

# GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustrations by

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## THE BACKUP MEATBALL



# Landing on USS Enterprise (CVN 65) at night

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=uWDAhA43INc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=uWDAhA43INc)

“Uploaded by usnavy on Feb 16, 2012 | A glimpse at what it takes to land on an aircraft carrier - at night - enjoy!”

## Naval Aviation News Winter 2011 ‘The Backup Meatball’:

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“...caused the Hornet to strike the flight deck rounddown at the point where the tailhook is attached to the aircraft.... The pilot ejected and landed on the flight deck, sustaining major injuries; the aircraft was lost.... ...the pilot stated that his carrier landing technique was to use his Automated Carrier Landing System (ACLS) needles as his **primary reference** & use the Fresnel Lens Optical Landing System, or **meatball**, as a **backup for glide slope information**.

**Grampaw Pettibone says:** “...And our intrepid aviator? Well, Ol’ Gramps knows that every pilot has his way to do stuff, but **using the ACLS** → **needles in close instead of flying the ball is about as dumb as skinny dippin’ with snapping turtles**. Gouge is great, but it’s no substitute for knowing the right way to do things and stickin’ to what’s worked for a long, long time. **Gramps knows that none of this fella’s LSOs taught him that ACLS technique**—he should have stuck with what he’d learned....”

# The Backup Meatball

A Hornet squadron was embarked for carrier qualifications in support of carrier sea trials. The day quals period was challenging, with high winds and significant deck movement. A nugget who had flown during the day was also scheduled for the night period. Approaching the "in-close" position during the mishap pass, the pilot overcorrected a slightly above glide slope position with a significant power reduction while simultaneously making a large lineup and nose-down correction. The reduction of power, lowering of the nose, and loss of lift caused by the lineup correction caused an excessive

sink rate. This gross and inappropriate correction inside of the waveoff window caused the Hornet to strike the flight deck rounddown at the point where the tailhook is attached to the aircraft. The hook and parts of the aircraft's variable exhaust nozzle assembly were severed from the aircraft. The Hornet slid through and off the end of the landing area. The pilot ejected and landed on the flight deck, sustaining major injuries; the aircraft was lost.

The post-mishap investigation revealed the pilot was weak behind the ship with a significant history of lineup problems dating back to Training Command carrier quals. In addition, **the pilot stated that his carrier landing technique was to use his Automated Carrier Landing System (ACLS) needles as his primary reference**

**& use the Fresnel Lens Optical Landing System, or meatball, as a backup for glide slope information.** The report also cited several supervisory errors. The squadron and wing landing signal officers (LSOs) failed to provide NATOPS-required pre-embarkation training on high-wind and pitching-deck operations. The squadron and air group commanding officers failed to staff the squadron adequately, causing the squadron LSO to be overtaxed with other responsibilities during a critical pre-embarkation work up for the inexperienced squadron's first at-sea period. The squadron commanding officer and both LSOs failed to recognize the pilot lacked sufficient ball flying skills and was not prepared for the highly demanding environment encountered that night. 

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Holy jalapeños!** They set this kid up for failure and he took the ball and ran with it! We lost a jet, and we were durned lucky we didn't lose the pilot or some of the good folks up there on the flight deck.

Let's start with the preparation—or lack thereof—to go to sea. The squadron paddles was working too many jobs to get them boys ready for flying on the great briny. The squadron commanding officer overburdened his LSO because the air group didn't give him enough experienced bodies. The wing LSO was there to help, but between him and the squadron LSO, they only did half a job. LSO NATOPS says you gotta talk about that stuff every time you get ready to go to sea,

and they plum forgot. We shot that kid off the pointy end on a dark and stormy night without all the tools he needed in his bag. Anyone smell what I'm cookin' here?

**And our intrepid aviator? Well, Ol' Gramps knows that every pilot has his way to do stuff, but using the ACLS needles in close instead of flying the ball is about as dumb as skinny dippin' with snapping turtles. Gouge is great, but it's no substitute for knowing the right way to do things and stick-in' to what's worked for a long, long time. Gramps knows that none of this fella's LSOs taught him that ACLS technique—he should have stuck with what he'd learned.**

So here are today's lessons, kids. First, you older

fellas who are in charge gotta be in charge. Make the hard call. If you ain't got what you need to do the training, either get it or don't do the training. Stay ahead of the game and don't let your folks get in over their heads.

You young whippersnappers, gather 'round and let's make sure we got today's lesson. Learn the right way to do it, and do it that way. Don't make up procedures and don't give in to bad habits. Shortcuts and unproven personal techniques have no place in big-time carrier aviation!

Now you kids get back to work. Gramps is gonna see if he can get the ol' SNJ fired up for a trip around the patch.

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