



# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

## An Eye Out for Birds

A flight of two A-7Es from an East Coast training squadron was executing the old Jax 80 portion of the VR-1005 low-level VFR military training route across central Florida.

Having passed the Fort Myers checkpoint, the section proceeded east across the Florida marshlands toward Lake Okeechobee. Up to this point, everything was on track. Navigation, elapsed time and fuel status at each checkpoint were right on. The flight leader was a student replacement pilot (RP) and was established on course, 360 kias, at 200 feet above ground level. The instructor pilot (IP), flying chase, was in trail and stepped-up slightly at the four o'clock position. Visibility along the route was good and everything was going as briefed. Occasionally the flight had to jink to avoid gatherings of large birds.

The flight leader momentarily scanned his instruments and, as he looked back out of the cockpit, the first thing he saw was a large bird filling the entire view of his front windscreen. Impact followed at the left forward canopy panel. Glass, entrails, feathers and the like were driven directly into the pilot's face through his visor.

Noting the lead plane beginning a left-wing-down descent toward the trees, the instructor instantly broadcast, "Level your wings!" Totally blinded, the RP was unable to respond, not knowing which way to move the control column. The instructor, detecting no response, quickly transmitted, "Pull up! Pull nose up! Put your right wing down!" to which the RP instantly reacted. The IP joined close aboard and coached the RP into a positive climb attitude. During the climbout to 15,000 feet, the instructor

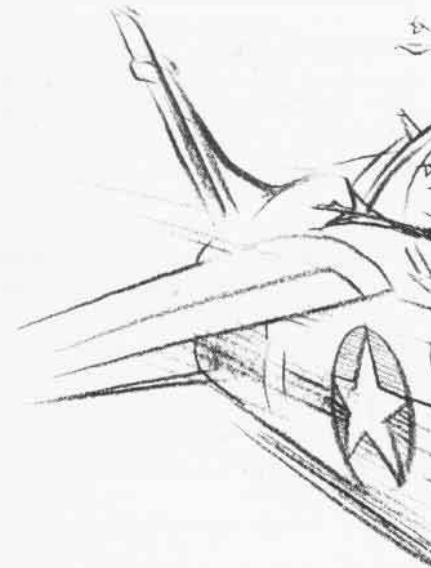


noted the broken canopy and the injured, bloody face of the student pilot which was visible through the shattered helmet visor. The RP informed the IP of his injuries, stating he had no vision from either eye.

The IP then directed a turn toward home base, a distance of approximately 125 miles. Leveling the flight at 15,000 feet, the IP informed Miami Center of his flight's dilemma. After assessing the options, the IP concluded that the most expeditious medical attention available would be at NAS Cecil Field. He relayed his intentions to center and requested assistance in alerting Cecil Field crash and rescue services. During the 15 to 20-minute transit back to Cecil, the RP regained some vision in his right eye, to the point that he was able to detect shadows.

When they arrived at Cecil Field, emergency personnel and equipment were standing by. The squadron LSO, already on station, had been communi-

cating with the IP as to the recovery alternatives available. These were ejection in a nearby unpopulated area (with possible further injuries) or execution of a blind talk-down, straight-in approach to a short field arrested landing. In view of the limited vision now available, the decision was made and concurred in by the RP to try the latter course of action. The IP talked his wingman through the pre-landing procedures en route and descended to pattern altitude. The IP, flying close wing, and the LSO were able to direct the injured pilot safely through the approach and to a successful landing using the short field arresting gear. Crash and rescue personnel quickly removed the pilot from the aircraft and evacuated him to the Jacksonville Regional Medical Center. Medical diagnosis showed a severely



ILLUSTRATED BY *Osborn*

damaged left eye with crushed retina and loss of fluid. The right eye showed minor damage.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy low-level braille! This young man nearly bought the farm! A bird in the hand sure beats one in the eyes. Thanks to the alert actions of a most professional instructor, Lt. Ross Fisher, and the courage and skill of this young lad, a tragedy was avoided. Our "blinded" pilot, Ens. Burt Thorpe, is, in fact, seeing again. After about six months of surgery and treatment, his sight has been fully restored and he has returned to full flight status.

Gramps is proud as can be of these two who richly deserved the air medals they were awarded.

## Holy Roastin' Helos

Following a one-hour-and-15-minute early morning passenger flight from NAS Tidewater in mid-September, the crew in its shiny VH-3A VIP helo put down at the Puzzle Palace Pad (PPP) promptly at 0850. Clearance for takeoff on the second leg of flight was received following a two-minute stopover during which

passengers were discharged and a passenger embarked.

At 0852, Helo 34 made a liftoff and established a 15-foot hover in order to check engine instruments and power gauges. All indications were normal. Upon completion of the post-takeoff checklist the pilot transitioned to forward flight.

Approximately 40 seconds later a loud explosion was heard. It was accompanied by an immediate lurch-to-port and shudder of the aircraft. A ball of orange flame was observed rolling down the starboard side of the aircraft. The second aircrewman immediately reported "Fire in #2 engine." The pilot reduced collective, transmitted an emergency to the PPP tower, and commenced a left turn back toward the pad.

No other suitable landing area was available in the freeway-and-building-congested area. The copilot noted the #2 engine fire warning light illuminate as he added full power to #1 and lowered the landing gear. No. 2 engine

turbine rpm needle was at zero with #1 needle at maximum. Rotor rpm had dropped to 90 percent. Within seconds, the #1 engine fire warning light also illuminated. Engine fire was confirmed by PPP tower personnel. By this time the pilot had maneuvered the aircraft to a short-final position and executed a highly professional, no hover landing on the lawn, approximately 75 feet short of the pad. Upon landing, the pilot secured speed selectors (#2 would not secure), pulled both T handles, ignited both fire bottles, secured fuel switches and engaged rotor brake (which failed).

The crew and passenger made an orderly but mighty hasty retreat from the craft as 25 to 30-foot flames engulfed the engine compartment and fuselage. The PPP crash crew arrived at the scene approximately two minutes later and suppressed the aircraft fire with foam.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy roastin' helos! The professional excellence demonstrated by this team prevented the incident from becoming a hovering inferno. Internal failure of the #2 engine combustion chamber fuel manifold resulted in subsequent turbine blade destruction and damage to a high pressure fuel line. This led to a rupture and atomized hydraulic fluid fed the fire in the transmission compartment. You can bet your singed whiskers these young lads had quite a scare — just as did old Gramps, who happened to witness this one personally! The cool thinkin' and professional action of this crew got the roastin' rotor back on terra firma; and in this case, the more firma, the less terror! This team gets top billing on old Gramps' list of Super Pros.

