

Deadsticking a T-bird

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The T-33 was a reliable jet trainer – if you flipped the right switch for the tip tanks.

I was a solo pilot in a T-Bird (the T-33, a single jet engine-powered aircraft that was used in Korea) preparing for takeoff to fly wing with another T-Bird that had a student with an instructor. As before every flight, you check to be sure fuel will transfer to the fuselage tank that feeds the engine. The switch to pressurize the wing tip fuel tanks is then turned to the ON position. The instructor in the lead aircraft motioned to me... come on... come on let's go. With all that pressure from the instructor in the lead aircraft, I did not flip the switch to pressurize the wing tip fuel tanks.

At an altitude of about 5,000 feet, I began to get "surging" in the engine. It was the exact same engine indication for loss of the turbine. I transmitted to the instructor in the lead T-Bird of my problem and set up the emergency landing procedures. I was right over the two runways at Greenville AFB to do a 360 landing pattern. I transmitted to ground where, and what, I was going to do.

Turning from downwind to base, I noticed that there were T-Birds on both runways getting ready for take-off. "Well," I thought, "I will land the T-Bird between the runways, on the grass." I planned to land long since there was arresting gear at the end of the runway if I overshot the landing.

One of the emergency procedures is to punch off the (full of fuel) wing tip tanks. However, if only one goes you cannot control the airplane at landing speeds. So I elected to leave the wing tip tanks on the aircraft.

I touched down right on the numbers, and rolled to a stop on the active runway. Instructors in the Mobile Control Unit came up to me sitting in the (now open) cockpit shouting, "What the **** are you doing? You didn't even call on final!"

I received 100 plus merits for doing a fine emergency landing pattern, but 1,000 plus demerits for head up and locked, for not interrupting the fuel starvation correctly.

Finally, the quote under a photo of me in the "Round-Out" G (for Air Force class of 57-H), is "What a Clown...Damn it, I'm alive, aren't I?" My Instructor was Lt. George Bushey "You Got that" with our call sign "Rain Dance."

Here's a bonus story: This is an event I had in the Mass ANG flying F-86Hs in the early 1960s.



It's difficult to do, but you can bend the tail on an F-86.

We were a flight of four F-86Hs flying from Westfield Air Base in Springfield, Massachusetts, to a gunnery range in New Jersey to practice strafing, bomb dropping, and high angle (about 75 degree angle to the ground) rocket firing at ground targets. On one of the high angle rocket firing passes, the G suit connection became disconnected. After firing the rockets, you pull 3 to 4 Gs to recover from the high angle dive; clearing the ground by 100-150 feet.

On the high angle dive recovery, without the G-suit connection, I began to gray-out...which means you gradually lose your sight. Do you think I released the back pressure? No way!

When I was sure I was flying up away from the ground, I released the back pressure. I looked at the G meter in the cockpit. The redline for the F-86H is 8.3 Gs; but the gauge goes up to 10-plus. Where was the telltale pointer on the gauge? You're right: pegged at the 10-plus location. So I said, "I'm not flying any more high angle dives on this flight."

Upon landing at Westfield Air Base, the crew chief came up to me and said, "Captain Godston, you have just ****-canned this aircraft." The tail section of the F-86H was 10 to 15 degrees from where it was supposed to be.

So much with flying without the G suit being connected... never happened again!