

Sometime last fall or winter we had a rather long phone conversation which dealt with our various VQ experiences. You suggested I write and describe one of these events. I am on a working vacation in the White Mountains of Arizona with no neighbors, no phone and no shop to distract me so I'll take a shot at writing. Here goes.

I reported to VD-1 in August 1955 shortly after the event I shall describe occurred. It may be best described as a midsummer night's nightmare. One of our P4M;s was out that night doing what VQ-1 PM4's did when all of a sudden, apparently with no warning the plane lost its port 4360 engine. I mean lost, as in it made a sudden descent to earth unaccompanied by the P4M to which it was formerly attached. With the sudden loss of power and on aerodynamically inferior fire wall exposed, a descending spiral to the left began.

Meanwhile in the cockpit, as the story went, the young co-pilot, Karle Naggs, succeeded in getting the J33 jet engine which was located beneath and behind the 4360 started. This helped to regain control of the aircraft.

I will divert for a moment to recall a characteristic of flight crew life at VQ-1. We usually got up about 6AM and spent our day with preflight preparations and working on our jobs (admin, personnel, maintenance, etc.). We then took off about 12 hours later on flights that would be about 12 hours long. This made for a very long day and it was not unusual for one pilot to take a brief catnap in his seat while the other one watched things. The story had it that the pilot, Jim Edixon, was in the left part of the aircraft answering a call of nature this event occurred. Of course he abruptly made his forward took charge. After serious loss of altitude, control was regained.

This night was not without further incidents. In the midst of this poorly controlled descent, Taiwan air control queried whether they were flying a lost plane pattern and were advised the plane was spinning in.

The electronic officer came on the intercom, apparently repeatedly, to find if he should jettison the security bag (I've forgotten the proper term). The normally mild LT Edixon is supposed o have suggest it be stuffed into a dark and odorous place.

The exhausted crew made it back to Naha, Okinawa where I believe they had to make a rare, actual GCA approach and landing.

Fate was unkind to LT Edixon even after the plane was stopped. As I heard it, everyone else got out of the plane uneventfully except LT Edixon. For those unfamiliar with the P4M, the front crew got out through a vertical tunnel with a door that hinged down. This door had steps in it, and for most, it was a bit high so you stepped off the bottom slip and dropped to the ground. On this night with the loss of the engine weight, the planes balance shifted slowly to the back and settled slowly onto the tail skag. When LT Edixon stepped off the bottom step it had become about 8 feet in the air. He got a broken wrist.

When I arrived at VQ-1 at Sangley Point, PI, LT Edixon had an arm cast and the P4M was still in Naha for a 4360 transplant.

The only explanation for the engine coming off is possibly a propeller blade failed and the sudden in balance caused the engine mounts to fail.

I guess that is it for now. I haven't sent in my reunion papers and don't have them with me. I probably will only attend the Saturday night dinner since I'm living in Tucson. My golf wouldn't qualify to get me in the initial tryouts for the Special Olympics.

I don't know what use I could be as a volunteer for the reunion but if whoever is in charge wants to call me, I'll do what I can. My schedule is a problem since I won't finish here until 8-28> Then the weekend of 9-11 through 9/13 I'll be managing a church camp for a men's retreat. Other than that I'll give it a shot.

I hope your eyes haven't buckled under the load of my penmanship.

Respectfully,

Hugh Ward