

## **F-106 Stories**

My good friend and neighbor, Carl Kelle, sent me the following interesting story of an aircraft incident that occurred long ago. The story led me to recalling my very own experience, also from long ago, in one of these amazing aircraft. My story immediately follows the one Carl provided.

**Sometimes strange things happen. This could be right out of the twilight zone.**

### ***Fighter jet in a cornfield - 1970***

The aircraft, a F-106 supersonic interceptor, assigned to the 71st Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS) at Malmstrom AFB, Montana, had its pilot eject during an in-flight emergency. The pilot somehow got the aircraft into a flat spin which is generally considered to be unrecoverable in the F-106. He then did what the flight handbook required; he ejected.

After the pilot did just that the F-106, serial number 80787, recovered itself from this "unrecoverable" situation. Minutes earlier, in a futile attempt to escape the spin, the pilot had extended half flaps, established takeoff trim and throttled the engine back to an approach power setting. After the ejection, the aircraft recovered from the spin on its own, and established a wings level attitude at a low rate of descent under reduced power all the way to the ground. Ground effect further reduced its rate of descent and it settled into a near-perfect gentle belly landing in a farmer's snow-covered cornfield. When the local sheriff came upon the scene, the engine was still running. The aircraft was situated on a slight incline, and was creeping forward slowly under the thrust of its still-running engine as the snow compressed to ice beneath it. Concerned about where it might be headed, the sheriff didn't think he could wait for the recovery team to get there from Malmstrom, which was about 50 miles away; so he contacted the aircraft's squadron for engine shut down instructions before he carefully entered the cockpit to secure the engine.

Photos following this story show pretty much what the sheriff beheld on that fateful day.

A depot team from McClellan AFB recovered the aircraft and it was eventually returned to service. When the 71st FIS was disbanded in 1971, 80787, now famously known as the "Cornfield Bomber", was transferred to the 49th FIS, where it finished out its operational service life. Pilots of the 49th FIS would occasionally run into ex-71st FIS guys at William Tell exercises and rag on them unmercifully about the "emergency" so dire that the plane landed itself. 80787 is now on permanent display in its 49th FIS markings at the USAF Museum at Wright Patterson AFB, OH, where its story is told in the exhibit. While the 49th FIS Eagle jocks (they now fly F-15 Eagles) are reportedly glad to see their squadron immortalized in this way for millions to see, they would prefer to see it made more clear that it was the 71st, and not one of theirs, who jumped out of this perfectly good aircraft.

This is evidence of the Air Force's perfect record; they have never left one up there.

p.s. I searched Google for some confirming information and found a video about this incredible event. Click on the link and enjoy!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noriLGVL7Qo>

For more fascinating information on this amazing aircraft, click on the following:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F-106>

*Photos On Following Pages*







## ***My Recollected Experience***

Interesting story from Carl, I'm surprised that I hadn't heard of it before now although, the fact that I was on my way to Vietnam at the time likely explains my ignorance of it. It takes me back...to 1979. My good friend and FAA coworker at Jacksonville Center, Ernie Webster, invited me for a ride in his F-106, a supersonic interceptor. Like me, Ernie was a pilot in the Guard but he was in the Florida Air National Guard in the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing while I flew in the Florida Army National Guard. Our aircraft was a "B" model and unlike the F-106A it had two seats, in tandem, and could be used for training. Simulators were primitive back in the day and the serious training was done in aircraft that accommodated two pilots, like the F-106B.

We departed JAX as the wingman in a flight of 2 and headed out to the Warning Areas (offshore military training airspace) east of Jacksonville where we practiced intercepts on a B-52 Bomber from Robbins AFB, GA. That was fun as the B-52 practiced avoidance and counter-measures while we maneuvered into position to simulate the firing of missiles that would, in wartime, have included a relatively small nuclear warhead. Relative to nuclear warheads, that is. After simulating the missile launch Ernie maneuvered violently. After things seemed to calm down following the first run at the bomber I asked Ernie, "What the hell was that about?" He responded with, "Evading the blast from that nuclear missile we launched on the bomber." Well, Duh!

Following several intercepts on the B-52 we headed back to JAX but not before I experienced my first and only ever supersonic flight. We reached Mach 1.03 briefly, the F-106 is a real gas-guzzler in afterburner not to mention that it's unlawful to "break the sound barrier" overland or offshore within 12 miles of the coast. Sonic booms break too much expensive plate glass. Soon we were back in the traffic pattern doing touch and go's at JAX. That is an experience in and of itself in a F-106. Airspeed on final is 185 knots and touchdown is at about 165, which is about 40-50 knots faster than a typical jet airliner. They don't do "squared" traffic pattern turns in

fighters so Ernie made a 180 degree turn from upwind to downwind and another 180 from downwind to final. I'm sure he wanted to "embellish" the experience for me and he pulled about 5 or 6 "G's" in those tight turns. After a few touch and go's we made a full stop landing and taxied to the ramp. Ernie would love to have made me, a lowly helicopter pilot, sick and he never knew how close he came to doing just that. On the taxi in I removed my gloves for use as barf bags, just in case. Thank God I didn't suffer that indignity. As I climbed out of the aft cockpit and down the ladder I realized that I was wrung out; my legs felt rubbery and it was all I could do to stand on my own. Until those 2 hours of fun I had no idea how athletic flying a fighter jet is. Those who fly fighters had better be in damn good shape, my hat's off to Ernie and all "fighter jockeys."

Ernie let me have the controls to try my hand with a supersonic jet and it was both interesting and fun but, just like in a helicopter, push the stick left or right and the aircraft rolls in that direction. Pull back on the stick and the nose goes up, push forward on it and, voilà, nose down. After the experience I have to admit that I often longed for a throttle with an "afterburner" detent. During the flight mostly I observed and took lots of photos with my 35MM camera and I'll never forget how, when in a high "G" turn, my camera, hands and forearms quickly were in my lap.

Several years later I tried to get Ernie to ride with me in my UH-60L, Blackhawk. It doesn't zoom like a fighter jet but, at night, flying low-level (100 feet or less) while wearing night vision goggles in a Blackhawk at 150 knots is its own special kind of thrill. Ernie passed on my offer and I'm sure it had nothing to do with courage, which he had in spades but he is about 20 years my senior and, as I'm now discovering, we all eventually become a bit fragile.

*More Photos On Following Pages*



*I'm holding on to the ladder to prevent falling to my knees after having been "wrung out."*





*A great American and a great guy, Ernie Webster, Lt. Col., USAF Ret.*



*Our flight leader in a F-106A behind our target B-52.*

*p.s. You don't fire nuclear tipped missiles from this range, not if you want to live to tell about it.  
That would be a bit like throwing a nuclear hand grenade.*