

April 10, 1970

Jeffrey L. Seideman - Recollection of 4/8/70 Incident
Conroy CL-44 Aircraft

At approximately 15:00 P.S.T., after approximately three hours of various flight testing, Capt. Bugbee (in the left seat) informed his crew, consisting of Capt. Jim Seymour (right seat); Jeff Seideman, Flight Engineer; Herb Schoeck, F.A.A.; Bill Guffe, Conroy Aircraft Chief of Maintenance, and Assistant Joe Carlisle, to prepare for "V.D."

On command from Capt. Bugbee I was instructed to set memo power on all four engines at approximately 25,000', approximately 20 miles off shore of Southern California, over water. Approximately gross weight 125,000#.

Captain Bugbee, the sole manipulator of the flight controls, informed the entire crew that we were going into a dive, intentionally, for the purpose of V.D.

At this point the aircraft was sustained in level flight at what appeared to be terminal velocity for the given power setting, weight, altitude, temperature, etc., of better than 220 knots I.A.S. (Capt.'s airspeed indicator).

As Capt. Bugbee nosed the aircraft over, my concentration was fixed upon, primarily, all engine instruments and, secondarily, upon Captain's airspeed and artificial horizon. Observing the artificial horizon I followed it through 15° vertically down from level. Also I noted a rapid rise from the airspeed indicator.

Realizing that our target velocity was .7 mach and 352 knots indicated, having been there before, I anticipated no adverse characteristics, with exception of the descent angle being better than twice as much as previously encountered.

Please be advised that I would like to go on record at this time by saying I have had no prior training as a Test Flight Engineer. However, I am under the impression that it is not advisable to obtain airspeed in this situation by increasing the angle of descent, per Herman "Fish" Salmon, test pilot, Lockheed A/C, Retired.

As we passed through 327 knots indicated (Captain's A.S.I.) (mach meter not observed) and approximately 22,000' (Capt's altimeter), we encountered severe buffet, unexpected by most, and uncontrollable at least.

Quantitating, the next (minimum of) 5 seconds to (maximum of) 30 seconds is still unclear. The A/C proceeded to shake, shudder and buffet to the extent of frightening magnitude. Clearly all crew members aboard realized we were in trouble. At this point all instruments, regardless of position, were unreadable. Outside air prior to said buffet was smooth.

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At this point I instinctively, as a Commercial pilot instrument and multi-engine rated, A & P licensed Flight Engineer, wanted to pull off all power and start a gradual pull out to stop the severe buffet. However, this was merely my thought. The actual occurrence was that Capt. Jim Seymour reduced all power to flight idle. Capt. Bugbee and/or Capt. Seymour pulled the aircraft out of the descent angle to level, or positive pitch attitude, whereat the severe buffeting terminated.

Recovery altitude was somewhere around 15,000' - 16,000' indicated. At this time Capt. Jim Seymour increased power on all four engines to an R.P.M. unnoted by this F/E. However, the airspeed stabilized at approximately 170 knots.

From this point on conversation was mainly between Captains Seymour and Bugbee. Capt. Jim Seymour immediately suggested we make an emergency landing at Point Mugu (within sight). Simultaneously Capt. Bugbee suggested we proceed to Rogers Dry Lake Bed at Edwards Air Force Base. Right now we are still flying level, power unchanged, approximately 170 knots, recovery heading whatever it was. Capt. Seymour said something to the effect (and don't quote me) "Crazy, baby, like here we are, but where are we?". Capt. Bugbee said "I don't know, but let's find out."

Right now I inquired "Are we o.k.?". Capt. Bugbee replied "We don't have rudder response". Captains Bugbee, Seymour and F/E Jeff Seideman surmised that we had possibly physically shed the vertical stabilizer.

At this point Los Angeles Center, which was giving us traffic advisories, was informed that we were declaring an emergency, that we had suffered structural damage of unknown magnitude, we are proceeding to Edwards AFB, we are requesting a visual inspection of our A/C by another A/C.

Contact by dispatched F-4 Phantom was made en route to Edwards. F-4 Pilot reported left main landing gear was extended and that structural damage was visible on leading edge off R/H horizontal stabilizer. We were reinsured that the vertical stabilizer was still intact. However, we had absolutely no control over our rudder.

Capt. Seymour at this time instructed his entire crew to 'chute up' and prepare for possible bail out. Captains Bugbee and Seymour reported that we have elevator control, aileron control, however, no rudder control. Sustained flight was smooth, except for a slight yaw condition.

Extension of remaining gear was thoroughly discussed by all concerned. Normal down selection was made and gear extended and locked.

Capt. Seymour instructed the crew that the landing configuration would be established at an altitude sufficient for enough time for bail out in the event the lowering of the remaining gear and or 30° landing flaps caused any uncontrollable flight condition. This was done at approximately 10,000'.

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Landing was made uneventful on Rogers Dry Lake Bed.

Post flight inspection of the aircraft determined that I should ground the aircraft until major repair has been accomplished.

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