

Editor's note:

Date: April 8, 1968

Aircraft: EKA-3B BuNo 147666

Crew: Pilot- LCDR Frank Burrows

E/N- LT Floyd Stokes (bailed out)

3rd Seat- LTJG Paul Zubritsky

Squadron: VAW-13 Det 64 (later VAQ-133)

Location: USS Constellation of the coast of Southern California

[147666](#) now sits in the back lot, and slightly ignored, at the Western Aerospace Museum in Oakland, Ca. It was converted back to a KA-3B and last assigned to VAK-208.

[LCDR Frank Burrows](#) received the DFC for saving the aircraft.

April Evening

During night carquals things got worse in the EKA-3B as it did three uncontrollable snap rolls before, thanks to the pilot's skill, things got better. After he salvaged the situation on the third roll, the aircraft scooped out at 400 to 500 ft and climbed steeply. However, he landed minus one crewman. His E/N (ECM/Navigator) had bailed out at 3000 ft and was eventually rescued by a plane guard helicopter.

The happy hour sea story of this incident will probably become a classic. For a starter, the following account, based on investigators' findings, will give you a pretty good idea of how it was

As the aircraft began its second roll at a much faster rate in spite of the pilot's countermeasures, he broadcast on UHF, "We're out of control! We're out of control! Bail out!" Then as he succeeded in regaining control and the rotation stopped, he cancelled the bailout order. At this point, however, the E/N who had already disconnected his communications plugs was on his way.

The third crewmember of the crew, the E/O (ECM/Operator) did not hear the bailout order although he did hear the first part of the transmission. (He was experiencing a ringing sensation in his left ear which had been giving him trouble in the bounce pattern.) Turning around in his rear-facing seat to see what was going on, he saw the E/N unfasten his seat belt, get up and blow the overhead hatch. The E/N stated later that he blew the upper hatch because he was momentarily unsure of the location of the lower hatch handle and he felt exiting- from the upper hatch would be more advantageous at their low altitude.

"The hatch blew open and the E/N was turning around and about to go out," the E/O states, "when I heard the pilot say 'Stay!' I grabbed the E/N and tried to hold him in but there was no holding him -he was going out!" (And just to demonstrate that everything is relative and it's all in your point of view, here's the E/N's statement on this event: "With the help of the third seat man I was able to lift myself up and grasp the upper hatch.")

The E/N used his elbows to hoist himself partially out of the cockpit and the airstream pulled him the rest of the way out. As he sailed back over the top of the fuselage, he was apparently facing aft. He hit the starboard side of the vertical stabilizer in a glancing blow absorbed mostly by his right hip and thigh. His flight boot scuffed along from forward of the horizontal stabilizer up to and over its leading edge.

"A split second after I left the cockpit I felt a bump on my right thigh, then I was clear of the aircraft and falling," he stated later. "As my baro-release lanyard was not

connected, I pulled the D-ring - no difficulty - and observed a good chute. The moon was bright enough to allow me to see the horizon and I glanced momentarily at the water to estimate my altitude. I checked the accessibility of my koch fittings and Mk-3C toggles and quickly reviewed what I had learned at deep water survival school a month or so earlier."

When the parachute began to oscillate he attempted to stop it but with no success. The oscillation didn't seem serious so he prepared for the landing by inflating the right side of his Mk-3C. He put his hands on the koch fittings and lifted the upper part of the latch. About 200 ft above the water he inadvertently disconnected the left koch fitting and the rest of the descent was made with only the right riser connected to the parachute.

"When I hit the water, I pulled the starboard koch fitting and was immediately disengaged from the chute. As soon as I broke the surface, I inflated the left side of my Mk-3C and, spotting a helo on the horizon, activated my most easily accessible signaling device - the strobe light."

The E/N's troubles still weren't entirely over. After igniting the night end of a signal flare, he saw the helo disappear over the horizon. No other aircraft were insight. He then realized that he had not deployed his raft during the parachute descent and that the seat pan and parachute container were still attached to him by the lower rocket jet fitting. He released one leg strap and attempted to remove the raft.

"I had great difficulty locating the raft release and finally unzipped one side of the seat pack and forced the raft out," he recalls. "It must have taken me 5 to 7 minutes to accomplish this. My progress was hampered by the imbalance caused by the weight of the seat pack and back pack."

As soon as he got the raft out, he connected the lanyard to his Mk-3C and inflated it, deployed the sea anchor and boarded the raft. He readied another day/night signal flare for easy accessibility and fired a pencil flare in case a ship might be close enough to see it.

"I felt calm enough," he recalls, "but was apprehensive about being swept out to sea and concerned about the safety of the other two crewmembers."

He was rescued by plane guard helo after a half hour in the water.

Meanwhile the pilot had regained control and flown the A-3 to the beach.

"Once we got squared away on the outbound heading it took great physical pressure to hold the aircraft upright at all times," he states. "Not only that - but I had to think about what had happened and get the rescue vehicles to pick up the other crewman . . . We were at 16,000 ft at night with the wind rushing into the cockpit at up to 300 kts. I was completely drenched in sweat from trying to physically hold the aircraft. At no time did I ever feel cold till I got out of the aircraft on the deck ... It was a pretty tough go . . . I thought we had really had it."

Investigators concluded that the primary cause of this incident was material failure of the aileron actuating linkage bolt.

In the closing remarks in his report, the squadron commanding officer paid high tribute to the pilot's performance.

"I would like to depart from the accepted practice of not including praise for a job well done in the mishap report," he wrote, "in order to state my admiration for the pilot's courage, professionalism and skill in the face of this situation in which one wrong movement would, have resulted in tragedy. His almost incredible feat of flying has not only saved the lives of himself and his crewmen but also preserved a valuable aircraft. That this aircraft was saved is now resulting in a program of inspection throughout the A-3 community which no doubt will save other aircraft which might otherwise be lost due to similar mishaps."

All in all, it was quite an April evening.

Additional comments from Ralph Poore (CO of VAW-13)

The story about Frank Burrows is OK, but incomplete. When the aircraft was inverted and heading down, Frank muttered "I'm going in like a man," and rammed the throttles wide open. That was when the aircraft righted itself and then Frank used cross control, full left aileron, full right rudder, to maintain upright flight. He gingerly nursed it to about 13,000 feet, aimed in the general direction of Miramar (remember he launched with 6,000 pounds of fuel) yelled to Zubritsky to dial in Miramar on the tacan (remember the pilot did not have access to navigation instruments, they were on the right console), broadcast on guard channel his intentions (noise level too high to hear the UHF) and landed downwind on Miramar's longest runway, and promptly flamed out as he was taxiing off the duty runway.

I saw him two hours later and we drank coffee until noon. When, via the COD, we got back on board, we did manage to find a quart of scotch and made a dent in it.

The next morning, Jerry Norris and I wrote him up for the DFC.

The story is absolutely the truth, authenticated by Frank, himself, to me and later with Floyd Stokes. Floyd came to my stateroom the next night and gave up his wings. I regretfully accepted them. I suggested he put in for a change in designator, which he did. He became an Intelligence Specialist. Many years later I ran into him in an elevator in the Hoffman Building, (just inside the beltway in Alexandria) which housed The spooks. He had been promoted to LCDR, but I lost account of him. I have no idea where he may be today.

The entire episode is indeed heroic. I submitted an emergency FUR the day following when all this occurred. It turned out that all Douglas multiengine jet aircraft has identically the same aileron control configuration as the A3. Within weeks, we learned that more than thirty aircraft world wide, upon inspection, had the same corroded bolt, just waiting to fail. Frank's guts not only save himself and the airplane, but clearly avoided disaster for uncounted others.