

LANDINGS WITHOUT WHEELS

As the Selfridge Field News Letter Correspondent whimsically puts it, further test of the advisability of landing a PB-2A with wheels in the retracted position was a recent occurrence. He goes on to say that 1st Lieut. Murray C. Woodbury, en route to Fort Leavenworth, Kans., in an airplane of this type for the purpose of engaging in a tactical problem, was flying at about 2,000 feet and had reached a position about 50 miles east of Fort Leavenworth when the engine "threw" connecting rods in both banks of No. 2 cylinder, causing dense smoke and apparent fire.

Lieut. Woodbury at once adjusted the stabilizer, throttled the motor back and called to his passenger to "bail out." The latter, Private P.G. Vaughan, 3rd Air Base Squadron, without hesitation climbed over the side and hung by his hands along the fuselage. At this moment, Lieut. Woodbury, who was out on the wing beside the cockpit, decided there was no fire and that he would attempt a forced landing. He motioned Private Vaughan back into the cockpit, but the latter was unable to get back and dropped free.

Lieut. Woodbury managed to get back into the cockpit and, in a shower of oil and smoke, set the plane down on its belly in a small plowed field.

Possibly, under the stress of the occasion, Lieut. Woodbury had no time to lower the landing wheels. It is more than likely, however, that, finding no suitable landing place in the immediate vicinity, he calculated a "belly landing" in a small area would be the safest after all, as the plane would skid along the ground for only a short distance, whereas a landing on the wheels might result in their striking a rough spot, with consequent nosing over of the plane, injury to himself and greater damage to the airplane.

As it turned out, the plane suffered no damage beyond a bent propeller and a crushed prestone radiator.

Private Vaughan, in the meantime, had opened his chute about 100 feet from the ground and landed safely. It was his first airplane ride since enlisting. When asked why he delayed so long in pulling the rip cord, he unperturbedly replied that the Supply Sergeant had told him not to lose his gloves and he had a hard time finding the rip cord with them on. He still has the gloves and also the honor of being the first to get away with "bailing out" of the rear seat of a PB-2.

Selfridge Field pilots are high in their praise of Lieut. Woodbury's courage and coolness under the circumstances. Our Correspondent states that the slight damage suffered by the airplane was the Lieut. Woodbury's first accident in ap-

proximately 3,000 hours of flying, both military and commercial, in the last 18 years, and that the conduct of both the pilot and passenger in this emergency is a credit to the Air Corps.

From Hawaii comes another story of a safe landing, minus wheels, of a B-12A bombardment airplane. Shortly after taking off from Luke Field and while raising the wheels, the right wheel assembly fell off and hit the ground in the rice fields near Pearl City. Lieut. Chester P. Gilger, who was flying in formation with Lieut. Norman L. Callish, both being members of the 72nd Bombardment Squadron, notified the latter by radio of the accident and also called the ground station.

What will he do? That was the question everyone was asking. Would he land in the water near Ford Island, in the cane field, on Luke Field or Wheeler Field, or resort to his parachute? Lieut. Callish was notified to use his own judgment. However, if he decided to land on the ground, it was recommended that he land at Wheeler Field.

Knowing that belly landings had been made numerous times without serious damage to the airplane or personnel, Lieut. Callish chose the latter course, and when all was in readiness came in and made a beautiful landing without a bounce. The tail of the plane rose momentarily as he hit the ground and then settled back into a nice slide. There was no tendency to ground-loop. The only damage done was to the propeller tips and to the bomb-bay doors.

New propellers were soon installed, and the plane was flown back to Luke Field for repairs by the Hawaiian Air Depot.

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