

Captain Steve Damer

BOMARC Intercept

F-106A 56-0462



F-106A High Altitude Intercept vs Simulated MIG-25

Bomarc Intercept in 56-0462 June 6, 1975

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FORWARD

I'd like to start with a disclaimer: I am now 73 years old and this occurred in 1975. I've never written about this that I remember. I've been asked many questions about it through the years (even some nasty comments that this accident lead to the early retirement of the F-106). I feel the 6 performed tremendously. There has been a lot of misinformation out there so this is a small attempt to tell the [real] story as I remember it. I am certainly not trying to brag as many of you have done similar sorties!

THE REAL STORY

The time period is May and June of 1975. We were told that the need for these sorties was that a Mig-25 overflew Egypt as I remember. They tried unsuccessfully to shoot it down with some F-4's. Air Force was concerned and wondered if the '6' was capable. The plan ended up being a Bomarc launched from I believe the Galveston, TX area, eastward over the Gulf of Mexico at approx. Mach 3 around 75,000 feet. We were to accelerate in from the East and do a cruise/fly up for the intercept.

Three of us from Tyndall were “selected”. Capt. Jerry Butler from the 475th Test Squadron, Capt. Dave Oakes from the 62nd Fighter Interceptor Squadron and myself (Capt. Steve Damer) from 2nd Fighter Interceptor Training Squadron (hopefully, they remember more than I or maybe more accurately)!

At the time I was a flight and ground school (Operating Manual plus Weapon Systems) instructor at the 2 FITS at Tyndall. The sorties were done with full pressure suits (David Clark A/P 22S-2), initial training in the altitude chamber and a few days of training. Then we took each other up in the [F-106]B model to make sure we were comfortable, etc before getting in the [F-106]A. We were briefed that the engines we were using had been “combat trimmed” and expect them to run a little warm. We were specifically briefed each sortie to disregard the overheat warning light (came on at 630). Normal A/B limits were 635 with acceleration limits to 650. We were briefed by a superior officer that he had checked (we assumed with Pratt & Whitney) and we were to use the higher limits because of the mission profile? Seldom did they get that high but we occasionally had to pull power back to keep them around 620. We had a few training missions with about 50% success. Problem obviously was the high closure rate and only a 30 mile lock on. Even with infrared slaving leading to lead collision with only had approx. 5 seconds to try and center the dot. They didn’t want shots with the dot out. The setup, with as many individual corrections as we could put in early, helped. I believe the Bomarc had a traveling wave tube on it to help with early radar pickup.



“Demonstration” day for the General and some invited friends was Saturday morning, 6 June 1975. I was flying F-106A 56-0462. (I know because they gave me the helmet mounted very nicely with a plaque

at my separation party) I believe there were just 2 of us. The other pilot I think was Capt. Butler but I'm not sure.

The profile that seemed to work best was to find a cold altitude somewhere in the high 30,000 to mid-40,000 feet, get as much speed as we could (usually easily Mach 2+) and at a specific distance based on that speed to start a cruise up to lose as little speed as possible so it didn't result in a big fly up at fire. The Bomarc was still there for me. This plane was running fast and hot. Numerous power reductions to keep it in range. Dot was actually centered at fire (pulled film as proof for some stupid reason before ejection and put it in my flight suit Lol). After fire looked back in and saw the EGT rising rapidly. Pulled power back with little effect so shut the engine down. We were usually in the high 60's to low 70's (thousand feet) at fire. As I recall, the Mach was around 1.3 or so but because of the altitude the indicated [Mach] wasn't much so had to be gentle on the controls. Once the engine shut down the pressure suit did its thing and got nice and hard! Turned toward Tyndall and attempted a few restarts at a lower altitude with no luck. Number one joined up with me and told me later the engine was putting out sparks (maybe molten turbine blades—later recovery said turbine stages suffered damage).

There was an under cast. I wasn't sure of my exact position so wanted to wait to see where I was before making a decision about dead sticking it in or ejecting. I broke out approx. over Port St. Joe (something like 25 miles from Tyndall runways) at around 9,000ft. Decided not a good idea to dump plane in town so turned out over the Gulf. I was ready to eject and now see I'm over Cape San Blas with quite a bit of Sat morning activity so wait a little longer. I finally 'zoomed" and ejected at let's say a low altitude?! Everything worked and I ended up in the Gulf. Crawled into the raft. Sun is beating down and I'm cooking so took off the helmet. About then lead flew over so I realized they

were aware of my position. Not far from Tyndall at this time so expected a fast pickup.

Some guys in a fishing boat approached –didn't want to come close even though I waved them over. They hollered "Are you American?" in the good ole Southern drawl. Of course they never heard the airplane and see this guys coming down wearing an orange suit with glass dome under a parachute. Couldn't blame them. They offered me a ride to shore but figured the chopper was on its way and they knew my position so stayed.

Wish I could do that one over.

The time got extended so tried the radio (didn't work) and played with stuff in the survival kit. Put the iridescent sea dye in the water, etc. (Found out later the liquid dye used horse urine as a base... Attracted sharks!) This was getting way too long!! When chopper arrived the down draft blew me out of the raft. The multiple layers of mesh and material in the suit completely restricted leg movement until some water got in and equalized the pressure, then it was great.

False rumors of [the pressure suit] pulling me to the bottom! How much does water weigh in water? Nothing. Fill a pail to the top in the lake and hold it under water. Nothing; only weight or buoyancy of the pail itself. Same with filling waders with water. As long as you stay with the waders under water, no problem. Before a little restriction with just one thin layer; try multiple layers and mesh! Accident board disagreed with me so the flight surgeon took my suit (no longer any good-salt water) up to the pool and reported back to the board the exact same thing I'd been saying. Now they were arguing with him! Two people in excellent shape who have both experienced it, reporting the same results and a board who just have some false opinions and have never done it.

This is too long and there is more to be said but I'll close before you fall asleep from boredom! I do have one more thing I want to say: I'm a Christian and I can see God's protection in numerous ways during this time!

1. A check ride just weeks before this accident that exactly duplicated the event!
2. Plane held together with an apparent fire with fuel and weapons.
3. Safe ejection - I only got a small cut on my lip from the dome with its accompanying microphone being forced back in my face from the wind blast. They told me later it was the first successful full pressure suit ejection for the Air Force. Nothing I did! Think there were only two others at this time. A SR-71 and a RB-57, both severely out of control thru no fault of the pilots from what I'm told.
4. Safe rescue (although the tried a couple of failed attempted with a tree penetrator before switching to a horse collar).
5. Somehow using this to help me get hired by American Airlines where I retired from in 2005.

As stated earlier, forgive an old mans failed memory. I loved flying the Six. I was fortunate enough to get it right out of flight training and spent the rest of my career in it; first at the 49th FIS in Griffiss AFB and then to Tyndall as an instructor. Time period from Mar 1969 to May 1976. Wonderful memories!!

Steve Damer