



*by LtCol. John DeHart*

“...If I don’t have enough time to get dressed and strapped in again before landing, wave off this approach...”

When a front-seater in a Cobra mooned the Air Boss during a round of boat bounces in the middle of a particularly dull float, he instantly achieved legendary status in the community (as well as being put in hack for two weeks). I marveled that disrobing in such a small cockpit was possible. But many years later, I found myself in a remarkable set of circumstances that called for similar measures...



A training mission in the UC-12 offered a fine afternoon of flying over the Gulf Coast. We could make as many instrument approaches as could be desired by any two red-blooded American pilots. The trouble was that the air conditioner didn't work, and the Gulf Coast was suffering under a very hot, very humid summer. The solution was to fly as high as possible and let the cold air at high altitudes do the work of the broken air conditioner.

Frequently dragging the sleeves of our flight suits across our brows during the start and runup sequences, we broiled in the aircraft and stopped sweating only at Flight Level 290. The

outside air, at minus 20 C, chilled the airplane and finally made the cabin reasonably comfortable. Humming along at high altitude was cool and relaxing, but we still needed to get to the business of practice approaches. So after an hour, we nosed over a flat pine forest that surrounded an airport in Florida.

Sitting in the right seat, my job was to talk on the radio, read checklists and back up the flying pilot in the left seat. We descended into the sultry depths of the lower atmosphere and got ready to shoot an approach. Eight miles out

from the field, about three minutes before touchdown, we passed through 2,000 feet. At precisely that point, the cold airplane descended into just the right combination of hot, humid air to make the windshields sweat. In a flash, the windows completely watered over with condensation. I raised my hand and tried to wipe the glass. The large beads of water moved around some, but the window continued to sweat. I looked around the cockpit area for something that would absorb water. No joy. I tried to pull the little nomex flap at the end of my flight suit sleeve forward to the palm of my hand. Too small and not absorbent enough.

So there I was, CAVU outside, IFR inside. My garrison cover of poly-wool wouldn't work. Six miles, two and a half minutes out. I needed something large and very absorbent... like a T-shirt. Good ol' 100 percent cotton would do the trick. Aha! I was wearing one!

I wrestled the flight suit's zipper to half mast, shrugged back the top half of the flight suit, and took off my T-shirt. Stopping to put my headset back on, I said to the other pilot, "If I don't have enough time to get dressed and strapped in again before landing, wave off this approach, and we'll set up for another. No way do I want you to ball this up while I'm half dressed... the mishap board would draw the wrong conclusions."

Vigorous application of the T-shirt to the windows cleared them. Another struggle later, I was again seated, fully clothed and strapped in, confirming the landing checklist yet again, with a mile to spare. My new preflight regime for the UC-12 includes ensuring that a cotton towel or plenty of paper towels are within easy reach of the cockpit. No way do I want to be IFR inside, when it's CAVU outside, again. 

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