

HANGAR FLYING by CAPTAIN Carlton W. Swickley AvNumber 725

A "Cut" on the Cap

For a first-tour Coast Guard aviator right out of flight training, standing the duty at old Salem Air Station was exciting. The anticipation of a possible SAR case kept the adrenaline pump at the ready. But in the winter when all those SAR-generating pleasure boats were hibernating in shipyards, duty nights could be quietly spent watching TV. Or what was more interesting, listening to the old hands swap sea stories. And since all of my SDOs (Senior Duty Officer) were WWII veterans, some of those tales were bound to impress a junior birdman like me.

One of my SDOs had been a PBY Catalina pilot in Patrol Squadron Six (VP-6 CG) at Blue West One (BW-1), that frigid, fog-bound, wind-driven outpost in Greenland responsible for ant-sub patrols, SAR, and other missions in that part of the North Atlantic. Among the many stories this SDO told was a fantastic one of a pilot landing on the Greenland ice cap. It seems this pilot and his PBY crew were flying on instruments in thick clouds and falling snow. As the pilot concentrated on the gauges, he noticed something moving out of the corner of his eye. And when he glanced out the window, there standing in the snow was his crew chief ... waving his arms and giving the "cut engines" signal! They had unintentionally landed on the ice cap! It seems they had flown onto a very gradually rising slope in white-out conditions, and the snow was so soft and featureless they did not even feel it when the "Cat" touched down and slid to a stop.

Now is the story true? I don't know. I no longer recall the name of my SDO who originally told me the tale, nor the names of those who he said were on that PBY crew. Too many of those WWII pilots have now Gone West, and I doubt that the event can be verified today. But what I will say is that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I heard that story repeated often enough by other WWII Coast Guard pilots as they chuckled and shook their heads, that I came to accept it as gospel. I leave it to you to judge.

But before you decide it is all a bunch of blarney, let me tell you a tale that I *know* is true ... I know because I was living among those to whom it happened. I was at CGAS Savannah aboard Hunter AFB, then home of the 63rd Troop Carrier Wing (Heavy). The 63rd was operating C-124 Globemasters at the time. While one of their planes was operating in Antarctica, and flying in white-out conditions, the observer in the after station noticed the props were starting to kick up snow! Imagine the panic on the flight deck when the observer yelled, PULL UP! ... PULL UP!" on the ICS! So now what do you think?