

a swollen jaw, and a banged-up nose. I was released early the next morning.

Here are three learning points I will remember throughout my career from this exhilarating and humbling experience:

- *Clear Visors.* I will wear my advertisement for clear visors—in the form of a scar over my right eye—for the rest of my life. As aviators, we need to make a conscious decision about using our visors. Too often, we view them as a hassle, a nuisance, or even an afterthought. Without a visor, you risk your safety and your career.

- *Flexibility.* Even before our incident, flexibility was a defining concept of our journey. We had to keep aware of changing conditions in our vicinity and at our destinations. Solid planning and decision-making helped us deal with the emergency. We eliminated one extra headache that may have made a tough situation unbearable.

- *Crew Coordination.* Despite the drama and the confusion of our mishap, the obvious benefits of crew coordination cannot be overlooked. Maintaining communication between crew members and balancing workloads made it easier to deal with the emergency and return home. 

1stLt. Humphreys flies with VT-9.

VT-9 ASO note: *The plexiglass over the front section of canopy shattered in flight; the rear section remained intact. The injuries to 1stLt. Humphreys were caused by pieces of plexiglass traveling aft inside the cockpit and from windblast to the face. The instructor was behind the front windscreen and had no injuries, even though he also did not have his clear visor installed, and his dark visor was in the up position. This incident resulted in Class C damage to the aircraft. Extensive safety and engineering investigations were unable to find any conclusive proof that aircrew, maintenance, material, or other factors caused this mishap.*

Another View From the Convertible

By Lt. Bruce Marsack

My Marine student never had been west of Arkansas. His friends at Miramar showed him a good time, and he discovered that there is fun beyond “Deliverance.”

On the descent, 70 miles west of Meridian, all hell broke loose in our T-2 cockpit. My first reaction to the decompression, noise, wind, and confusion, was to take the controls. I closed my eyes for an instant and crouched down. I tried to get my face close to the instrument panel and

out of the windblast. We still were flying, and there were no indications of an airframe failure: no unusual G’s or hot, bright sensations of fire. I put down my visor, turned up my instrument-panel lights, and squawked emergency. Then I managed to get a positive ICS check with my student.

I looked at my caution panel, expecting to see a canopy unlocked light—no light. I started to sit upright and saw what looked like a crack on the canopy, but I could tell the canopy frame still was on the airplane. I stared in disbelief as I realized this “crack” actually was the jagged edge of my canopy. There had been no warning, and, in the words of Gus Grissom, “It just blew”; the front cockpit glass had failed—miserably.

Shortly after I realized nothing was between the night sky and me, I tried to savor the moment: the open cockpit, the wind, the sky; just like “back in the day.” The moment was cut short as I tried another ICS check but got no response. Several more ICS checks also failed. After approximately 10 seconds, he started gently shaking the stick; apparently, he could hear me. Whew! He had been troubleshooting his mask because it also had been hit. A few seconds later, he was back on the ICS and said, “Sir, I can’t see out of my right eye, and blood is everywhere.” Our malfunction just turned into an emergency, and I feared my student’s flying days were done.

I told him to cover his eye and to protect himself from the windblast. I later found out the wind was much worse for him in the back than it was for me, and it only got worse as we slowed. The descent to get below 10,000 feet took a

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while, as I tried to slow down. I should have pulled more power to get slower, but I didn’t want to change something that was working, especially since I could not see the engine stack through my visor. Home plate was a little farther than the nearest suitable divert, but changing the plan would have increased the confusion and added to our problems.

Center told me to switch approach. My student had control of the radios in back, which meant I could not see which frequency was dialed in (a serious problem in the T-2 that pilots have been screaming about for



many years). I was trying to feel my way through the radio switches when approach came to life and talked to me.

Although injured, my trusty Marine student stayed in the fight. He handled the frequency changes and a few other tasks with his good eye. As minimal as his help sounds, I’m grateful for his assistance because it would have taken a lot of my attention to play with the switches in the dark. Raising my visor didn’t seem like a good idea since dirt and debris still were floating around the cockpit. However, I intermittently did raise my visor to make out the field, and I had the visor up for the landing.

After I pinned my seat, I turned to see how my student was doing. His face curtain had become dislodged several inches and had been mis-pinned by the crash crew. There also was a crash-crew ladder hooked over the side of the canopy rail. The ladder was close to a canopy-jettison handle that had not been pinned yet. I did not want to get in their way, but I was directive about those two items.

My student was med-up six weeks later. He now has the perfect combat scar, and I hear it’s a hit with the ladies.

Is switching a visor in flight practical? Probably not. One aviator told me that he leaves the dark one down and turns up all his lights until recovery. This flight highlights the need for a solution to the visor problem that exists on day-night flights. Most aviators fly with their dark visor up after the sun sets.

If ICS is inop or degraded, think creatively about communicating with your crew. In multi-crew aircraft, it is far better to have two sets of hands on the controls than none. 🦅

Lt. Marsack is the student control officer in TW-1.