

F106A-59-100 and Captain Muldoon!

By MSgt Marv Donnelly, MA-1, 11FIS, 343CAM, 87FIS, 84FIS, and now RETIRED!

I'm not so sure of the date of this incident, but I think it was sometime in the fall of 1969, or Spring of 1970. The weather was clear with a little gusty wind here and there. We were sitting in the launch truck on the apron outside of shelter 14 at Duluth, Minnesota. Home of the 11th FIS/343rd CAM and later the 87th FIS.

Our squadron had just completed a hard quarter of flying and fixing "sixes" As a reward, we all got to participate in a flyby of ALL available Sixes in the squadron. We had 20 of them at the time. Well, we did get ALL 20 of them off the ground and they did a flyby over Duluth and the surrounding countryside, with no problems encountered. Then they finally started lining up in the pattern for landing. Almost all of the Sixes landed without mishap! But the last two were still in the air.

We were given a low altitude flyby on the deck by one of the last flyers, with the exhilarating and heart pounding pitch up and climb into the stratosphere with full military burner! WOW!! What a sight! And the sound!!! Still rolls in my ears!

One of the last two Sixes to hit the deck was 59-100, flown by Captain Muldoon! A short (5ft1in!) hard partying, hard flying Irishman! As 59-100 touched down, a gust of wind, or maybe a left over swirl of patchy air from the previous flyers caused the aircraft to lift back up, on the left wing. This caused the right main gear to collapse, dragging the right wing into the runway. This was followed by the Capt correcting for the right side wing drag. Once he corrected, the aircraft settled down on the left side, causing the left main gear to punch itself out through the left wing. The nose began to settle down and when it touched, the nose gear simply was swept off like a windshield wiper removes rain, or snow in Duluth!

The aircraft started to veer to the left and off the runway, headed directly for the flight line truck that ALL of us MA-1 troops on the recovery crew were sitting in. As the aircraft barreled down on the truck (A 1965 International Metro Step van with one of the dual back doors welded shut!) we ALL decided it was time to vacate the step van! There must have been about 12 or so of us in there and we all made it out a door! Any DOOR! The only one that didn't was SSgt Mike Nehila. That was the only time I can recall where he actually had followed Air Force directives and had fastened the seatbelt!! He could not get it off and had to sit and watch the airplane coming directly at the front of the vehicle.

The Six, with grass and dirt flying everywhere, finally stopped short of the truck, about 20 yards as I recall.

We were all standing outside the truck and watched helplessly as the aircraft skidded to a halt, in front of the truck and about 50 yards from the fire station. The firefighters ran over with a couple of handheld extinguishers. The aircraft was still running and had power on! Captain Muldoon looked a little wide eyed but somewhat relieved with a BIG grin!. He opened the cockpit canopy, went about the business of getting all of his belts and hooks unfastened from the ejection seat, then he shut the engine off. With the engine still winding down, he stood up in the cockpit, just made sure he wasn't hooked to anything, then leaped off onto the ground and ran over to our van. He sat down inside the right front door and took a deep breath and a big sigh of relief! He asked if "Anyone got a cigarette?" SSgt Nehila, who had finally got his seatbelt off, offered Captain Muldoon one from his pack. They both lit up and Muldoon inhaled his in one long puff!

The next comment from Captain Muldoon was "WOW! Did you all see that?" "Yes Sir, we did!" was the unanimous reply. The last of the sixes finally landed after 59-100 settled in and we had let Control know that we had the pilot with us in the launch truck. All in all, a very scary moment for us, and especially for SSgt Nehila and for Captain Muldoon. What a picture I still have in my mind of that afternoon!

By the way, that aircraft was the only one I ever removed an 045 compressor unit from WITHOUT opening up the "05" door! I stood outside and reached in through the hole in the left side airframe, where the nose wheel gear had ripped the skin off!