

## Jet fighter in a cornfield



Truth can be stranger than fiction - a fighter jet in a cornfield!

In 1970, whilst assigned to the 71<sup>st</sup> FIS at Malmstrom AFB in Montana, the pilot of this aircraft ejected during an in-flight emergency. The pilot had somehow got himself into a flat spin – generally considered to be unrecoverable in an F-106 and he did what the flight handbook said he should do – get out of it, eject!

After the pilot did just that, the aircraft - 58-0787 - recovered itself from this “unrecoverable” situation. In a vain attempt to break the spin, the pilot had lowered half flaps, rolled in take off trim and throttled the engine back to an approach power setting

After the ejection, the aircraft recovered from the spin on its own and established a wings level low rate of descent. Finally it settled into a near perfect gentle belly landing in a farmer’s snow covered cornfield.

When the local sheriff came upon the scene, the engine was still running. The aircraft was situated on a slight incline and was creeping forward slowly under the thrust of its still running engine as the snow compressed to ice under the body of the aircraft. Concerned about where it might be headed, the sheriff didn’t think he could wait for the aircraft recovery team to get there from the airbase at Malmstrom which was about 50 miles away, so he got himself connected to the aircraft’s squadron for engine shut-down instructions before entering the cockpit to secure the engine.



The photos alongside show pretty much what the sheriff found on the fateful day. A depot team from McClellan AFB recovered the aircraft and it was eventually returned to service. When the 71<sup>st</sup> FIS was disbanded in 1971, 58-0787, then famously known as the “Cornfield Bomber”, was transferred to the 49<sup>th</sup> FIS where it finished out its operational service life.

Pilots of the 49<sup>th</sup> FIS would occasionally run into ex-71<sup>st</sup> FIS people at William Tell and rag them unmercifully about the “emergency” so dire that the plane landed itself.

58-0787 is now on permanent display in its 49<sup>th</sup> FIS markings at the USAF Museum at Wright Patterson AFB where its story is told in the exhibit. While the 49<sup>th</sup> FIS Eagle pilots are reportedly glad to see their squadron immortalized in this way for many to see, they would prefer to see it made clearer that it was the 71<sup>st</sup> and not one of theirs that jumped out of this perfectly good aircraft.

