hazardous, obstructed area without assistance. Failure to request assistance resulted in significant damage to the aircraft and nearly cost the life of a crew member. A whirling prop slicing through a congested crew compartment is "too close a shave."

The seemingly insignificant decision, "I can get through there," under such circumstances, can, and often does, lead to some awfully significant incisions. This one really frosted Old Gramps' whiskers.



ILLUSTRATED BY *Osborn*



No Room to Assume

"In the groove, do you have a ball?"

"Cobra 112, *Phantom* ball, state 4.3."

"Roger Ball."

The carqual evolution continued. Then over the flight-deck SRC-22VFH headphone circuit came a call of "Foul deck! Foul deck!" from the arresting gear officer (AGO). He had observed a cable support malfunction during arresting cable retract. The air boss, hearing the foul-deck call, turned to switch the aft rotating beacon from green to red – to "close" the deck. Two flight deck crewmen ran into the landing area to inspect the arresting cable and repair the malfunctioning cable support bracket as an F-4, which had just landed, taxied clear of the landing area. The arresting gear maintenance officer, running aft to supervise the wire support repair, observed the AGO in the landing area with his outstretched arms crossed overhead – indicating a foul deck.

"Roger Ball," – acknowledged the

controlling LSO. Cobra 112 appeared on the center line, wings level, with two men visible in the landing area.

"That's good...now hold it up there ... a little more power."

"Right for lineup," called the backup LSO, as the incoming F-4 neared the ramp.

"Bolter! Bolter! Bolter!" called the LSO as the *Phantom* landed. The arresting hook skipped the #3 wire but picked up #4. The *Phantom* slowed somewhat, then, with throttles at full power, became airborne after the #4 arresting cable parted and whipped violently across the deck. Miraculously, no one was injured by the cable. The pilot assessed the situation and diverted his slightly damaged aircraft to a safe landing at a shore base.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy assassinating assumptions! This is enough to make grown men cry, or even worse, die. It was more than miraculous that no one was injured in this foul deck fiasco. This incident illustrates the potentially catastrophic results that can occur when well-trained and qualified members of

the carrier aviation team "assume" things other than their responsibilities.

The LSOs, directing their attention to the approaching aircraft, assumed the deck to be clear. They failed to observe the men in the landing area and assumed someone would tell them (the LSOs) if the deck were foul. The LSO phone-talker assumed the LSOs heard his repeated foul deck calls. The air boss assumed that the LSOs knew the deck was foul and assumed they would wave-off the approaching F-4 since there was no chance for landing. He diverted his attention from watching the deck to getting more aircraft into the pattern, and failed to announce "foul deck" over the flight deck 5mc loudspeaker circuit.

The two wire-check crewmen directed all their attention to repairing the wire support, with no one "hawking" approaching aircraft. They assumed someone would warn them of impending danger. Fortunately, one of them spotted the landing F-4 in the nick of time and they fled the landing area as the aircraft passed over them.

Too many assumptions here! It seems to old Gramps that we go through some variation of this disaster almost annually. Fortunately, on this occasion the grim reaper missed his mark. But you can be dang sure he'll return when we least assume that he will.