

**Capt. David W. Gould USMCR**

## **F-8K Ejection 4-19-1973**

April 19, 1973 began with an F-8 emergency procedures training session in the CPT (cockpit procedures trainer) as I was about to fly a cross-country training flight to Jacksonville, FL. I was new to the F-8 and had accumulated the initial 25 hours of flight time required by NATOPS to fly outside of the local area.

The flight leader and I launched during the afternoon. Upon leveling off above 30,000 feet, I noticed an illuminated warning light on the instrument panel. As the wingman, I had been concentrating on flying formation with the flight leader's aircraft while occasionally glancing inside the cockpit. The yellow warning light served a dual purpose. It indicated abnormal pressure in the engine oil lubricating system or in the flight control hydraulic systems. I noted that the engine oil pressure gauge registered zero pressure. I declared an emergency and assumed the flight lead. We were above Raleigh, NC; however, the local civilian airport had only a single runway that was not long enough for the F-8. I began a descent to land at Seymour Johnson AFB, Goldsboro, NC (approximately 50 miles ahead). The emergency procedures pocket checklist called for setting the engine to 88 % RPM and avoiding any power changes until landing. Even without oil lubrication, the engine could run for up to 20 minutes before seizing. At lower altitude, I observed Goldsboro and found the Air Force base runway on the south side of the city. As I began my turn to line up with the runway, I heard the engine RPM suddenly increase and observed the airspeed decay rapidly. Obviously the engine had seized, and the fuel control was trying to maintain RPM. At approximately 170 knots and 2500 feet AGL, I initiated ejection by pulling down the face curtain handle. I recall observing the aircraft falling away below me as the rocket pack carried the seat clear. My boots were flaying as they hit the airstream. Within 2 seconds, I was in the parachute. The aircraft rolled inverted and impacted vertically on a farm field with a subsequent fireball. I let go of the face curtain (it was later returned to me), noted how silent it was, and looked around to see where my descent was taking me. It appeared that I might be landing in a pond adjacent to a large electric power plant below, so I released the raft from my seat pan. The cord attached to the seat pan and the raft unfurled and caused the raft to inflate when it tugged at its end. As I came closer to the ground, it was evident that I might land within the power lines of the plant. I tried to steer the parachute away by pulling on the risers to no avail. My action caused me to turn such that I was drifting backwards into the power lines and could only see each power line as it appeared from behind me. As I was about to impact, I pulled my knees to my chest to pass over any more power lines that might be behind me, and suddenly I landed in the parking lot of the plant while looking up at the last power line. Fortunately my helmet had not dislodged, as my head impacted the asphalt hard enough to daze me. Plant workers came to my aid; however, I was so busy trying to evade the power lines during the descent that I had not removed my oxygen mask. When I realized that the workers couldn't hear me, I finally unhooked the mask. The parachute, raft, and other gear were placed in the trunk of a worker's car. I had called the Air Force base from the power plant office to inform that I was OK and would be driven to the base by plant personnel. While riding to the Air Force base, a police car with its lights flashing was seen coming in the opposite direction. I waved it down and transferred to the police car for the remainder of the ride. I was given a physical examination at the Air Force hospital and told that I must be under observation by medical personnel for 24 hours. I told the doctor that I was going to the officers' club for a drink, if

he wanted to observe me there.

Earlier I had observed the flight lead's F-8 fly over the power plant and had assumed that he had seen me on the ground. After lead arrived at the hospital, we discovered that he had lost sight of me when I ejected. He began to home on the emergency signal broadcast by the emergency locator beacon (ELT) contained in the seat pan that had been placed in the trunk of a car. He couldn't understand why every time he passed over the area where the cockpit instrument needle swung 180 degrees (indicating that the locator was directly below), he observed a car traveling along a road. The ELT broadcasts an audible signal that can only be heard if one is monitoring the emergency frequency of a compatible radio. I had failed to turn it off as I couldn't hear it. With only the flight suit I was wearing, I spent several days at the BOQ before my unit sent an aircraft to Seymour Johnson AFB to fly me home.

There is a postscript to the story. Approximately 15 years later, while traveling with my family from Raleigh, NC to the beach, I drove thru Goldsboro and noticed a road sign to the Lee Power Plant, which I followed. Upon arrival, a worker came by and asked what we were doing there. I told him the story of my ejection, and he said that he had observed it as well. I said that I had landed in the parking lot and thought that I had cleared all power lines. He said, "No, you went through them", and everything (raft, parachute, and me) had not tangled or touched the lines. He said that plant operators had considered shutting down the power plant, but sufficient time was not available as I was descending toward the plant. My family and I were taken to the top of the main plant building, and he pointed out the impact point of the aircraft.

I am grateful to the Martin Baker Company that designed and manufactured the ejection seat that saved my life. My compliments to the Marines who maintained the seat and life support equipment, and packed my parachute.

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