

New Pages for the "Dash-One"

or

How I Made the First Flameout Landing in the A-37!

Of all my A-37 combat missions and war stories, I guess the time I made the deadstick landing at Tan Son Nhut was the one most people remember and wanna hear about. So, with a short preamble, here's the story.

I had never flown with the "Old Man" before that day. Rumor had it that he was checking up on me prior to endorsing my letter of evaluation from the Pleiku Detachment, which had just folded. In any case, Bill Lutgen and Don Dalton had conspired to paint a picture of me that bore little resemblance to the new and still learning pilot I was at the time (the nickname "Boy Wonder" had been bestowed by Lutgen, and I was having a hard time living up to it). Col. Weber probably just wanted to see if there was at least a glimmer of truth he could agree with before he signed. Little did anyone suspect that I was about to be presented with such an unbelievable opportunity to add to the legend!

After scrambling from the alert pad, Col. Weber and I arrived at a troops-in-contact situation about 25 miles southwest of Saigon. After a coupla passes in the target area, the fuel low light blinked. We were racing around as fast as we could go making CBU passes, and my first thought was that I was using gas faster than the system could pump it. I told Col. Weber about this, but before we could talk it over the gomers made a run for it across an open field. I couldn't resist making another CBU pass. After the pass, the low light stayed on and total fuel was noticeably lower. I flew towards the river to drop my expended CBU pods as Col. Weber joined up.

As he closed, he informed me that one engine was smoking and I was leaving a trail of mist! So, instead of just dropping the empty pods, I jettisoned everything and shut down the engine. We began a climb towards home and started to review the situation -- fuel low light on, about 1500-2000 pounds of gas, evidence of battle damage, 20 miles or so to Tan Son Nhut and another 15 to home. We decided to try for home.

Upon leveling off at 15,000 feet or so, total fuel had dropped below 1000 pounds and I could actually see it decreasing on the gauge! By the time we were five miles from Saigon, I only had 3 or 400 pounds remaining and Bien Hoa wasn't lookin' good. I

told Col. Weber that I wouldn't make it and would try to get down at Tan Son Nhut. We went over to tower frequency and declared an emergency.

By now there was only a hundred pounds of gas or so remaining and there was no way to get on the ground before running outta gas. I got the gear down and maybe a little bit of flaps using normal hydraulics, then began spiraling down. A few seconds later the remaining engine surged a bit, then things got real quiet. A new page to Section III of the Dash One was about to be written!

Taking advantage of my altitude, I set up a glide at 140 to 150 knots or so to see how many feet I would lose in a 180 degree turn. 2000 to 2500 feet. Good, I could fly a pattern similar to a T-33. We knew that the old T-37 stuff wasn't going to work due to the weight and drag of the Mini-Thud, but I had done hundreds of T-33 flameout patterns over the last two years and could use those numbers as a starting point. Now for the gut check.

Approaching base leg, tower started giving me a ration of sierra about some TWA 707 that was a few miles out on final. I told tower that I wasn't going around, couldn't go around, and that I was no kidding making an emergency landing. At this point, Col. Weber got somewhat peeved and in no uncertain terms informed the jerks that I was flying a glider! He then asked me if I was ready to get out if things turned to worms, and I replied that I had stowed everything and would just point out to the west before jumping. He was hanging right in there on my right wing the whole time, pretty as can be, as we turned onto final.

I began to feel real good as we rolled out on final between 1000 and 1500 feet. Moving my aimpoint from about a third the way down the runway to the end of the runway almost bit me. My airspeed didn't increase all that much and I wondered if I had done the right thing. Coming across the overrun at 150, I began a slow, gradual flare. Boy, did the airspeed bleed off in a hurry. After touching down in the first 1000 feet, I was absolutely ecstatic. Talk about the Pepsi "Uh Huh" ingredient, this was definitely it!

While rolling out, I began planning a cool, calm turnoff at mid-field to greet the host of fire trucks and other well-wishers racing alongside. Not this time, however, as the right tire began thumping soundly and I was barely able to keep the thing on the runway as I slithered to a stop. Seems the gomers had also hit my tire. Then, to really deflate my spirits, the firechief made me help push the thing off the runway so that TWA airliner could land. I also had to save the minigun. Oh, well.....

So there you have it. But wait, there's more! The best part of the story was still to come.

The flying safety officer picked me up in his jeep and we tore off to meet Col. Weber, who had done a closed pattern, landed and was now waiting to take me home. We both got outta the jeep and I started to get into Col. Weber's jet. He moved forward, then turned a little. I ran forward. Then he did it again, and I'm thinking, "If you'll just stop for a second I'll jump in." By now the flying safety type told me he was leaving to get back to the crippled airplane and asked us to get in touch when we got home. Col. Weber finally stopped moving long enough for me to climb in, and I strapped in as he started up the starboard engine. My first words were, "Gee sir, I thought you'd never stop long enough for me to get in." He responded by pointing out at the left wing, then started laughing, "Hell, McAdoo, if the flying safety officer saw that, he wouldn't let us takeoff!". There, about two or three feet inboard of the tip tank, in the middle of the wing, was a five-inch hole caused by a .50 calibre hit!