GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

ILLUSTRATED BY Osborn

Moonless Sonata

It was a moonless, winter night in the Mediterranean and the aircraft carrier's deck was pitching a bit. The ship's crew had enjoyed a liberty port and the rusty air wing was tuning up to reachieve battle-ready standards after the layoff. This was the first night operation since leaving port. Gradually, as the evening went on, the fliers were becoming smoother and voices that earlier were tense had become calmer.

Near the end of the last cycle, however, a helo pilot declared an emergency. He was vectored in for approach as the deck crew prepared for him. Over the amplifier the air boss said, "I need an LSE [landing signal enlisted], chocks and chains, spot three and a half for emergency landing!"

A young LSE raced across the flight deck as the air boss reiterated, "LSE, spot three and a half, right now!" As the LSE arrived on station he had the incoming aircraft in sight. It was on glideslope and centerline. Then, for some reason, crewmen motioned frantically at the LSE as he was waving the approaching aircraft lights toward the spot. He heard no warnings over his Mickey Mouse ears but sensed something was wrong. Finally, a flight deck chief rushed out and pulled the confused LSE out of the landing area. A short time later an A-6 screamed across the deck to an arrested landing.

From the tower came the call, "OK, A-6 clear the landing area. LSE, chock and chains to spot three and a half for arriving helo."

The LSE looked up toward the tower, shrugged, then raced back into position for the incoming emergency helo which landed safely.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Expect the unexpected. In carrier aviation it comes with the territory, as this LSE found out. Whether workin' out the kinks after time on the town, or doin' your thing when the wing is back in the groove, the nature of duty on the roof is its unpredictability – sometimes, anyway.

Hats off to the LSE who was doing his job and hats off to the chief who pulled him to safety. As to the air boss? Maybe not hats off to him this time around. But he's also doing his job and there's none tougher in Naval Aviation. That's why when you're on the flight deck you've gotta think like Indiana Jones – as if somethin' bad is comin' at you from weird angles and at weird times. And, on occasion, that somthin' is a get-out-of-my-way-or-I'll-crush-you, air-breathin' flyin' machine!

Toeing the Threshold

The P-3C *Orion* was on a functional test flight following an Update III retrofit modification. The aircraft had not flown in nearly three months. Problems were encountered during the flight which would not permit successful conclusion of the test but the crew elected to remain airborne to finish as many equipment checks as possible. One discrepancy was a variance of 6 to 10 knots between the MP (mishap pilot) and MCP (mishap copilot) indicated airspeed (IAS) indicators.

Approaching NAS for landing the ground controller cautioned, "The first 2,000 feet of runway 27 are closed. There're 6,000 feet remaining." The pilots knew that construction was under way at the end of the runway and, in fact, had passed the area while proceeding for takeoff. They acknowledged the warning and continued the approach, their first ever to this particular runway. There was a right-to-left crosswind.

Because of the airspeed discrepancy the copilot issued readings every 10 or so seconds to the pilot. The pilot, concentrating on the landing sequence, mentally filtered

out many of these calls.

The right mainmount touched down in dirt about 80 feet short of the paved runway surface. The left mainmount touched down in dirt 15 feet short of the hard surface. Both wheels dug shallow furrows in the soil before impacting the end of the paved surface. The port mainmount broke off. The nose wheel did not touch down. The MP waved off and after further deliberation landed at another naval air station nearby with port gear missing, starboard mainmount extended but indicating "unsafe," and nose gear up. There were no injuries. Damage to the P-3 exceeded a million dollars.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Lot of shoulda's here. The MP and MCP shoulda communicated better on final. Which means they shoulda had a better briefing on emergency and "pilot to copilot" comm procedures. That highfalutin' but important term – cockpit resource management – comes to mind and has meaning here. Comin' down the slope the MCP was so concerned with passin' on airspeed info, his outside scan pattern was reduced. Meanwhile the Orion is headin' for the wrong touchdown point even though it's the one the pilot was actually aimin' for.

The air station shoulda marked the construction area properly. Original runway markings were not removed or marked with a yellow X, like the book says. Old touchdown zone markings and a fixed distance marker were still located in the closed first 2,000 feet. It was a late afternoon landing and sun position worked against the Orion by creating a washout of color differentiation. On top of that the coloration, texture and shading of the soil in the construction zone looked like the concrete pavement nearby. Also, the construction area shoulda been outlined by day with yellow flags (at night with red lights). But it wasn't.

The MP had a long day. He'd been up and workin' for 11 straight hours. He had orders to a new duty station, was in the process of settlin' on his house and his wife was expectin' their first child. The MCP was relatively inexperienced, which didn't help either. Add to the above the matter of the IAS differential and the attention it consumed and there ain't enuff awareness left to notice big trouble ahead.

Such can happen to you. Don't let it!

Bronco Bustin'

A section of OV-10 *Broncos* had completed simulated paradrops and were returning to base via low-level navigation. The leader had briefed a minimum altitude of 500 feet for this leg of the flight. He also told number two to remain three minutes in trail.

Lead was at 500 feet when he observed his wingman about a half mile behind him, radically maneuvering his aircraft across lead's flight path and executing vertical rolling maneuvers. The wingman broke the 500-foot minimum altitude a number of times during these maneuvers.

Lead lost sight of number two for a time then picked him up again as he was in an extremely nose-low attitude, passing through 500 feet. At the last moment the *Bronco* "squatted" but still struck the ground. The pilot and aerial observer were killed instantly.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Leaders, lead! When you see a wingman bending a machine around against the regs, stop the show.

Even though number two closed up a bit, why brief him to stay three minutes in trail. That's nine miles in the *Bronco*! Hard to maintain control from that distance.

Violators of regulations may be friends and shipmates, but if you're responsible for the flight you can't stand pat when "sins" take place. Ole Gramps believes that loyalty among Naval Aviators is, and should be, second to none. But loyalty works both ways, senior to junior, junior to senior. And loyalty to flathattin' rules goes beyond rank.