



**580761 Fire
Selfridge AFB 1962**

By Lonnie Berry

Selfridge AFB 1962 Shelter Fire Destroyed F-106A 58-0761 -- Damaged 58-0763

By Francis Richie via Bruce Gordon



"My [Bruce Gordon] former F-106 crew chief, Francis Richie, sent me this story of the 1962 fire at Selfridge AFB shelter where 58-0761 was destroyed and 58-0763 got so hot that its internal wiring melted and it was sent as a display to the Air Force Museum" – Bruce Gordon, Maj, USAF (Ret), 26 Aug 2016

Sometime during the Summer of 1962 a F-106A landed "short" at Selfridge AFB and the tail-hook, still attached to the aircraft caught the arresting cable and slammed the nose down with the nose wheel strut damaging the front portion of the aircraft.

I can only assume that the aircraft was in an extreme nose high attitude for that hook to catch the cable. This must have been what the review board and General Dynamics felt also because they designed a tail hook "guard" and issue a Field T.O. to install this "guard".

Rumor had it that a certain pilot from the 94th FIS and a certain pilot from the 71st FIS had a wager to see who could land the shortest. I don't if there was any truth to this but I did get to know both of the pilots mentioned and both were "good guys" with just enough mischievous to lend credence to the rumor!

Now, before the guard could be manufactured and distributed the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred, and the aircraft from Selfridge were deployed to Patrick AFB in FL and Volk Field in WI.

In middle November the aircraft started to return to SAFB and the maintenance crew and equipment was spread pretty thin between the three bases; two seeing aircraft off and one receiving them. At the same time we were assigned a new Maintenance Officer, a First Lieutenant. I know his name and will never forget it, but his name is not important.

This First Lieutenant had come up through the ranks. At one time he was a Tech Sargent and became a Commission Officer through a program the USAF had created where if an NCO accumulated enough credits and had X amount of years in service he could obtain a commission and because of his previous service his commission would be as a First Lieutenant instead of a Second Lieutenant. I was once told that this replaced the ranks of Warrant Officers. By this time you must be asking "Where is he going with this story?" Trust me it all fits together.

Now our new Maintenance Officer had people skills somewhere to the right of Attila the Hun!

Because we had equipment, people, aircraft and, aircraft knowledge spread over three bases we were unable to meet our "sortie quota". Our new Maintenance Officer decided to put all maintenance crews on a "12 on, 12 off seven day a week schedule". Because we did not have enough tow vehicles he had the crew chiefs pushing aircraft in and out of hangars by hand. If you lived on base and/or in barracks you could expect to be called out at any time of night or day to come to the line and hand push aircraft around. He dressed down E-7-8's in front of their charges and never complimented anyone who warranted it.

This insanity went on for about two months. Finally as we were getting the aircraft back in shape and on time we started catching up with non-essential T.O's. The tail hook guard was back in play!

Early in 1963 we pulled 2 birds off alert duty and towed them from the barns to the shelters. I am sure you know that an aircraft "on alert" with external fuel tanks has their shear pins in place. Whereas when the aircraft is in maintenance it has its safety pins in place. As 58-0761 came off alert the Crew Chief or maintenance team did NOT replace the shear pins with safety pins.

58-0761 and 58-0763 were placed shelters #5 and #6 to have the tail hook guard TO completed. The TO instructions were to place a "cushion" under the hook then release it using the cockpit switch/button. At this point you could bolt the guard on to the existing frame and reset the hook. 20 minute job at best.

The crew chief on duty that night sent his OJT candidate up to the cockpit and told him to press that button to drop the tail hook. Unfortunately the young man did not know which button to push or did not read the nomenclature that well and he pushed the button to drop the external tanks (filled with JP -4). The same tanks that had shear pins instead of safety pins. The flame from the explosive bolts lit up the shelter like the Fourth of July. Two F-106A Fighter Interceptors gone!

They convened a Courts Martial and the enlisted personnel all had civilian attorneys that specialized in Military Justice. They were pretty much exonerated on the grounds that they were overworked, stressed and not responsible for their actions due to fatigue. They also mentioned that the work schedule they were expected to keep during a peace-time stage was unreasonable.

All the enlisted men were promoted at their next time-in-grade due date and reassigned.

The Maintenance Officer was relieved of duty and I never heard of him again.

-- Francis Richie, F-106 Crew Chief