

# Unretiring Grampaw Logs 20 Years

HOW TO PAY tribute to Grampaw Pettibone on the 20th anniversary of his "birth"—this was the question that gnawed at the Editor as January 1963 crept nearer. How can Naval Aviation News do justice to its crusty, cantankerous counselor on aviation safety, for 20 years this publication's best read feature?

To begin with, Grampaw started as an IDEA—an intangible piece of fiction in the mind of a man. We asked the Idea Man, Capt. Spencer Hubert (Seth) Warner, USN (Ret.), to tell us the "Why and How" of Grampaw Pettibone, and this is his story:

"Grampaw Pettibone was conceived in desperation, the offspring of frustration out of despair.

"Some six months after Pearl Harbor, I found myself holding down the Flight Statistics desk in the Bureau of Aeronautics. In addition to flight time records, all accident reports were routed to this desk to be charged against the aviators concerned. Daily review of these reports soon produced a feeling of nausea and anger. Why were so many of the stupid accidents alike, and why were so many of them so stupid, 100 per cent pilot error?

"Actually, with some 20 years varied flight experience, I was a natural for this review job. You see, I had had many similar experiences myself and most of them, I now confess, were largely due to pilot error. They could have been prevented by more thorough preparation before takeoff and less daredevil attitude after. Fortunately for me, planes were much slower in those days, allowing more time for corrective action; and they didn't flatten out so much when they hit.

"But now I was sitting on the other side of the problem, analyzing the accidents instead of causing them. How could we really get through to aviation personnel with vital safety advice? Yes, we had Technical Orders, Technical Notes, Engineering Notes and *Naval Aviation News*; the warnings were there, but all too often ignored. For years we squadron officers had to 'read and initial' these various safety instructions, and from personal experience I knew this was



FOR TWO DECADES, Grampaw Pettibone has been keeping his eye on Naval Aviation trends. His blood pressure has a low boiling point as he views chart (top). . . . He takes action with a real dressing down for Dilbert (C) . . . and smiles at the very happy results (bottom).

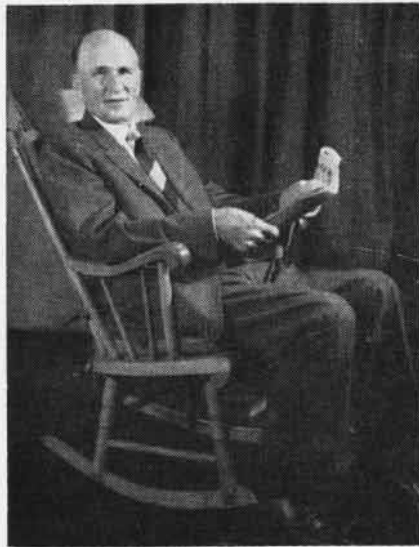
often done with but casual perusal. One could see that a great many of these current accidents were caused by pilots and others who *initialed* but did not carefully *read* and take appropriate action. Hence the frustration!

"All this later led to the establishment of the Flight Safety section, but not yet. Something spectacular had to be done immediately to attract attention and make these safety warnings stick. We couldn't convert them into jingles and croon them to pilots over the radio as the advertising agencies do. What else? What would you have done? Naturally, you would have invented a cantankerous old codger with a low boiling point, uninhibited with official language, and turned him loose, hoping that his pithy remarks and sardonic humor would hold your attention long enough to stab you with a vital safety factor—make you *Safety Conscious*. And what would you have named this choleric old curmudgeon? *Grampaw Pettibone*, what else?

"So we've got Gramp's characteristics, but how to depict and launch him? Easy! Just toss the problem to my good friend and yours, Robert Osborn, creator of that human accident, Dilbert. Bob grasped and endorsed the idea immediately. In an hour, he had the first crotchety Grampaw thumping his cane on my desk. And mark my word, the immediate and *lasting* success of Grampaw P. was, and is, in large measure due to Robert Osborn's inimitable ability to portray so strikingly the vital point of any and all safety articles.

"While I have your attention, may I leave you with a startling bit of advice: *Don't be like Grampaw Pettibone!* Listen to him, yes, carefully, for his is the composite voice of experience dating way back to the period you study as *aviation history*, but which to him was a series of *current events*. But don't imitate him. His irascible disposition will lead you to become an accident-prone aviator.

"Another thing, don't depend on LUCK to pull you through. You can't say there is no such thing; after all, look at me! But—I kid you not—Lady Luck most often bestows her



CAPT. SETH WARNER, AS GRAMPS; AS MRS. WARNER SEES HIM, GENTLY ROCKING; AND AS HE SEES HIMSELF, A DEBONAIR SPORTSMAN

favors upon the forehanded, the guy who is not only calm, cool, and collected, but completely competent. And you get that way only through constant preparation, eternal vigilance and intelligent action."

At the end of WW II, Capt. Warner moved his base of operations to Carmel, Calif., where, in moments off from various civilian pursuits, he makes good use of a rocking chair. His original collaborator, Robert Osborn, has stayed with Gramps through 20 years and sends in his drawings from Salisbury, Conn.

Says Capt. Warner, "I finished with Gramp 17 years ago, but Osborn is still in there pitching and merits as

much or more recognition than I do for the idea."

Says Osborn, "Be sure that equal or larger play be given to Warner. He conceived Grampaw. . . . I wasn't too convinced by his idea. I feared it was too old-fashioned in feeling. Obviously, I was wrong."

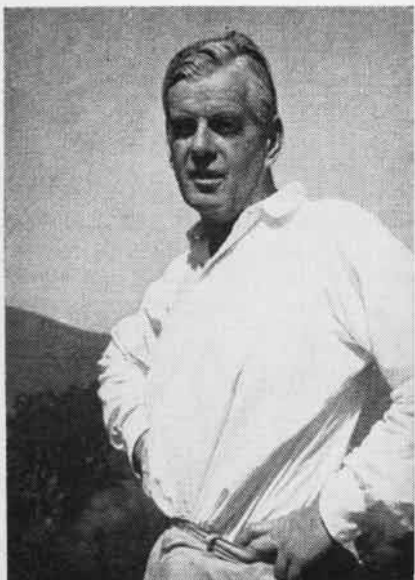
Osborn, working from his Connecticut home on a monthly mailing arrangement with *Naval Aviation News*, has continued to draw Grampaw in all his varying moods as visual accompaniment to the Naval officers who followed Capt. Warner as writers.

Capt. Warner and Mr. Osborn received the Legion of Merit Award

from SecNav James V. Forrestal at the end of World War II for their Pettibone contributions. Since Capt. Warner's retirement, the artist has worked with five other writers to keep up the spirit and crustiness of Gramps.

Says Osborn, "Gramps wouldn't have happened and wouldn't have worked except for Seth Warner. Subsequent writers have kept Gramp full of old mustard—no mean accomplishment. Praise them all!"

While Capt. Warner received public recognition for the origination, the men who followed him have all remained behind the cloak of anonymity. They do not seek personal



OSBORN TODAY, GRAYER BUT ENTHUSIASTIC



SECNAV GATES PINS 1959 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL ON ARTIST ROBERT OSBORN

aggrandizement or try to ride to glory on Pettibone's coat tails.

Remaining anonymous has its virtues, as all will admit, especially the one writer who was well known enough to be caught making a downwind landing at a naval air station several years ago. Gramp really had a fit about that one!

A warm friendship still prevails between Warner and Osborn although 3000 miles separate them physically. From California, Warner writes, "We worked together nine years and have yet to have our first argument!"

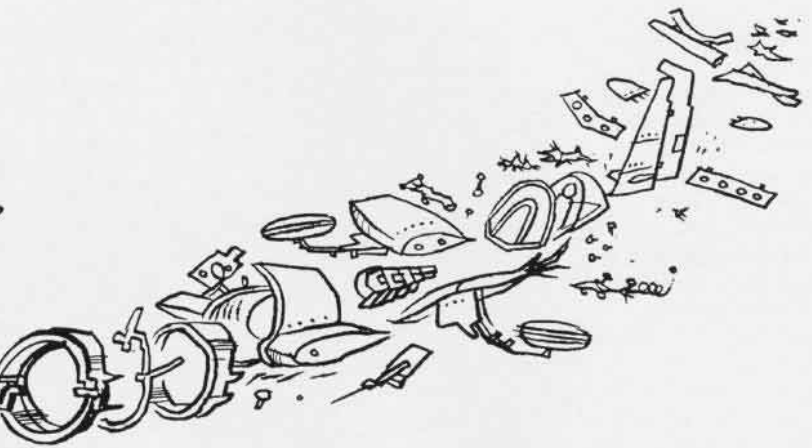
Of Warner, Osborn writes, "This splendid man . . . did the hard thing . . . he conceived Pettibone. All of the



Pittsburgh. Instead of landing to replenish, I figured I had enough gas and a good idea of the course to Altoona some 70 miles away. I hit the general area of Altoona, but had no map to show me where the airport was. By the time I located it (it was a small grass field) and landed, my gas tank was almost plumb empty. And, boy, that's rough country! By the time I reached Roosevelt Field on Long Island, I had been lost twice more. Once I landed at a small field in Connecticut and bought five gallons of gas with my own money. This entire flight was 'ridiculous.'"

Because he had been lost, Gramp wanted to save others from similar.

Aw Shucks!



rest is easy after some one has the IDEA."

Warner, who survived flight training with Class #13 at Pensacola in 1921 and was designated as Naval Aviator #2974, reluctantly admits he had many personal experiences which "it may be better not to publish. . . . The troops might lose all respect for him and pay less attention to his sage advice."

But having done "all the wrong things" may have been the flash of inner fire that has kept Gramp and his image "glowing" all these 20 years.

As Osborn puts it, "Gramp succeeded because he is *humanly* correct."

What were some of the experiences which gave Warner his background?

Warner tells this one on himself: "Once on a cross country in an open cockpit plane, I lost my map over



frequently harrowing experiences.

In the very first issue of the Grampaw Pettibone column, a "lost aviator" story appeared. To the Bureau of Aeronautics *Newsletter* readers, Gramp wrote:

"Reminds me of the time I got lost. Landed, out of gas, in a cow pasture about sundown. When the farmer came out, he said, 'Well, son, we only got two beds—' but maybe I better not tell that story—might only lead to more young flyers getting lost. Better tell the one about Lindbergh. Seems like Lindy got lost the time he flew non-stop from Washington to Mexico City. Ran into considerable weather and was blown way off his course; off his map, in fact. He knew he must be somewhere near Mexico City, but he had no idea even in which direction it was. He finally spotted a

small, stone church and immediately knew where he was. The reason was (and here's the nub) that he knew all the landmarks within 50 miles of his course. Mark my word, it's hard to lose a chap like that, or like Edison says, 'Genius is 99.44 percent perspiration.'

There was another "lost aviator" story (1945) telling of a fighter pilot who was forced to land at sea when his radio failed. While Warner does not admit his answer resulted from personal experience, Gramp wrote:

"Talked to the C.O. of a fighter squadron the other day whose pilots all had the reputation of being expert navigators. Asked him how come. He allowed as how his 'boys' probably were the best fighting pilot navigators . . . and then he made the following ambiguous remark: 'They don't like to eat chamois skin.' Seems the C.O. himself was once forced down at sea because his navigation was a bit careless. He claims the only thing that kept him from starving to death before rescue was eating the inside of his helmet. Right then and there he decided that nobody in his squadron would ever have to eat chamois because of not knowing how to navigate. . . ."

Warner infused Gramp with certain violent hatreds in the then-still-new business of military flying. Among his most violent subjective incantations are those against flatthating and against the attitude "I must go, come hell or high water."

The latter attitude, perhaps, was fostered early in Warner's career when he set out for Paterson, N. J., from a Long Island field.

"Not a very long flight," Warner recalls, "but it was over New York City, and it had begun to snow. Not bad, but it rapidly got worse. Boy, that stuff was just like fog, only more so. I was not qualified to fly instruments, but I was smart enough to know I couldn't fly low contact over the canyons of New York City. By this time I had no idea where my take-off field was. I headed for the beach and flew low along the water side of the shore line. Ever try to follow a jagged coast line in almost zero visibility? That Lady was riding with me again! It wasn't long before I caught a glimpse of green pasture (not yet snowed in). A tight turn and a quick



set-down ended that episode, but I still remember wiping the sweat off my face and feeling how utterly stupid and unnecessary the whole thing was."

Some of that feeling was spattered by Gramp in a 1944 cross-country incident in which the pilot, flying visual flight rules, wound up making a forced landing in a field 40 miles north of Washington, D. C., on a trip from Richmond, Va., 100 land miles away. Said Gramp:

"Wasn't that a beautiful exhibition for an experienced pilot! That's just what you can expect, however, if you're barging around the country without keeping track of your position on the chart. . . . It hardly seems possible to fly from Richmond to 40 miles north of Washington without being able to locate something to give you a fix. Evidently he didn't even recognize the Potomac River."

Gramp has always been an advocate of "When in doubt, make a 180 degree turn." This, too, was evident in his early days. Like the time two planes out of a 15-plane formation cross country flight failed to return, because the flight leader "delayed too long" in making his decision to return to base. Said Grampaw: "The flight leader was chiefly responsible for these crashes. He should have returned to his point of departure as soon as it became evident that the flight could not proceed under contact rules. The delay in deciding to turn back was particularly bad in this case because of the special circumstances involved: (a) the route was over rugged terrain, (b) the flight consisted of a large number of planes, (c) some of the pilots had very little experience in this type of airplane and were very rusty on instrument flying."

While Capt. Warner was Grampaw



in the beginning and set the pace for his breezy and head-cutting style, the actual writing (transcribing may be a better word) has been spread among five associates of Pettibone's who succeeded him since 1946.

These "associates" are all alive today, proof that they learned well the safety practices that Grampaw taught them. Their assignment to the volatile and sometimes violent Pettibone came after they had been occupied with varied fleet duties. At least two "associates" were Patrol Plane Commanders in the four-engined PB4Y. One had flown the little-known Ryan *Fireball*, a combination prop and jet aircraft of the 1945 era. One had been a TBM pilot during the sinking of a submarine during WW II. One was an early jet pilot on a carrier during the Korean crisis. Two had intelligence training; one associate held simultaneously (in a Hunter-Killer exercise) jobs as CIC officer, material officer, electronics/ECM officer, assistant air operations, assistant plans and intelligence officer, all while serving on a carrier division staff.

One of Gramp's helpers admits privately that he learned to "always fasten the safety belt" on his second training flight in the Navy. During the flight he fell from the plane, pulled the parachute ripcord and landed safely. "My concern with safety started early," he said.

It is likely that without his ever-present associate's assistance, Grampaw's purple prose would never get into print. The principal job of the associate is to conduct research into accidents and keep Gramp informed of trends and types of accidents. But a good part of his time is spent in "editing" Pettibone's words into prose that is "fit to print."

While there is no measurable way of pinpointing how effectively Grampaw has been combatting accidents, he is among the first to point with pride to a downward trend on the accident graphs over the 20 years.

In the January 1943 issue of the *BUAER Newsletter*, for example, the following statistic was revealed: "In the first half of calendar year 1942, more Navy pilots were killed in aircraft accidents which occurred as the result of pilot error than were killed as the result of enemy action."

In the next issue of the *Newsletter*,



P. S. Pettibone (P. S. for Post Script) was born. He was introduced to readers as "... an old timer . . . who 'started flying back in the days when airplanes were built out of cigar boxes and baling wire' . . . when an airplane was considered a success if the pilot could coax it 50 feet in the air . . . and a successful landing was anything you could walk away from. . . ."

"He is still very able and eager to take care of himself, but because of his high blood pressure and his rheumatic back and out of respect for his venerable age and long grey beard, we now defer to his desire to be called 'Grampaw.' Accordingly, Grampaw Pettibone it is—respectfully."

Although he tried to talk his way back to active duty as a flier, he was turned down by the flight surgeons for physical and age reasons.

"He argued that because he had flown all types of airplanes and had had every kind of accident, he knew how to avoid them. The longer he talked, the clearer it became that it would be a shame to isolate him at any one station and not give all aviators the benefit of his vast experience."

The result was, of course, Gramp's assignment to the Bureau of Aeronautics as Aviation Safety Counselor, a title he accepted grudgingly. In an interview after his assignment, he said, "Aviators are too hard-headed to take advice."

Thus was Grampaw shown for the first time on January 15, 1943.

Since then, Naval Aviation has passed through a period of rapid growth to meet wartime needs; it has

been cut back to a peacetime force and established a permanent Weekend Warrior aviation program; it has gone through a rapid buildup for the Korean fighting and has been at the fore in a number of flareups around the world.

Throughout his 20 years as official observer, Pettibone has seen a gradual improvement in safety. But even one infraction of the rules is too much for him. That's why he feels that he will "never retire."

In 1945, Grampaw set down a bit of his philosophy:

"Let's get reasonable. Aircraft accidents not only can happen, but in the present stage of development we know that many of them are bound to happen. Not to face this fact squarely, and do everything we can to prevent accidents and to lessen the damage of those that do occur, just isn't intelligent. We've come a long way in aviation, but it hasn't been through hiding from the facts. Our advancement has been achieved through the untiring efforts of a bunch of two-fisted guys who were quick to recognize deficiencies but who could never accept them as final. They stuck with it until the defects were either whipped or counteracted by operating procedures or safety equipment.

"A lot has been learned about flying technique and much safety equipment has been developed. Neither technique nor equipment is worth a damn, however, unless personnel are properly indoctrinated. That's what this blast is all about—trying to get aviators to know their stuff."

# Pettibone's Pearls Over 20 Years

**S**OME FOLKS would be better off in bed—all the time. When you see a line of thunderstorms ahead and find that you can't go OVER, UNDER or AROUND, then ask yourself: "Is this trip necessary *now*?"

**For long life, happiness and retirement benefits, pilots should place self-preservation above pride, for it is well known that pride goeth before a fault.**

If you want to go sightseeing in the mountains, take a bus instead of a Navy airplane.

**Many a life has been cut short by shortcuts.**

We have enough bird accidents without chasing them around at 50 feet.

**If a pilot buries his head in the cockpit, sooner or later someone else will have to dispose of the rest of him.**

If I had a nickel for every accident caused by memory failure, I could buy that farm and retire.

**In aviation maintenance, a job that's only half-done is worse than one that isn't done at all.**

I have never known of a prop losing an argument with an opponent.

**If you want a close shave, go to a barber; when working around the world's fastest blades, give them a wide berth.**

A high-G pullout is like trying to make second base on a single or wearing an undersized girdle—it all depends on what happens in the stretch.

**The fellow who takes the plane up, after you've worked on it, is counting on you for a perfect job—anything less might cost him his life.**

Next time you're tempted to buzz the old homestead, just remember that you may be plowing your own furrow.

**Good mechs get their reward every day—it's real satisfaction to see the plane you've worked on come humming back from each flight.**

Every landing is a separate evolution warranting special attention.

**If a pilot had his druthers, he'd druther have a break than a broken back.**

Simple ignorance is not knowing; compound ignorance is not knowing that you don't know.

**It is not how little you know that gets you in trouble. It's believing that what little you know is enough to keep you out of trouble that puts you behind the eight ball.**

**Squeezing the margin for error is like squeezing the grapefruit. If you squeeze too hard, you get it . . . right in the eye.**

Appreciated be they who abideth by these words. It is not enough that wisdom be set before us, it must be made use of, for broad is the way that leadeth to destruction.

**No pilot is any better than his last landing.**

The pilot still has to remember that his hops are flops when his thinking stops.

**The pilot paid with his life for participation in an unscheduled air show—that's too high an entry fee.**

Quotes from a note found in a transferred aircraft:  
"This here is the Oklahomer Rose. She dun flew 70 missions this cruze and she ain't missed a beat. Pleze take good care of her like I dun."

Gramp's Comment: The grammar may not be up to snuff but this plane captain and his Oklahomer Rose represent the spirit and performance we need among maintenance crews.

**Any pilot tempted to go IFR while on a VFR clearance should remind himself that under these circumstances IFR means "I'm Flying Recklessly."**

Definition: *Scooter pilot*—one who flies marginal weather by getting down close to the ground and dodging the hills right under the overcast. Results are usually fatal. (Term applies to pilots who still have urge to drag one foot).

**Any time there is any doubt, don't.**

Don't worry about what may happen to you—worry about what you're going to do when it happens.

**Going into a spin is like stepping out on your wife. You might get away with it, but if you don't, bub, you're in hot water.**

This disastrous accident was the product of misguided initiative, inexperienced personnel, violation of a squadron order and disregard of squadron instructions, all combined with uncanny perfection.

**When you assume that your thousands of hours in the air make you immune to accidents, you are a candidate for the Deep Six or the wrong end of the long green table.**

Statistics show that if you make contact with the ground or water in a normal landing attitude and have your shoulder harness locked, you'll probably be able to walk away from your forced landing.

**A red face is a darn sight healthier than none at all.**

An airplane is like a woman. Let it get the upper hand and you'll find yourself in a situation that may affect your entire future, not to mention your present.

**The decision to execute a 180-degree turn has saved many a pilot and airplane, but it was made before reaching the point of no return.**

Aviation safety is an all-hands job that requires teamwork and attention to detail and the conviction that "I AM my brother's keeper."

**A little more KNOW and a little less HOPE will save us a lot of airplanes and pilots, not to mention a higher state of morale for the next-of-kin.**

The plane captain is the pilot's right hand man. It's a good idea for the left hand to know what the right hand's doing—and vice versa—if only to keep things safe.

**I suffer from "accidentitis," the symptoms of which are high temperatures and extreme chills at the same time.**

From here on in I'd say you better be pretty careful, as there's little doubt that you've forced your guardian angel to take a "rest cure."

**A hot landing is like trying to beat a train to an intersection. If you are able to wonder what would have happened if you didn't make it, you must have made it, but it was mighty close.**

Pilots who know all the loopholes in the rules generally end up digging their own graves.

**A wise man learns by his mistakes; a wiser man learns by observing the mistakes of others.**

When getting your pre-flight briefing, don't be like a blotter, soaking it all in and getting it backwards.

**When a fellow decides to disobey regulations, the least he should do is start figuring on alternatives in case things don't go so well.**

A good surgeon counts his tools right carefully before he stitches the patient up; it's a good idea for mechanics to keep accurate check on tools.

**Get familiar with safety precautions and you'll grow whiskers like ol' Grampaw's.**

Perseverance certainly is a desired trait in a Naval Aviator, but only when it is tempered with inquisitiveness, caution and just plain good common sense.

**Famous last words—"It'll be all right by the time I get there."**

Aviation maintenance is one line of work where perfection pays—the pilot's life depends upon your work.

**If you skip the checkoff list and save 40 seconds in this world, you may arrive 40 years too early in the next world.**

Confidence coupled with haste in this flying racket is a combination that adds up to a high score—for the Reaper.

**A little foresight, lots of planning,  
Everything set, both pilots scanning;  
That cloud may pack a jolt or pitch,  
But you won't need the panic switch.**

The only thing you can stretch in this flying racket, and get away with it, is a sea story.

**When you're short on fuel, altitude is like money in the bank.**

A pilot who gives a good snow job in the Ready Room sometimes gets caught in his own blizzard.

**He who turns around and lands at base will live to fly to some other place.**

A "little" pilot error is like a little smell of garlic—there ain't no such thing.

**There's no vision like supervision.**

The quickest way to get there is by the Great Circle Route—except when it runs through mountains or thunderstorms.

**It's a well known fact that a mid-air collision can ruin your whole day.**

Anticipating a "cut" has caused many pilots a peck of trouble. In many instances the anticipation is almost as great as the realization—but not when you're making carrier landings.

**Your head may be shaped like a hub cap, but that's no sign you're a "wheel."**

Sometimes I'm convinced that pilots schedule an accident in advance of a flight.

**Haste makes waste. But for survival by ejection, well planned, rehearsed, fast, coordinated action can save your life. Here, he who hesitates is lost.**

There are two dangerous periods in a pilot's life: ONE, when he's a young cub just learning to become a tiger, and TWO, when he's a battle-scarred tiger with plenty of time-in-model and maybe gettin' a few too many automatic reactions and becoming too relaxed.

**Life is brief sans briefing.**

That five extra knots for the wife and kids is more appreciated than you realize. If you don't have a wife and kids, five knots will get you a ticket for the beer muster at quitting time.

**Two make a crowd on a runway at night.**

If you are looking for trouble, just glance over your shoulder—it's probably right on your back.