

## A-6 Partial Ejections (1 of 2) RDML Rupe Owens

### First Partial Ejection: Jim Brooks

I had my A-6 Demo flight on February 7, 1963 – in the right seat. The next day I was in the pilot's seat. My logbook shows that VA-42 operated 149479 and 149477 that month when I logged 17 hours as First Pilot. We flew those two A6'S until July 1963 when we received our first full system aircraft Bureau Number (BUNO) 149939.



VA-42 was scheduled to CQ on FORRESTAL in June 1963. Skipper Jack Herman set up a practice CCA and trap at Pax River. I made two landings at PAX – one Touch & Go and one field arrested landing. On 11 July 1963 we went to the ship. Pilots occupied both seats in each aircraft. I was in BUNO 149477 with Jim Brooks. He flew first, making two traps; we swapped seats on deck. We did not need refueling before my catapult shot so we were ready pretty quickly. Taxiing up to Catapult 1, we were behind two A6s. Finally, I received the signal to move onto the catapult. First thing, before we entered the catapult track, the Yellow Shirt displayed an aircraft gross weight for me to acknowledge that was too high. We had not refueled and were several thousand pounds lighter; it took a couple hand signals to get the gross weight correct. Then we moved up onto the catapult and I felt the nose-tow connect with the shuttle. In no time, the Catapult Officer signaled for me to run up the engines.

From my standpoint, the A6 instruments looked ready to go, RPM, TPT, etc., In the Green. I saluted the Catapult Officer and shortly the catapult fired. The shot felt pretty hard (due to my A4 background, I suppose). As we rumbled down the catapult, I was aware that Jim's seat was moving up the rails. When I glanced over at him, he was behind me - as the seat followed the seat rails upward. I thought, DAMN, Jim's is ejecting!

Rechecking the airspeed and deck remaining and, knowing that the catapult felt harder than normal, I was sure we had a good shot from the standpoint of clearing the deck. Shortly, we reached the end of the catapult stroke and the A6 was airborne.

Pax River had complete studies to identify the optimum technique for making catapult takeoffs. This included setting the throttles at 100% and rotating the knob to tighten the throttles at the military power position. All of these things were done. At the end of the stroke, the pilot was to allow the A-6's nose to rise normally without holding the stick. Catching a glance, the AOA gauge was moving toward 3 'o'clock, or optimum position. However, it did not stop where it was supposed to, and the aircraft's nose continued upward. I could not see Jim Brooks since his parachute had pulled him and his ejection seat up the rails. And I was too busy to spend time searching for him.

I was thinking: How the hell am going to get the nose down? I didn't want to push the stick forward (I could not see the sea or horizon). I chose to make a steep turn, hoping that the nose would ease back down, and I could then, hopefully, see the water and the horizon. That worked. Now, still at full throttle, we were climbing.

Once things settled down, I looked over to check on Jim. He remained inside the cockpit, but his parachute cords were completely out of the canopy thru a small diameter hole in the canopy Plexiglas. I was ahead of the ship and starting to turn down-wind and re-enter the pattern. Without prompting, the Ship radioed "Your signal "BINGO, Oceana (something like) 280 at 65 miles." I looked over at Jim and his body was being pulled up against the canopy by the parachute. His helmet was forcing his head downward, restricting his ability to see the surroundings. I replied to the Ship that the B/N was in danger and I did not think we could fly that far in our condition. "Request immediate CHARLIE." The Ship's reply, as per normal, "WAIT, OUT."

I continued to work to the proper abeam position and, about at the 180, I received the only acceptable answer, "SIGNAL CHARLIE (authorization to land immediately)." I was a bit high entering the groove, but made some typical corrections and we landed, caught a 3-wire! 😊 I looked over as we trapped, and Jim's and seat came slamming down the seat rails. The parachute shroud lines, which had been fully deployed behind us, were quickly snapped in reverse and came from the aircraft's tail to its nose. I happened to see the rocket top, still attached to the parachute shroud lines flash by (good wing-tip distance from Jim's canopy). Soon we were stopped, chained and Jim was evacuated by the Enlisted Safety Personnel. He was placed in a stretcher and taken to Sick Bay. Basically, he suffered no real injuries.

Me? I was scared all the time that I might lose control with the parachute pulling from the astern position. The parachute deployed coming down the cat track which I did not know. Jim's radio was disconnected when the seat moved up the rails, so we were not able to communicate with each other during the event.

In the aftermath, Commander Naval Air Forces Atlantic, the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics, the Grumman Aircraft Company and the ejection seat manufacturer

worked several months trying to find the problem. I don't recall today what that might have been.

FORESTAL off-loaded the aircraft In Norfolk for repairs. A few days later, in the VA-42 Ready Room, the Commanding Officer came in, looked around and said, "Okay, Rupe, go over to Norfolk and get YOUR A6." I reclaimed the aircraft without a B/N seat and the side canopy had something covering part of it, so it was a bit difficult to see out to the right of the aircraft, taxiing or flying.

VA-42 CQ-ed again on 14 October 1963 and I was in 149477 again – with no problems that time. My next carrier landing was on 30 March 1965.