

"All in a Days Work!"

**Submitted by Ronald DeSantis
VAH-9 A3D Plane Captain**

This event occurred during Operation Blue Bat, 15 July - 20 Oct. 1958

The catapult shot from the USS Saratoga (CVA-60) was uneventful but exhilarating as usual. It was a 2 hour plus hop over the Mediterranean Sea in mid summer of 1958. It was just before the Lebanon crisis started.

Shortly after the cat shot, I was beginning to worry. I had not visited the head prior to departure and two hours was starting to seem like a long time before we would trap back aboard. Being the 4th passenger in the jump seat, time was going slowly with nothing to do but enjoy the hop. Finally the mission was about over and we entered the pattern for our turn to final.

Thoughts of getting to the head as soon as possible were crowding out any concerns about landing. The approach was by the book. On the ball, hit the deck, and grab a wire. We were slowing down under negative Gs as normal, and then all hell broke loose. Actually, we broke loose, as the arresting wire had separated. I assume it broke at one of the fittings that secured it to the machinery below deck.

Training and practice is the name of the game. LCDR R. W. Lagare, was the pilot that day. He had reacted as trained and had gone to full military power as we grabbed the cable. We still had power on when the cable let go but having lost most of our airspeed we dipped below the deck after dribbling off the ship. I remember looking up at the catwalk on the port side bow as we left the angle deck

The J57 P-10s had come to life without hesitation and we were at 100% on both engines. Pratt & Whitney had done their homework.

Our BN, LTJG A. C. Deana, reached over and helped LCDR Lagare with things on the center console. The third crewman whose name I don't remember, was screaming on the intercom "Dive brakes, dive brakes." They had been extended for landing and we sure didn't need them now.

I sat there waiting for water impact which never happened, thanks to the training of the crew and quick reactions.

We were flying again and gaining altitude. The next thing I know we were again on final and made a successful trap and home safe on the Sara. CDR E. A. Horrell (XO) was understandably concerned about

a 4th person in the cockpit during carrier operations. A ban was put in place prohibiting future flights with 4 people on board.

I am sorry that I cannot remember the name of the third crewman but perhaps he will read this and remember the event and make his name and presence known. You guys will always be in my heart and prayers.

A special thanks to LCDR Lagare for being a professional, understanding person. Where ever you are, thank you and god bless you.

THANKS AGAIN GUYS!

Ron DeSantis, A3D Plane Captain

P.S. I did get lucky and made it to the head in the island when we landed.

editors note:

LCDR Rupe Legare was the squadron Safety Officer; an important job because the A3D reputation on the ships had been poor. Part of this problem was due to the selection of "plane commanders" from multi-engined recipis. Selection was later changed to focus on carrier background. CDR Ernie Horrell was the XO, and he brought along a distinguished record as an enlisted pilot in Navy test programs. Both pilots retired as CAPT. The prohibition against 4th crewmen didn't last long, if it ever was formalized. Ed Parris