

Part V – The accident

Aircraft E-1B BUNO 147215 was launched at 0431A on August 14, 1963 from the number one catapult on the USS ENTERPRISE (CVA(N)65) for a pre-dawn ASW(surveillance) mission. The aircraft climbed straight ahead and after 1 ½ minutes the pilot reduced power to approximately 46 inches manifold pressure, whereupon the port torque meter was observed by the co-pilot to fluctuate approximately 30psi and then fluctuate very erratically (SIC). The port engine began to pop and cut out. The pilot reduced power on the port engine which momentarily smoothed out the operation of the engine. When it began cutting out at reduced power the pilot started dumping fuel and feathered the port engine. At this time the aircraft was at 500 feet and 110 knots. The ENTERPRISE tower was informed of the difficulty and told that the engine was feathered. The pilot then requested the length of time required to re-spot the deck for landing. The tower reported that the re-spot was commencing. The aircraft was not holding altitude with 40 inches manifold pressure on the starboard engine. The pilot informed the crew to stay off the ICS and go over their ditching procedures. The aircraft slowed to 100 knots. The pilot decided to restart the port engine to attempt to obtain power in order to climb and to reduce the strain on the starboard engine. The pilot had secured the fuel dump with 1400 pounds remaining. After restarting the port engine the pilot added throttle to 27 inches manifold pressure on the port engine and climbed at 110 knots. A few minutes later the power was reduced to 24 inches manifold pressure because the engine began to cut out again. The reduction in power temporarily smoothed the port engine and the climb was continued to 800 feet where the engine began to cut out as before. The pilot feathered the engine again. In the meantime he reversed course at 7 miles and headed toward the ship. The pilot carried 46 inches manifold pressure on his starboard engine. At this time the fuel weight was down to 1100 pounds.

The aircraft slowly lost altitude and passed over the ship at 600 feet. After crossing the ship, the pilot was informed by the tower that it would take about 10 more minutes to complete the re-spot. The aircraft continued to lose altitude slowly at approximately 50 feet per minute. Passing through 500 feet, the pilot attempted to restart the port engine a second time. He experienced difficulty restarting and obtaining power from the port engine. He feathered it again at 150 feet and 100 knots. The pilot was warned by the ENTERPRISE tower he was getting very low. He added full power to the starboard engine and commenced a left turn to return to the ship. The pilot ordered the co-pilot to dump to minimum fuel and to standby to crossfeed. He again ordered the crew to stand by to ditch. The pilot headed between the fantail of the ENTERPRISE and the bow of the plane guard destroyer. At 80 feet altitude the pilot declared his intentions to ditch the aircraft. ENTERPRISE tower informed the pilot that the wind was 083°, 19 knots, and to ditch close to the plane guard destroyer.

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Part V – The accident (cont'd)

At approximately 20 feet altitude the pilot informed the ship he was taking power off his starboard engine so that the shock with the water would not throw the propeller blades through the fuselage. At 0455, 24 minutes after take off, the aircraft struck the water off the starboard quarter of the ENTERPRISE (290° and 2000 yards) and off the starboard bow of the USS PIERCE. The aircraft was heading about 240°, approximately downwind. The sea state at the time was approximately 6 feet. The aircraft filled immediately with water. The co-pilot exited the aircraft through the overhead hatch. The number one controller exited through the starboard emergency exit. The escape route of the fifth seat occupant cannot be determined. The number two controller and the pilot are not known to have departed the aircraft and are presumed to have been incapacitated on impact. The three personnel who exited the aircraft were picked up by a motor lifeboat from the USS PIERCE. A diver from the lifeboat then went to the wreckage to check for the pilot and number two controller, but found that the aircraft had separated from the dome and had sunk.

Part VI – Damage to aircraft

E-1B 147215 was ditched under control at 0445A (SIC), 37° 57'.2" N, 05° 59'.7"E on an approximate heading of 240°T. The direction of the wind was 108°T at 20 knots and the wave height was approximately 6 feet. The aircraft descended from 80 feet at approximately 98 knots with the port propeller feathered. Power was decreased on the starboard engine prior to impact. The aircraft hit the water with landing gear up, hook up, and, as near as can be determined, 2/3 flaps. The impact threw the occupants forward and to the left. After impact the aircraft was noted to float apparently intact with wings awash and tail slightly high. The board was unable to determine if the extent of structural damage sustained on landing. The description of the impact was very hard. All survivors and witnesses state the aircraft hit only once and stopped immediately. At approximately 0517A or 33 minutes after hitting the water, the fuselage sank, breaking away from the dome at the lower attaching points of the support pylons. The dome remained afloat until broken up and taken aboard by the USS OWENS to remove it as a navigational hazard. The depth of the water at impact was 1470 fathoms. It was not considered feasible to conduct any salvage operations.

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