

## **...Then the Fun Began**

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The A3D with a crew of three had been launched from the carrier at approximately 2000 for CCA [carrier controlled approach] practice. Recovery was scheduled at 2030. The weather was clear above with scattered low clouds. Visibility was 10 miles. The air temperature was 50' F., water temperature 78'. Five-foot waves rolled across the ocean surface.

Under positive control of CCA, the pilot made three CCA penetrations to a wave off before being cleared for a CCA penetration to a landing. On the fourth pass for a landing aboard, the aircraft appeared to be in good shape, on speed, on glide slope and lined up on center line until just prior to touchdown. (The ISO was handicapped in determining wing position because the aircraft's port wing light was out.) The mirror was working properly. The pilot experienced no difficulty with the brilliance of the deck runway lights.

At this point, the pilot, detecting a left drift, attempted to correct the situation. Before his corrections could become effective, however, the aircraft engaged the No. 4 cross-deck pendant.

As the pilot said later, "The arrestment and run out appeared normal. Then the fun began . . . "

On run out, the aircraft tracked from starboard to port. At completion of the run out, the plane hesitated momentarily, then slowly went over the port side ... paused ... then became inverted ... and paused again. The arresting wire parted. Dislodging several life rafts stowed in bins, the A3D dropped into the water inverted and in a slightly nose-down attitude.

Water rushed through the open upper escape hatch into the dark cockpit. The pilot released his safety belt and discarded his APH-5 helmet and oxygen mask. He rose to the floor of the aircraft to take several deep breaths of the trapped air he knew would be there, and then submerged to search for the bombardier-navigator and gunner-navigator. He found no one. After returning to the air space for a few more breaths, he dived down and out through the open hatch. He surfaced alongside the fuselage on the starboard side.

Meanwhile, the gunner-navigator had escaped through the canopy above his seat where the Plexiglas had broken out on impact. He surfaced near the wing tip, inflated his life vest and looked around to see if anyone else had gotten out. Moments later, the pilot surfaced nearby.

When the pilot inflated his Mark 2 life vest, tears in the outer flotation cell allowed some of air to escape. Holding on to the gunner-navigator, he inflated the center flotation cell orally. The men then crawled onto the wing to rest and plan their next move. They shouted the bombardier-navigator's name several times but there was no answer.

Although they could see two plane guard destroyers lying dead in the water with their searchlights working the area, the survivors did not fire signal flares because of the strong smell of fuel around the crash area. They decided to get away from the aircraft and to swim towards the closer destroyer. After blowing some more air into their life vests, they jumped off the aft edge of the wing and swam toward the ship. The gunner-navigator blew his whistle and the pilot waved a life vest flashlight. A few minutes later, they were picked up 100 yards from the wreckage by a motor whaleboat from the destroyer. They had been in the water 14 minutes.

Following the pick-up, the whaleboat circled the aircraft wreckage twice in a search for the third crewman. As the boat headed away from the plane, in the distance the occupants saw a small light intermittently

some 1000 yards from the wreckage. Drawing nearer, they heard a whistle, then were able to make out the figure of the bombardier-navigator from the light reflecting off his orange summer flight suit. As they got closer they saw he was sitting in the middle of an inflated life raft – one of the rafts the A3D had knocked off the carrier as it went over the side.

At approximately 2335, the bombardier-navigator was pulled aboard the whaleboat. The signalman signaled the plane guard destroyer that all survivors had been rescued and 10 minutes later, the whaleboat was hoisted aboard.

The gunner-navigator and the bombardier-navigator suffered only minor bruises and cuts in the crash. The pilot sustained a moderately severe injury of the right hand requiring several months' grounding.