

“G-Suit”

By Lee Everitt

I was an F-106 pilot with the 319th Malmstrom AFB, Montana August 1971 - May 1972, and the 460th Grand Forks AFB, N.D. June 1972 - January 1974.

This narrative concerns what I consider my most memorable experience in flying the “six” during my Air Force career. It revolves around a worn G-suit zipper that gave way at a most inopportune time. It was in the fall of 1973 and we were to send four aircraft and pilots to Tyndall for a week of College Dart exercises with the F-8’s out of Navy Dallas. I had recently been checked out in the ACT program along with several other new “real” fighter pilots. I had always felt like something was missing in my being a “fighter pilot if I was not ACT qualified. So now I was one.

This was going to be a real fun week for all of us as we showed the Navy pukes a few things. Boy, was I in for a rude awakening. The pilots the Navy sent were all Viet Nam vets that were now weekend warriors when they weren’t flying for the airlines. These guys were “goooooood”. If I remember correctly, we flew 2 sorties a day and the first three days were 2v2. Lt. Pete Anderson and I teamed were teamed together for the 2 ship work. Being older and wiser (that’s a joke), I was to fly lead and Pete was to be “blue 2”. For the first two days, all I can remember is looking back and seeing nothing but F-8 intakes. This getting killed every sortie was getting old in a hurry. This was in the days before the computerized ACT ranges that could electronically recreate the air battle during the debriefings. We had to rely on verbal accounts of the battle and the recorded radio conversations of each flight. You could tell from the radio tapes who were the pros and who were the new guys. The greater the intensity of the battle, the higher pitched Pete and my voices became while the F-8 guys sounded like they were sitting in their living rooms having a quiet after dinner conversation.

After 2 days of humiliation (or so it seemed), Pete and I decided to switch positions. He would now lead us to glory as our flight lead. It was a great morning for flight but a bit hazy out in W-470 over the Gulf. Pete and were ready for’um. We briefed to go to min burner 30 miles out to prevent them from seeing our burner plumes and to have plenty of energy on our side when the fight began. As the GCI guy called out our targets, I felt like this was the time to see some F-8 tailpipes rather than their intakes. I did not have a visual on them and suddenly Pete called them at our “right 10 o’clock”. Now just where the hell is my right 10 o’clock? As the old saying goes, “if you come the fork in the road, take it”. So, I did. I looked at the 10 o’clock position just long enough to see me fly right by my adversary, and once more start to get a glimpse of those darn intakes again. Where Pete was by this time, I had no idea and what’s more I didn’t care. All I knew was that this sucker was going to have to work to nail my butt this time. I had up such a head of steam, that I thought I would out zoom him. I was in a nose low attitude and a sharp right hand bank in full burner. I rolled wings level and pulled back on the stick and watched the G-meter go the 7-g limit. Now here’s where it got interesting.

I was still using the same G-suit I had been issued back in pilot training in 1969 and I now was to learn that zippers can wear out. As I am transitioning from a nose low attitude to a vertical attitude at 6-7g’s, the waist zipper broke. (Can you say blackout?) Did I ever blackout! I was somewhere around 25000 feet when the zipper popped and near a 90-degree climb. When I came to, I was going through 38000 feet; the airspeed was dropping through 120 kts. And shortly thereafter, it pegged out at the bottom of the airspeed scale around 45 kts. (I think 45 was as low as it could go). You’ve heard the saying “out of airspeed and ideas”. That just about covered it for me. However, I did have over 8 miles of altitude with which to work. The “six” was notorious for the flat spin, but we were taught that if the stick was placed “center and forward of neutral” it could not and would not enter a spin. The only things that I knew to do when I found my self in this situation was go to idle and put the stick “center and forward of neutral. I can’t prove it, but I’ll bet Hulk Hogan himself could not have budged that stick when I got it in the “center forward of neutral position”. But now I’m still pointed straight up and sliding straight down. (I couldn’t remember ever practicing this in the simulator, I must have been absent that day). Somewhere around 30,000 feet the nose started oscillating left and right and started to drop. Looking back I must have resembled a falling leaf until the nose of the aircraft finally dropped below the horizon and airspeed

indicator unpegged itself. Somewhere below 20,000 I was flying again and there was that damned F-8 waiting on me. As luck would have it, I fell in behind him and actually called a kill shortly before his buddy nailed my tail again.

The debriefing was interesting to say the least. The narrative from one of the F-8 guys went something like this: “ We were unaware just where the “sixes” were, when all of a sudden one came by me like a bat out of hell. He swapped ends so fast that I couldn’t come close to staying with him. But he kept going and going and going. Then he started coming and coming and coming but tail first. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything quite like that maneuver before. He should have had a tail gunner. I think I was so stunned by what I had just seen that I let up and the son-of-a-gun ended up behind me.”

Needless to say I was issued a brand spanking new G-suit that very day.

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