

FASTER THAN A SPEEDING BULLET

By David H. Fisher, Jr.

What's faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound? Is it Superman? No...Superman is a fictitious comic book character.

What IS faster than a speeding bullet? What IS more powerful than a locomotive? What IS able to leap tall buildings in a single bound? Well one thing that meets this criterion has been nicknamed the "Super Hog"; the "Ultra Hog"; and the "Lead Sled", but it is usually known as the "Thud."

April 16, 1979. It was a beautiful day. There was some wind but there is almost always wind in Kansas during this time of the year. The spring sun was warm but not hot. The Koch fittings clinked together during our two and a half block walk. The climb up the two story ladder was easy...But wait, I am getting ahead of myself.

It all started during my senior year at Topeka High School. A good friend of mine suggested I take a course called "Introduction to Public Speaking." The course was taught by my friend's debate coach, J. Matt Hill. Little did I know this course would change my life. Mr. Hill gave me a love for public speaking. He taught me to try to begin my speeches with something that would immediately catch my audience's attention.

Two years later I found myself taking a course called "Introduction to Public Address" at the University of Kansas. One of the assigned speeches was to give a talk on a trip we had taken. It could be a real trip or one we would like to take. Those were the only requirements.

I was near the end of the list to give a speech on this topic. For several class periods I heard speeches from fellow classmates about various trips they had taken. These included trips to Hawaii, California, England, etc. Finally, it was my turn. Using the principles I learned from my high school teacher I began my speech, "Over the past few days we have heard talks about trips to various parts of the United States and the world but today I would like to tell you about a little different trip I took, a trip through the sound barrier".

As I watched my classmates eyes opened wide I began to tell them about a trip I won as a Boy Scout...A trip through the sound barrier in an American jet fighter. As I described the experience in detail I noticed I had everyone's attention throughout my presentation.

When I took my seat following my speech, the person who sat next to me leaned over and told me he was a former Navy pilot in the Korean War. He said, "As far as he knew rides in US Military jet fighters were just not given". He continued, "Especially trips that were won by a Boy Scout. But, your descriptions were so accurate it must have been true". He continued, "Congratulations on a fine speech."

That evening, in my fraternity room, I reread the "Readers Digest" article I had read the night before that described what it is like to ride through the sound barrier in a jet fighter. This was where I got the information for my speech.

I later graduated from Washburn University. Though I got my degree in teaching, with a major in physical education, I entered the life insurance business. Soon I was asked to speak at life underwriters meetings throughout Kansas. My favorite speech was a motivational speech where I compared going through the problems in life with breaking the sound barrier. Again drawing on the information I had learned from the "Readers Digest" article.

One cold winter's day in early 1979 I was walking down Kansas Avenue and decided to stop into the new Cunningham Shields men's clothing store. Carl Seufert happened to be in the store and we visited for a few minutes. I knew Carl had been a pilot in the Naval Reserve so I asked him about military aviation. During the conversation I told Carl about my speeches and mentioned I would really like to have the actual experience of breaking the sound barrier in a jet fighter.

Carl told me it was just not possible. I responded that I was so excited about having this experience I would be willing to pay one thousand dollars (I didn't have one thousand dollars) to have a ride. Carl's eyes opened wide and he replied, "If it really means that much to you, you could call Major General Ed Fry and ask him. MajGen Fry is the Adjutant General of the state of Kansas. But I really doubt a ride would be possible."

I told Carl I had not been in the military and had never heard the term “Adjutant General.” Carl smiled and told me how to contact MajGen Fry. We shook hands and went our separate ways as we headed out into the cold.

After giving the idea some thought I decided to write MajGen Fry and tell him about the speeches I was making throughout Kansas and to ask him for a supersonic ride in a jet fighter so I could better relate the experience to my audience. I would mention I would follow-up the letter with a phone call. After many hours laboring over the letter I typed it up and took it to the post office.

My hands became cold and clammy as I began to dial MajGen Fry’s telephone number on the day I had indicated in my letter. This happen to be the day MajGen Fry had his picture in the Topeka Capital-Journal regarding a story indicating John Carlin, the newly elected Kansas Governor, would have to decide whether to retain MajGen Fry as the Adjutant General or select a replacement.

I called the State Defense Building and told the secretary I would like to speak to MajGen Fry. She put me through to his office secretary. After asking for my name, she said, “Just a moment.” As I was anticipating what to say, MajGen Fry picked up the telephone and said, “Yes Dave, this is General Fry, I received your letter.” I briefly said I would like to meet with him and discuss the possibility of a flight in connection with my speeches. He said, “Sure Dave,” and we arranged a time to get together the following week.

On the day of our appointment I arrived a few minutes early and nervously drove around the National Guard grounds in Topeka. I then pulled up in front of the State Defense Building and went inside.

I waited briefly for MajGen Fry and was then ushered into his office. It was an impressive office. MajGen Fry was dressed in a blue Air Force uniform. His shoes were immaculately shined. After shaking hands MajGen Fry got straight to the point and informed me it was almost impossible for anyone to get a flight in an American jet fighter. But, if I wanted to write him another letter explaining why it would be beneficial to the Kansas Air National Guard and the United States Air Force, he would be happy to review it with me and send it to the Pentagon where it would have to be approved.

MajGen Fry then spent several minutes telling me how he was trying to get the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce to start a military relations committee but was not making much progress. He paused for a moment, and then said, "If you were a member of the military affairs committee of the chamber that would slightly improve your chances of a flight."

About that time he took a rag out of his desk, leaned forward while still talking and polished his shoes. He was so dynamic, yet totally at ease. We scheduled another appointment in one week, shook hands and I left his office.

As soon as I returned to my office I called Merle Blair, president of the Topeka Chamber, and inquired about the military affairs committee. I never mentioned my requested flight. After several minutes of discussion Merle told me if I joined the chamber he would form a military affairs committee and I would be a member. We concluded our conversation when I told him I was mailing my check and he said "Dave, you are on the military affairs committee."

After many hours of preparation I completed my second letter to MajGen Fry. It began, "As a member of the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee I would like to request a ride in an American Air Force jet fighter."

When I personally delivered my letter, MajGen Fry indicated he didn't want to change the letter at all and would send it directly to the Pentagon. In about four to six weeks he would receive their decision. He told me from what seemed to be almost impossible now appeared to have about a five percent chance of success. I then left his office.

One week later I sent MajGen Fry a thank you letter telling him I was looking forward to hearing of the Pentagon's decision. Approximately two weeks after our second meeting MajGen Fry called me and said, "Dave originally I thought I would try...Oh, by the way, I have good news for you...Originally I thought I would try to get special channels open to get the authorization for your orientation ride but after figuring that would not be the best way to handle it, I went through the normal channels and I do have approval."

I remember the excitement that went through my mind as I realized my dream was going to come true. MajGen Fry told me Colonel Palmer would be in touch with me in the next few days with the arrangements for the orientation flight.

Later that afternoon MajGen Fry called and told me MajGen Singlab, Chief of Staff of US Forces in South Korea, was going to be a possible speaker for Armed Services Day. Since I was a member of the military affairs committee of the chamber of commerce he wanted me to attend a meeting the following night to discuss the general's arrival.

At that meeting I met with MajGen Fry and was introduced to Col Palmer. I found myself meeting with a large group of top ranking military personnel discussing MajGen Singlab's arrival in Topeka. To my surprise I was now a part of a contingent made up of myself and the top military officers in Kansas.

Following the meeting Col Palmer gave me a map of McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita and pointed to Building 48 where I was to go when I went to Wichita for my supersonic ride in a Republic F-105 "Thunderchief", also known as the "Thud." We picked the date of April 16, 1979.

A few days later I received a conformation letter from Col Palmer informing me that Lieutenant Colonel Cummins would be in charge of the arrangements for my orientation flight and I should contact him a few days prior to April 16.

Thursday, April 12, 1979, I called LtCol Cummins and made the arrangements for my flight. I told him I would travel to Wichita Sunday evening, April 15, and spend the night so I would be rested for my flight the following day. He was to call me prior to my drive to Wichita if any weather problems developed. Otherwise, I was to arrive at Building 48 on Monday, April 16 at 8:00 AM.

April 15, 1979 was Easter Sunday. During the day the excitement began to build. At approximately 7:15 PM I left for Wichita. The night was so clear that stars filled the heavens during the entire drive. The anticipation by this time was almost overwhelming.

I arrived at the Ramada Inn, registered for a room, called my wife Kathy, and went to bed at 10:45 PM.

At 6:00 AM I awoke and prepared for the adventure that awaited me. I had breakfast at the Ramada Inn and at approximately 7:30 AM I left for McConnell Air Force Base. As I turned onto Rock Road I realized the driving distance was not as far as I had expected and I would arrive about 20 minutes early. I found the base entrance gate, pulled into the parking area and went over to the guard. I showed him Col Palmer's letter indicating I was to meet LtCol Cummins at Building 48 for my orientation flight. The guard told me to proceed to Building 48 and asked me if I knew where the building was. I told him I had a map and should have no problem finding it.

I drove to the Kansas Air National Guard area and parked in front of what I thought was Building 48 as there was an American flag flying in front. Upon entering the building I observed Air Force personnel walking around and told one of them I was looking for LtCol Cummins. I was told he was in Building 48 which was the next building.

I drove my car to Building 48 and parked in the lot at exactly 8:00 AM. The excitement continued to build as I entered the building and walked into LtCol Cummins' office. His secretary informed me he was in a meeting and would be out in about an hour. I told her I was Dave Fisher and had a meeting with LtCol Cummins at 8:00 AM. Just then an airman came up to me with the name Bay on his shirt and asked if I was Mr. Fisher. I indicated I was and he told me he was to conduct my aircraft orientation and familiarization course and explain the ejection procedures.

We then proceeded to the equipment area where I was given a size 42 regular flight suit. They discovered they did not have my boot size. After some thought Mr. Bay took a pair of 9 ½ jump boots out of one of the other pilot's locker and gave them to me. He told me to put on the flight suit and boots. I had purchased some boot socks but it appeared my sweat socks would work better so I used them and the boots fit perfectly.

After putting my clothes in a locker and putting my billfold and comb in my flight suit pockets we went back to the equipment area. Mr. Bay then picked out my helmet. It was a white helmet which had an oxygen mask attached to it. We spent about fifteen minutes learning how to operate the helmet.

The chin strap must be snapped from the lower side first and then snapped over the upper side. The oxygen mask must be clipped all the way into the side. Mr. Bay adjusted the mask and I blew hard so we could see if it was airtight around the sides. On one side of the helmet you adjust white face shield and on the other side you adjust the smoke face shield. Both shields could be kept down at the same time or you could just use one. It was recommend on takeoffs and landings that you have at least one of the shields down in case we hit a bird.

It was hard to get the feel of where the various slots were in the helmet. But soon the helmet began to feel a part of me. My ears fit nicely into the ear cups where the communication sounds are received.

Mr. Bay answered a few questions for another pilot and then fitted me with a G suit. The color of the G suit and the flight suit was a deep green. My flight suit was just like the other pilots' except they had their rank on their shoulder covered by plastic and on one side of their chest was a leather tag with their name and the initials of the Kansas Air National Guard under their name.

After fitting the G suit we went over to an air pump and Mr. Bay pumped up the G suit enough so I could feel it filling up over my stomach, thighs and calves. He remarked that I had rather large calves and as a result he had some problem fitting the G suit around them. He decided not to zip up that part of the G suit since it already was a good fit. He told me do myself a favor and pull the G suit down so the pressure is on my lower stomach. We then proceeded to the aircraft simulator.

With my helmet on, Mr. Bay gave me a quick overview of the simulator and then had me get in. The simulator doesn't have glass on the canopy so you can converse while the canopy is down. Mr. Bay explained how to hook up all of the various straps and belts and how to close the canopy. The canopy in the F-105 is closed by flipping a switch on the left side of the cockpit. It is a toggle switch. When you flip the switch down it lowers the canopy and when you flip the switch up it raises the canopy. After the canopy is down you pull a yellow handle over to the side and push it forward and rods go over a latch on each side of the canopy. You then snap the handle down and the canopy is secure. It is very important to make sure the rods go over the latch on each side.

Next we went over the ejection system very carefully. The ejection system in the F-105 is a very sophisticated system. There is a red pin on the right side of the seat. While this pin is in, the ejection system handles can not be moved. By pushing a little button in the middle of the switch with one finger on each side you can pull the pin. This arms the ejection seat so it can fire. If it's necessary to eject you put your head back against the headrest, put your feet straight out as far as they will go and sit up straight. You then grasp the yellow handles on both sides of the seat and pull them up. This lifts armrests into place with a trigger handle on the end of each armrest. By pulling the trigger handle on the left or on the right or both together you eject in about one second.

As you eject your feet are pulled under you so they won't hit the aircraft dash. As we simulated an ejection my legs hit the dash. Mr. Bay indicated when you eject the straps that are fastened around your legs will pull them under so they would not bump against the dash.

He explained, after you are above the aircraft a gun will fire which will separate me from the seat. The parachute will then be forcefully deployed up and open. You could actually eject from ground level. We practiced ejecting several times. Then Mr. Bay left to give some instruction to a new class of pilots that had just arrived. While he was gone I practiced ejecting several times and practiced putting the oxygen mask on and off and lowering and raising the clear shield and the smoke shield. I also practiced adjusting the various helmet straps. During this time I became comfortable with the equipment.

When Mr. Bay returned, we practiced several ejections until he was satisfied I understood the procedure. He then explained if we were on the ground with the canopy down there were four ways to get out. The first way was to pull the yellow bar and then use the electric switch that would raise the canopy.

The second way was to push in a button on the left hand side of the cockpit and then raise a little lever. This would blow off the canopy. You could lift the canopy off the rest of the way if necessary and climb out of the aircraft.

The third way was to pull a lever forward on the right side of the cockpit. This would completely disengage the latch that holds the canopy secure. You could then force the canopy up and break it off at the back.

The fourth way was to use a red knife located near the right hand corner of the canopy in a small red metal protector. You can push in a button at the bottom of the protector and pull the knife down. Then you can chip your way out of the cockpit through the canopy. Though it is very difficult to break the canopy from the outside, from the inside after a few hard chips with the knife the canopy will begin to crack and slit all the way back. With a few more chips you would be able to get out.

I asked Mr. Bay if a fifth way to get out would be to eject and he indicated that was a possibility but only as a last resort as it is a very close call if you eject on the ground because the chute has just enough time to open before you would hit the ground.

Mr. Bay explained, before making a hurried escape from the cockpit there were three clips you must undo plus you must unfasten the communication wire that is attached to your helmet. Also the oxygen hose must be disconnected where it fastens onto your chest and where it attaches to the mask on your helmet. Once these are disconnected you can wiggle out of the harness and open the canopy in the method you select.

In flight, if a problem developed an emergency eject light would light and the pilot would instruct me to eject. If I did not eject in a reasonable length of time the pilot would eject and I would go first. When I was told to eject I had no choice. Either I pulled the lever or the pilot would. I truly felt if told to, I could eject.

We left the simulator and went into the parachute area which was a relatively dark room that was four or five stories high. There were white nylon ropes hanging from the ceiling that simulated a parachute. Mr. Bay hooked me up in the parachute straps and fastened them to the parachute lines hanging from the ceiling. He pressed a series of buttons and manipulated me so I was hanging about one to two feet above the ground. It was a rather an uncomfortable position. I was sitting in the parachute harness with my knees up and leaning slightly forward. The straps under my thighs were uncomfortable and they got more uncomfortable the longer I was in that position.

Mr. Bay explained, after I ejected the seat should be blown away from me. However, if it didn't separate I should push myself away from the seat by arching my back and throwing my arms and legs back. This would separate

me from the seat. At that time I would have a survival kit under the harness. I should pull a lever which would drop the survival kit away from me but it would still be hanging below. This would keep the extra weight of the survival kit from hindering my landing.

If I looked up and saw I had a good chute I could pull a red lever which would separate more cords from the chute so I could steer the chute by pulling the red cords which would be located above my head. By pulling the left cord with my left hand I would turn left and by pulling the right cord with my right hand I would turn right.

Mr. Bay explained it was important to always land facing the wind. Upon landing I was to flip up two levers on my chest and pull the rings under the levers which would separate me from the chute. These are called Koch fittings. If I was being pulled along the ground because of wind in the chute I could release one lever and pull the ring and then roll over and release the other lever and pull the ring. He stressed not to do this until I landed as this would free me from the chute. The reason the rings are covered is so you won't release the chute prematurely.

If I was parachuting down through trees it is important to keep my legs close together and double up. If I was going to pass through telephone wires or power lines it was extremely important to stretch out and raise my hands over my head and turn my head to the side making as small a profile as possible.

There were various items in the survival kit. These included an automatic radio that turns on as soon as you eject along with a handheld radio I could use to communicate. It is important to turn the automatic radio off if I was going to use the handheld radio.

We went back to the area where I had my G suit fitted and reviewed the radio carefully. When you pull the antenna up the radio turns on. There were radio instructions in the survival kit.

Next, I was then given a pair of pilot's gloves. They were light green and off-white in color. Mr. Bay told me mine didn't have to fit perfectly but fighter pilots want theirs to fit so well they can pick up a dime. I put the gloves in one of the lower pockets of my flight suit. Mr. Bay also fitted me

with a parachute and we hung it up on a peg along with my helmet and G suit. The parachute alone weighed thirty five pounds.

Then Mr. Bay went over to a corner of the room and picked up a clipboard with a form on it and I signed my name and he signed his indicating I had gone through the ejection, emergency and parachute procedures. He asked if I had any questions and told him he had covered everything so thoroughly that I didn't have any questions.

Mr. Bay then took me back to the main offices and introduced me to Major Gale Tart, who was to be my pilot. LtCol Cummins was also there. I was surprised to see fighter pilots were relatively short men. I don't recall seeing any tall pilots. They were dressed in their green flight suits. I was amazed how sharp they appeared. They all had shorter type haircuts yet were as long as the military code allowed. Some of the pilots had mustaches. The pilots appeared to be very physically fit. Though they seemed quite young, many had grey in their hair. Some were totally grey. I was extremely impressed with the quality of everyone I met in the Kansas Air National Guard as well as the whole environment.

Mr. Bay took me into the operations room. Behind the counter was a large board. In grease pencil were the names of the afternoon flights. Our flight was listed as "Savvy 01 -Tart/Fisher." We then went back to the waiting room where I was rejoined by Maj Tart who told me his wife and boy had stopped by and his boy had fallen down and cracked his head open and required stitches, but there was no indication of a concussion. He said he would be back in a few minutes and we would discuss lunch.

I sat around the waiting room and read some Air Force magazines. There was a big Flying Jayhawks mural on the wall. Soon Maj Tart returned and took me to the officer's club for lunch. When we arrived Maj Tart and I sat down at a table with three other Kansas Air National Guard pilots. I had a hamburger, french fries and iced tea, exactly like Maj Tart. During lunch he told me we would try to meet two other pilots that would also be flying in an F-105. We would fly together in the Bison practice range. Following lunch we returned to Building 48 for our 12:00 noon briefing.

Maj Tart filled out our flight plan in the operations room and we went into the briefing room which was filled with flight books and air charts. During the briefing Maj Tart explained how to use the oxygen system and the

communications system. The oxygen controls are located on the right side of the cockpit. It has a normal setting and a 100% setting. The switch is white and looks like a light switch. You push it forward to breathe 100% pure oxygen.

The communications system is located on the left side of the cockpit. There are two knobs I needed to understand. The first was to adjust the sound while listening to our aircraft communications between me and Maj Tart. The other knob was to adjust the communications I would hear from the radio at the McConnell tower and the Kansas City flight center. He also showed me how to change the mike from the open mike setting where we could talk to each other to what was called normal mike where I could hear him but would have to press the mike button on the throttle, which is located on the left side of the cockpit, when I wanted to talk to him. In the normal mike mode he could not hear me unless I was pressing the mike button. Maj Tart indicated we could go to normal mike any time but it would probably be OK to stay on open mike.

Maj Tart explained if he told me to eject I was to eject. He said there was no joking in the cockpit. If he told me to eject that is exactly what he meant. If I wanted to ask him if he said “eject” that was OK and he would repeat it. He also told me that if I didn’t eject within a reasonable time he would eject, but I would go first as the backseat always ejects before the pilot’s seat.

Following the briefing I met Mr. Bay in the equipment room and he helped me put on my G suit and parachute and I picked up my helmet. Soon Maj Tart met me and we began our two and one half block walk out to our aircraft. The F-105s were out on the tarmac. Several of them had crews around them. Some were just starting their jet engines. It is almost impossible to describe the feelings that were going through me during our walk.

As we got close to our aircraft one of the crew members from another F-105 asked Maj Tart for the time of our engine start up and Maj Tart replied, “At 1:30 PM.” The crew member commented that we were a little early and Maj Tart indicated that we were early so we could check over our aircraft. I asked Maj Tart which aircraft we were going to fly and he pointed to the F-105 numbered 418. There it sat with both of its canopies open waiting for us, and another chill of excitement went through my body.

When we arrived at the aircraft a photographer met us and began taking a series of pictures. As I climbed up the ladder I could feel the sun and wind and hear the sounds of the jets from several of the other F-105s. This picked up the excitement I was feeling another level.

I sat my parachute in the backseat and Maj Tart climbed up my ladder and helped fasten the parachute into the seat. Then we climbed back down. All the time the photographer was taking pictures. We walked around the aircraft. I was surprised at how big the wheels were. They came up to at least my waist. The plane was much bigger than I had imagined. You had to stand on your tiptoes to touch the underside. It was covered with jungle camouflage paint.

After he checked over the aircraft thoroughly, Maj Tart indicated it was time to climb in and get ready. I climbed back up the ladder and Maj Tart strapped me in and I reached into my G suit pocket and pulled out my pilot's gloves. Also in the G suit pocket I found several envelopes. Each envelope contained a plastic sick bag. I then put on my helmet and the atmosphere increased my excitement another level.

Before Maj Tart climbed down the ladder he told me the crew chief would plug into our communications system and ask to see our ejection seat pins and red flags. Once he saw the pins and red flags he would know our ejection seats were hot and would give us the OK to taxi to our takeoff location.

After Maj Tart strapped himself into his seat I began to hear the F-105 come alive. I could hear the radio crackling in my ears. The lights on the instrument panel came on and I knew the aircraft was being powered by the ground generator as the engine had not been started. I saw lights flashing on and off and there was a panel on the right side with words that told about the various functions of the aircraft.

As Maj Tart went down the checklist he would call out information and a light would be displayed on the panel and he would press a button and it would go off. This continued until he had run his entire checklist. He was constantly talking with the crew chief on the ground through the communications system.

Then Maj Tart requested that the engine be started. There was a tremendous roar as the F-105's Pratt & Whitney J75 turbojet engine with 26,500 pounds of thrust was started and my excitement level went up another notch. The checklist resumed, and then Maj Tart suggested that I fasten on my oxygen mask and I complied. I looked to my left and the crew chief asked to see my ejection seat pin. I pressed the button in the middle of the pin, removed it and held it up with both hands showing the red streamer to the crew chief. I got an OK signal and a thank you.

After a couple of minutes I felt the release of the brakes and we started taxiing down the ramp. The photographer was still taking pictures. Maj Tart asked me to adjust the sound of the radio to my liking which I did. Then we pulled over and stopped for what seemed like a long time waiting for clearance to go to altitude. Two or three F-105s joined us to the left. We then began taxiing to the end of the runway.

There were several more ground crew members waiting for us. After plugging into our communications system, one ground crew member said, "It looks like you have a good one."

After another short wait, Maj Tart asked me to lower my canopy and I complied. As I tried to lock it in position it wouldn't lock. Maj Tart suggested that I raise the canopy up and lower it again which I did. This time I was able to get the arms over the rollers and tightened it down. We were ready to go.

After getting clearance, Maj Tart said, "OK Dave, go to 100% oxygen." I complied. It was quite an exhilarating feeling. The 100% pure oxygen made me a little light headed and added even more to my excitement. Maj Tart pulled the throttle back and the engine began a screaming roar while we were still sitting still. Then he said calmly, "OK Dave, I'm going to light the burner." He released the brakes, lit the afterburner and the F-105 lurched forward throwing me back against the seat.

As we picked up speed Maj Tart began to read out our ground speed. When we reached over 200 knots he pulled back on his stick while I watched my stick move in harmony, and the F-105 lifted from the runway. Again the excitement level went up another notch. I was in an American jet fighter living a dream that very few civilians ever experience. We made a right turn and Maj Tart said, "Sit back Dave; we are going to start our climb."

We rapidly went through 1,000 feet then 2,000 feet then 3,000 feet. At this point Maj Tart said he was going to shut off the burner. With the burner off our climb was much slower. We continued to go up and up and up. When we reached 14,000 feet Maj Tart told me the cabin will not go any higher as the automatic system will keep us at about 14,000 feet.

We continued to climb. At about 26,000 feet Maj Tart told me he was going to light the burner again. This caused us to climb much faster. We leveled off at 32,000 feet and Maj Tart turned off the burner again. The airspeed indicator in the F-105 looks like a tape with numbers and marks on it that go up and down with a stationary horizontal line in front of the tape. Our indicated airspeed was .70 mach.

Maj Tart then told me we were going to make our mach run and lit the burner. Our speed began to increase to .80 mach, then .90 mach. Just prior to mach 1.0 the F-105 seemed to stop. It felt like we were going through mud or snow. Then the tape on the mach indicator began to shake to the side and up and down and the tape on the altimeter began to jiggle and we went through the sound barrier. At this point the tapes were calm again. Our airspeed continued to increase. At mach 1.10 Maj Tart said, "OK Dave, you are going faster than the speed of sound." My excitement level went up as high as I thought it could go.

I told him it was a tremendous feeling to know that I was going faster than the speed of sound. After a few minutes Maj Tart pulled back the power. As we approached the sound barrier the tapes began to shake again. When we went subsonic the tapes smoothed out.

Maj Tart called the Kansas City flight center and asked to descend into the Bison area. We were given clearance to go to 25,000 feet and stayed there for several minutes. Finally we were given clearance to descend into the Bison area. Maj Tart made a violent maneuver as we turned right and began to lose altitude. That was my first G force experience as we pulled about 1.2 Gs.

At approximately 14,000 feet the Kansas City flight center told Maj Tart they would not assume responsibility since we were going to meet with another aircraft. Maj Tart radioed back he would assume the responsibility.

We began to look for the other F-105 in the Bison area. After some radio communications between our two aircraft, followed by several violent maneuvers the other F-105 came into view. Maj Tart indicated now we would play a few games. First we would try to pull in behind the other F-105 and simulate a dogfight. He made a violent maneuver to the right. At that point I began to feel the Gs. At 2 Gs the G suit begins to fill up and I felt it squeeze around my calves, thighs and stomach. We reached 2.4 Gs. We then pulled out of our turn and the G suit released its pressure.

Then Maj Tart said, "They don't want us to do this. They are trying to get away." He made several abrupt turns and the Gs quickly increased. This time we pulled a little over 2.5 Gs. It was a thrilling experience but I felt a little woozy. I mentioned this to Maj Tart and he asked me to go to 100% pure oxygen. I complied and immediately felt much better. The air conditioning jets on each side and slightly behind me began blowing very cold air. It was a very powerful air conditioner.

Shortly Maj Tart told me we were going to simulate a strafing or bombing attack on the ground. We left the other F-105 and went to approximately 8,000 feet. At that point Maj Tart aimed our aircraft straight down and we dove towards the ground. The ground came up quicker and quicker but we were not pulling any Gs. Maj Tart then said, "OK now we are going to pull up."

As we pulled up the G forces increased rapidly to 4.8 Gs. The aircraft was still going down but the power of the jet engine was fighting to pull us out of our dive. I asked Maj Tart how to handle the Gs and he told me to just sit there and grunt. I began to grunt against the G suit. There was tremendous pressure. As we neared the top of our climb we began to roll over and it felt like we were falling. We were now flying upside down. It felt like we were flying upright but as I looked through the top of the canopy I could see the ground far below.

We rolled over and Maj Tart asked me if I would like to take over the controls. I took the stick and made a gradual turn to the right. I asked if he wanted me to roll all the way over and he said, "No bring it back level." I brought the aircraft back level. He then told me to do a complete roll. I made a turn to the right and began to roll the aircraft. While doing this I tried to keep the nose of the airplane on the bar of the artificial horizon so we didn't lose altitude during the roll. (The airplane symbol on the artificial

horizon was dark and the background was white.) I did a complete roll. Maj Tart then said, "OK, it is my airplane."

Maj Tart flew some other maneuvers and then got on the radio and called to the other F-105 in the area and before long we were flying side by side. I looked over and realized that we had had lunch with the pilots in the other F-105 earlier that day. One of them was a student pilot. It was quite an experience to fly side by side.

At first I was a little nervous flying that close to the other F-105. Maj Tart explained you always had to look at the other aircraft. One mistake could mean a mid air collision. He went on to explain that was the way they had to fly in bad weather as at times you can have four aircraft flying together. If you didn't fly close you might lose the other airplanes in the clouds and would not be able to join up again.

We flew together for several minutes while making different maneuvers. First they followed us while we did climbs and dives. They stayed right with us. Then Maj Tart told the other aircraft we would follow them. We stayed with them as they flew different maneuvers. I was amazed we could stay so close together. It was quite a sight seeing the two pilots outfitted in their helmets, oxygen masks and hoses looking at us and realizing we looked the same to them.

Maj Tart then called to the Kansas City flight center and got clearance to fly back to McConnell Air Force Base. At that time I noticed some white particles drifting by me. I could tell they were coming from the air conditioners. I mentioned this to Maj Tart who immediately wanted to know what I saw. After I explained it to him, he didn't seem concerned. I later learned they were little pieces of ice from the air conditioners which was normal.

At times while we were flying back to McConnell, Maj Tart would ask me how I was feeling. He told me that if I felt a little woozy I was to give myself 100% oxygen. He also asked me how the temperature was and I indicated it was a little cold. He told me that was the way he wanted it.

When we got back to McConnell I thought we were going to land but just before landing we made a violent maneuver climbing to the left and pulled almost 3.0 Gs. We came back around and reached the end of the runway we

made another violent maneuver but this time we came in for our landing. As we neared our landing Maj Tart said calmly, "Come down, come down... touch down, the brakes are good." At that time he released the drag chute and I was thrust forward slightly in my seat as the chute opened and the engine began to whine down.

When we turned off at the end of the runway, Maj Tart stopped the aircraft and we opened our canopies about one third to get some air. We then taxied back to the parking area where we raised our canopies all the way up. You could still hear the engine whining and the radio communications. It was a tremendous feeling knowing that I had broken the sound barrier, lived the life of an American jet fighter pilot for a day, and that we were safely back on the ground.

Maj Tart asked me to take out my ejection seat safety pin from my flight suit and insert it in the seat so it was no longer hot. It was hard to reach down into the lower right hand pocket of my G suit as I was strapped in so tight. I was finally able to reach it and insert it into the slot. Maj Tart then shut the engine down and the crew chief put up our ladders.

The crew chief climbed up my ladder and helped me unbuckle the various straps. We unbuckled the three buckles that held the parachute to the seat. I unfastened the two oxygen hose connections and the communication wires. Then I stood up and climbed down the ladder. This was difficult as the parachute was very heavy. I gave my helmet to Maj Tart and he carried it as I was very tired and just carried the parachute.

I was still excited but I was also a little disappointed because the flight was all over. It was a much greater experience than I had anticipated.

It took us about five minutes to walk to a small building beside the runway. At that time, with our parachutes on, we sat down. Kansas Air National Guard personnel conducted our debriefing. They wanted to know if there were any mechanical problems with the aircraft and any other information we would like to cover. We told them there were no aircraft problems to report.

We left that building and went back to the pilot's equipment area and hung up our parachutes. It was quite a struggle for me to get the parachute off and up on the hook. I also hung up my helmet and took off my G suit and hung it

up. We then walked through the restroom to the locker room and Maj Tart told me to get dressed and meet him in the operations room.

I got dressed and put my boots and flight suit back in the pilot's equipment room with my other equipment. The boots fit so well I almost hated to give them back. As I started to go to the operations room I remembered the airsick bags and went back and took one of the bags out of my G suit for a souvenir. I was proud that it was unused. I put the airsick bag in my pocket and went to the operations room.

In the operations room Col Cummins, Maj Tart and the two pilots that flew in the other F-105 with us in the Bison Range were waiting for me. We had a nice visit and I explained how much I enjoyed my flight. I asked Maj Tart how frequently a civilian got to ride in the backseat of an F-105. He paused for a moment and said, "Dave, almost never."

He told me that in about three hours I would be very tired so we decided I should start my drive back to Topeka. At approximately 3:30 PM Maj Tart and I exchanged a very warm handshake. It was the type of handshake that indicated we had gone through a very special experience together. Then I left and began my trip back to Topeka.

During my drive back I kept thinking about the quality of everyone I met in the Kansas Air National Guard and how impressed I was with Maj Tart. They were all great Kansans and great Americans. They made me feel like I was a part of them during that very special day in my life.

In looking back at my experience I realize that I lived the life of an American fighter pilot for a day. There is something about flying at supersonic speed, high above the ground, strapped into your ejection seat looking out over the world below through a clear canopy, surrounded by electronic switches and lights, with your helmet on and your nose and mouth covered, hearing the crackling of the chatter through the communications system along with your own breathing that words can't adequately explain. It was an experience I will never forget.

Two years, two months and two days later, following a call from the new Adjutant General, Major General Ralph Tice, I again flew with Gale Tart. He had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. This time we flew Mach 1.3 in a McDonald Douglas F-4 Phantom. But that's another story.