



Demise of

F-106 56-0467

By Its Pilot Jim Wilkinson



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Single Engine Speed Record Holder

“Setting the Record Straight”

by Jim Wilkinson
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Just a note to set the record straight about the demise of F-106 [Single Engine Speed Record Holder: The Real Story](#). I have the dubious distinction of being the pilot who landed (?) this bird at Edwards AFB on its last flight on 14 Aug 1961. [Ken Robken's account of the accident](#) is amazingly accurate with but a few minor exceptions.

The right tire blew (all the rubber came off) just as I broke ground on takeoff and I had no idea that it happened until I was starting into my intercept training mission. The mobile control officer had seen the tire blow and immediately called 329th operations.

At that point everyone and his sister got on the horn (radio) and started giving me advice. Talk about a circus! My ops officer, Bob Furgeson, finally called Convair to try to get some guidance as to how to handle the situation because there was no procedure in the T. O. for landing with no tire on a wheel. The decision was made to burn down fuel and go into Edwards because they had a longer runway and much better crash equipment than George.

After burning down my fuel, I started my decent into Edwards and, in the process, discovered that I also had speed brake failure. I set up a straight in approach, touched down on the left gear (good tire and wheel) and held the right (the wheel without the tire) off as long as I

could and still have enough speed to put it down gently. I pulled the emergency drag chute and it also failed. Needless to say, this thing was not slowing down quickly enough to suit me with just the left wheel brake and no chute. Fortunately I still had good nose wheel steering and some elevon control, which allowed me to keep it going straight. The foam on the runway was totally ineffective in preventing the wheel break-up and subsequent fire. It was however successful in making it very difficult to keep the pointed end of the aircraft headed the right direction.

At the moment I gently let the right wheel down, Edwards tower started giving me a running account of what was going on behind me. In a very calm voice it went something like this: "You have sparks coming from your right wheel". "Your right wheel is breaking up". "Your right wing is on fire". "The whole back of the aircraft is on fire, get out"! Unfortunately I was still doing about 75 knots when I got that last transmission and I did not have the 0-0 ejection seat so things immediately got very busy in the cockpit.

Raising the canopy at this time was no help in slowing this mobile barbeque pit down. I shut the engine and fuel off hoping it would somehow prevent a very loud noise that I was convinced I would not be privileged to hear. To this day I am not sure how I kept it on the runway as long as I did. It wasn't until the aircraft had slowed considerably that it slowly drifted off the left side of the runway. When it became obvious it was going to come to gradual stop in the desert, I started releasing my harness and generally disconnecting myself from the aircraft. The moment it stopped I was over the right side (up wind side trying to avoid jumping into or through the fire) and to this day I contend I set the world's record for the 100yd dash after hitting the ground.

A fellow named Charlie Demarq came over from George that same day in a "B" model and took me back to the squadron. My squadron commander, little Joe Rutgers, met me on the ramp with some "medicinal" spirits, which quickly took the edge off the whole experience.

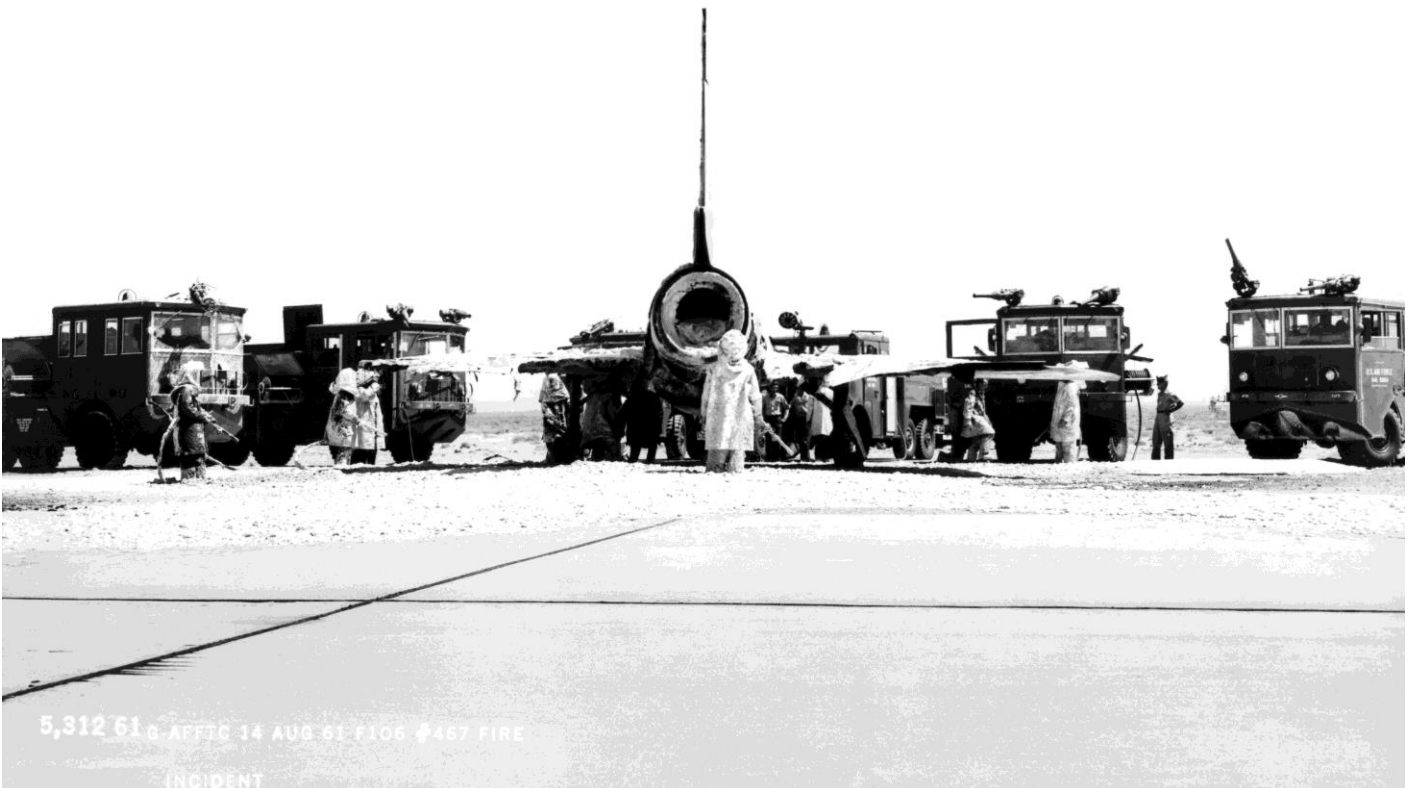
The accident investigation board met and I told them the whole bloody story including a remark about how it took a little more effort on final approach to find the right power setting because I had no speed brakes (normally extended on final approach). From this they concluded that I must have landed too fast which in turn contributed to the wheel break-up, fire et al. At this point I saw my flying career quickly going down the tubes. Fortunately for me this aircraft was equipped with a Convair data recorder and when the squadron Convair Tech Rep Joe Hitch heard about my difficulties with the board he kindly offered to provide the recorder info. It turned out that I had touched down within a couple knots of the T.O. speed for my weight so I was off the hook. Four thousand jet fighter hours later I retired without so much as having put a scratch on another bird.

I have a couple B & W 8x10 photos of the aircraft taken just after the fire was put out and would be happy to send copies to anyone who may be interested (computer image not hard copy). In addition, I believe I still have a small reel of 35mm stop action film taken by Edwards's tower of the entire sequence from touchdown to when it stopped in the desert.

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INCIDENT



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