

# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

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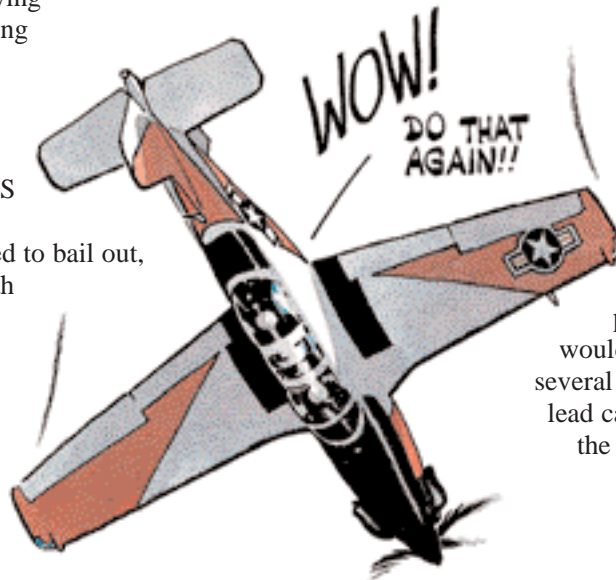


## Botched Bailout

A new flight instructor launched with his enthusiastic student naval flight officer for an aerobatic FAM flight. Once established at altitude in the warning area, the instructor put the T-34C through a stall series, a spin, and a series of other aerobatic maneuvers.

During the final maneuver, the Turbo Mentor departed at the top of a loop. The instructor pilot failed to command the proper out-of-control flight recovery inputs, either prematurely applying antispin controls or doing nothing due to misanalysis of his aircraft's flight condition.

The aircraft continued descending out of control through 5,000 feet, the NATOPS minimum altitude for bailout. Some time later the crew elected to bail out, but they cleared the aircraft with insufficient altitude remaining. Ground impact occurred prior to the two-second time delay, which prevented the parachutes from deploying. The aircraft remained in a spin until it hit the ground, as well.



*SORRY, BUT ONLY ONCE IN A LIFETIME...*



**Grampaw Pettibone** says:

**Gramps is a big fan of the ol' squirrel cage, but I've scared myself enough to know not to pull my nose above the horizon without considering what to do if it don't go right. Trainers are supposed to be forgiving and docile, and they are, certainly compared to our frontline machines, but they are still subject to the laws of physics. That's where NATOPS comes in. Limits like bailout altitudes and such must be committed to memory and followed when the need arises—and it will, usually when a brownshoe least expects it.**

## Harrier Headwork Hootenanny

During the last at-sea period prior to deployment, a flight of four AV-8B Harriers launched from an amphib on a long-range night interdiction mission. The flight

plan called for a strike on a training range using laser guided training rounds, plus aerial refueling from a section of tankers before and after the strike. Although all aircraft were equipped with targeting pods, once airborne the division discovered that only Dash-3's was working.

The flight encountered intermittent IMC during the transit, which caused the first tanking evolution to take

longer than expected. The weather wasn't getting any better closer to land, and the four Harriers needed air traffic control handling to pick their way over the target area. The flight lead deemed the weather sufficient to conduct the low altitude option of the strike plan, however Dash-3's laser pod wouldn't designate the target. After several unsuccessful attempts, the flight lead called for the flight to return to the ship.

The flight proceeded to the tanker track for post-mission tanking, encountering more clouds along the way. As the division closed on the lead-trail formation of tankers, the Harrier flight lead requested that

the tankers "drag" the flight north toward the ship's position. The flight lead also directed Dash-3 and -4 to join on the trail tanker, but because of confusion over the location of the trail tanker the entire division wound up joining on the lead tanker. Eventually Dash-3 and -4 dropped back, hampered by the clouds but able to find the trail tanker.

Dash-3 engaged the trail tanker but was unable to receive fuel. The tanker crew directed him to back away from the basket as they attempted to reset the hose, after which the Harrier was still unable to take on gas. Dash-3 made several more attempts to engage the hose. The flight lead, with his own tanking complete and now flying off the trail tanker's right wing, noted how long Dash-3 was taking and detached Dash-2 and -4 to return to the ship. The flight lead then asked the Dash-3 pilot for his fuel state. Only then did Dash-3 realize that



his fuel had dwindled below bingo state, and he asked the flight lead how far it was to the divert field. The flight lead determined that the ship was now 35 miles closer than the divert field and therefore was the better option.

Twenty-eight minutes had passed from Dash-3's first attempt to plug by the time he assumed the lead and started a bingo profile to the ship. Using the TACAN for navigation, the section closed the ship but neither pilot was able to visually acquire it because of intermittent cloud cover. The ship's controllers were unable to assist because the air traffic radar was inoperative.

The flight lead, now acting as Dash-3's wingman, spotted the ship just long enough to direct the other pilot's attention before they both lost sight of it again, which only served to further disorient both pilots. By the time they leveled off, the section was in a lead-trail separated by several miles. The flight lead was running out of ideas, so beseeched the LSO to find them, adding that his best guess was that his section was in a left-hand turn approaching final bearing. Meanwhile, Dash-4, one of the two jets the flight lead had detached earlier, gave up on attempting a visual approach and pushed from overhead the ship on a TACAN approach.

After rogering the earnest request from the flight lead, the LSO scanned the skies aft of the ship and did, in fact, spot two aircraft, but the formation he saw was actually the flight lead followed by Dash-4 on TACAN final, not Dash-3. Dash-3, still out of visual contact with the ship, followed the LSO's directions, which caused him to fly further away from the ship. On short final, Dash-4 realized that the LSO had mistaken him as Dash-3, and he executed a wave-off, which, in turn, caused the LSO to realize that the airplane under his control was not Dash-3. The LSO requested Dash-3's fuel status, and Dash-3 replied, "My gauges are reading zero." Seconds later the

Harrier flamed out, and the pilot ejected. He was rescued with minor injuries by the ship's search and rescue helo. The other jets recovered without incident.



**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**"Bingo." It's a pretty simple word, ain't it? Even now, when Granmaw Pettibone takes to shouting it out in the parlor on Wednesday nights, I'm prone to jumping out of my folding chair and heading to the briefed divert. So why do so many fliers still figure it in so many different ways? During this here hop the flight lead—already behind the eight-ball for letting one of his charges get below bingo state—added another log to a roaring inferno of rotten headwork by blindly choosing the shorter distance option. That might work between like airfields experiencing the same weather, but it don't always work when one of the options is USS Boat operating in and out of the goo, especially on a night when it's Murphy's shift. And although I've flown some pigs in my day, I'm relatively confident that in 28 minutes—the amount of time flameout boy sat behind the sour tanker waiting for a miracle to occur—even my biplane could have gone further than the 35 miles the flight lead made a big deal out of. Even if you're getting dragged toward your destination, trying to get into the basket takes a lot more throttle jockeying than flying a bingo profile does.**

**All it took to complete the mishap was confusion in the landing pattern, and on this night there was confusion a-plenty. Paddles might have been set up here, but all the same, there's a not-so-fine line between taking control of a situation and making it worse. In this case, one more chief at the pow wow made for one wet Indian.**