

Jack Krause

# To Load or Not

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### 318<sup>th</sup> FIS Gets an Unannounced ORI 1973

*By John "Jack" E. Krause LtCol USAF (Ret)*

In 1973, the 318th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (Air Defense) flying F-106s out of McChord AFB, WA (Now Joint Base Lewis McChord) was subjected to an unannounced Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) by the Air Defense Command (ADC). The inspection team fell upon the unit with its usual full-coverage efficiency and immediately ordered a full effort scramble of all our airplanes on intercept missions. We succeeded in getting everything airborne except one airplane that still had a day and a half to go in the inspection dock which was manned by about six technicians.

As the chief of maintenance, I concurred with our NCOs that four of the six inspection dock troops should help out on the flightline as the activity was extremely intense as airplanes launched, landed, recovered and launched again all day long.

The F-106 was a beautiful airplane but extremely difficult to maintain. It had an average "break rate" of about 60%. The airplane (which still holds the world speed record for a single engine, operational fighter – thanks to Col. Joe Rogers) was

sixty feet long with twenty feet of that packed with some of the most complicated and delicate electronics yet devised. When it worked, it was phenomenal. When it worked.

We were blessed with a great avionics section that worked magic keeping the temperamental machine operational, and we ended that first day of the ORI quite successfully - broken, but having satisfactorily accomplished the max-effort portion of the inspection.

With all our birds recovered and being worked on in various degrees by the night shift, the day shift went home. However, I noticed that the tech sergeant and staff sergeant still remained working on the airplane in the inspection dock. A quick query convinced me they were doing what they wanted to do so I left them alone and retired to my on-base quarters to rest up for the next onslaught of requirements.

At about 1900, the "red phone" in my quarters rang, and the airman on the other end said, "Sir, we are at DEFCON 2." I was a bit chagrined that the young man had not used the appropriate exercise term of YELLOW but decided to not make any corrections until after the inspection instead of muddying the waters right then.

Living on base allowed me to reach the Squadron in just a few minutes to see why this ORI teams deemed it necessary to harass an already beaten up outfit. As I entered the

squadron area I saw an unbelievable amount of activity with everybody – clerks, the cook, senior NCOs, officers, pilots – putting up barricades, temporary fences, signs, check points, etc. It really was a DEFCON 2. Egypt had invaded Israel and we were ordered to full readiness ASAP. This included loading every available airplane with the AIR-2 Genie nuclear rocket. The efforts of all squadron members were immense, and it made one proud to be a part of such an organization.

As is true in most organizations with capable and dedicated members, the managers are often merely bystanders in critical crises, and the commander, operations officer and I were mostly that as we watched in amazement at what was taking place. In three to four hours there were at least fourteen previously completely broken aircraft from the day's maximum flying effort, fixed, refueled, armed with nukes, manned and sitting on fifteen minute alert.

To top that off, the technical and staff sergeant who were working on the airplane in the inspection dock came to me to say that airplane was ready to roll out. Just the two of them completed all the inspections and checks in less than a day that would normally take at least an additional day and a half or more to complete by a crew of six.

Under normal conditions, an airplane just out of an inspection was required to undergo a functional test flight before being allowed installation of armament and operational use. However, this was a DEFCON 2 situation

that overruled that requirement. After consultation with the commander and operations office, word was given to upload a nuke on the bird. And since I was "combat rated" and a functional check pilot I personally set up on alert in that airplane.

Meanwhile, the ADC inspection team was pretty much lost in the whirlwind of activity, but apparently one of the enlisted inspectors got word to the brigadier general heading the team that we were setting up an aircraft just out of inspection without a functional check flight. When he asked me why, I pleaded that it really was a true DEFCON 2 situation. He agreed somewhat reluctantly, and we proceeded on in the face of what I perceived as the disapproval of some of the inspection team's lower echelon.

So now we had at least fifteen nuclear armed F-106s on the line ready to go. As an aside, the local paper stated that "no extra preparations" were taking place at McChord AFB. That spoke well for our security.

Higher headquarters eventually allowed us to release several of our airplanes from alert status, and of course we had our "just inspected" bird downloaded immediately. I also scheduled the machine for a functional check flight the first thing next morning.

It was pretty obvious there were some on the inspection team really looking for a reason to hammer us for putting

that particular bird on nuclear alert, and it was also pretty obvious that I was damned nervous that they just might find such reason – again taking into account the atrocious recovery rate these machines had. So I conducted a very objective and thorough check flight running the bird out to Mach 2, and tested everything on the checklist including the fire control system plus a few things of my own. Now I was known for my “heavy pencil” on check flights and was pretty darned thorough having had a lot of experience in the bird. But lo and behold, I could find absolutely nothing wrong. Even the canopy was clean, and the clock was wound.

My mind was racing as I walked back to the pilot/maintenance debriefing room thinking the ORI Team will never, ever believe it. As expected, several members of the inspection team – including the general – were there to witness the debriefing. And I was nervous to be sure. But I opened the aircraft log book and with a flourish signed the airplane off as having no discrepancies at all. This brought out some derisive guffaws from the inspection team, plus an officious declaration from the inspection team’s pilot that he was going to fly that very airplane on the afternoon mission. (Whoop de doo.)

He did, and guess what? He had no discrepancies to report either and stated, “That is the best F-106 I have ever flown!!!” I know it is hard to believe, but sometimes a little luck is better than skill.

By the way, the two NCOs in the inspection dock both got Commendation Medals. Moreover, a later inspection by a USAF maintenance inspection team rated our unit as having the third best maintenance organization in the entire USAF. (We were the only unit of the top three that maintained airplanes).



F-106A of the 49<sup>th</sup> FIS Griffiss AFB, NY Firing an Air-2A Genie Nuclear Rocket



F-106A 56-0466 of the 318<sup>th</sup> FIS McChord AFB, WA