

Robert Hamblin

Dead Stick F-106



Dead Sticking a 456th F-106

Account of an F-106 Flameout in 1959

By Robert Al Hamblin Col USAF (Ret)

Before I get into an account of the actual flameout, I would like to back up a little bit and relate some instances that are amusing and relevant to that fateful night. In early December of 1959 (I think) I was sitting around the 456 FIS Ops room [Castle AFB, CA] with a few pilots and the ops officer, a Maj Martin. We were due to get F-106's in a few months, and then the usual would start; ground school, -1 studying, rides with an IP, and simulator training. So, we were sitting around the ops room and somebody came in and shouted that two '106's were landing.

Two pilots from Palmdale walked in and said that both of the aircraft were operational and that we might as well get a flight in them as this was very unusual. I was 'A' Flight Commander and flew the test hops. Major Martin said, "Hamblin get your chute". I could not believe it...

No -I, no simulator, no IP rides, but I got my chute.

I can't tell you what a thrill that was. Of course the F-106 was quite similar to the F-102, but more power, more instruments and they were vertical instruments. I thought flying with vertical instruments were a snap. Just the last 1000 feet were a little tricky. But can you imagine two dumb pilots doing that today.

Very shortly after ADC HQ came out with one of their famous regulations, which in effect said that if you haven't flown vertical

instruments, you couldn't. Also ADC was very anxious to get the F-106's out into the field. Rex Howerton and myself now had over 10 hours of vertical instrument time (one of the many requirements as mentioned above). Within two months we had 106's scattered all over the U. S. because if anything went wrong we had just twelve hours to get airborne, and if not we had to return to Palmdale to ferry new birds. I found that whole episode amusing, but I did manage to rack up quite a bit of F-106 flight time.

I think some part of a year passes and there was an accident where an F-106 flamed out. The cause turned out to be a mixture of low fuel and high nose attitude. The reason was that with a high nose attitude, and less than 3200 pounds of fuel the bell-mouths in the wing could be uncovered and the engine would receive a slug of air and flame out. So we had to land with more than 3200 pounds of fuel. I now had lots of F-106 flight time and still practiced a simulated flameout pattern on almost every mission.

During a Western Air Defense exercise I was returning to [Castle AFB] base at approximately 0400 hours. I hit high cone at 20,000, with 3600 lbs of fuel, came to idle, put out the speed brakes and promptly flamed out.

I could not believe it.

I had plenty of fuel, but there is no doubt I was flamed out. I tried several air starts to no avail. Fortunately for me I was stationed at a SAC base [Castle], which meant a 12,000 foot runway, a massive overrun, and a SAC alert christmas tree, which was literally lit up like a Xmas tree. For me there was no hesitation on what I was going to do. I do not want to sound pompous but I did have quite a few hours in the bird, I practiced simulated flameouts regularly, and I was approaching a 12,000 foot runway with the approach end lit up very

well. Plus a pilot had recently ejected from an F-106 equipped with the rocket sled (Convair Supersonic Rotational B-seat later replaced by the Weber Zero-Zero seat), same as us and received a severely broken back.

I was now at 16,000 feet and approximately 30 degrees into the 360 flameout pattern. I had already decided that I would rather go off the end of this 12,000 runway, and again a huge overrun, than land one foot short going 250 knots. Yes, I was doing 250 knots simply because it felt so comfortable. I had tried 180 to 200 (the recommended I believe). Also I was on the dollar sized instruments at the bottom of the instrument panel and they were very hard to see, especially the minor graduations. But at 250 I had pretty much a major graduation and could see the needle better. I knew the RAT was not out, I was turning base, everything looked good and I decided not to change things by putting the RAT out.

I touched down approximately 2000 feet down the runway; I did not deploy the drag chute as I knew it would break off. But I did come back on the stick with a pretty high nose attitude.

I could have cared less. I was hoping the tailpipe would drag on the runway and decrease my speed even further.

Finally the nose came down hard because I did not help it, and I lost a good amount of airspeed because of it. I deployed the drogue chute, and stood on the breaks, even with anti-skid I they blew. I was barely able to turn off on the 10,000 foot taxi way and I opened the canopy. I heard a hissing noise, and since a jet pilot is always concerned with fire, I got out of my harness and chute and vaulted over the side and ran like hell. The hissing noise turned out to be a broken hydraulic line caused by tire debris hitting it. It was very quiet for a minute or two (I guess) and then all the emergency vehicles arrived.

In two or three days I received a couple of phone calls from ADC HQ, both Major Generals. One told me that what I just accomplished was a superior feat of airmanship and he personally was going to put me in for the Distinguished Flying Cross. I felt pretty good about that until I received the next call. This other General stated that what I had just done was a very stupid stunt for a professional pilot to do, and that as a result of my stunt ADC would probably lose two or three pilots and F-106's in the next year; and that he personally was going to initiate court martial proceedings against me.

As it turned out I guess they cancelled each other out as nothing happened.

One small footnote: Some technicians and ops people came up from Edwards AFB, CA. They wanted to know why I didn't set up the recommended airspeed. I stated simply that 250 felt better. Then they wanted to know how I could see at all since the RAT was not deployed. I stated I didn't have the faintest idea why. I think they later figured out that at the higher airspeed the engine was wind milling at a higher RPM and was enough to activate the emergency DC bus. However; all the so called facts in this paragraph are quite fuzzy to me and I may not be entirely accurate.

In summary I believe that I was an extremely lucky little boy, but I was prepared and what all the so called experts think did not and does not mean a rat's ass to me.