

NANOOK JATO TEST

When it was learned that Lt. Cavnar was going to flight test his C-54 with JATO(Jet Assist Take Off) Rockets, CWO Chastain who accompanied BW-8 cargo aboard the USS Link Splice, advised the Engineering Section that all JATO rockets had been deck loaded and were subjected to possible sea water damage during a storm enroute. It was then decided to test fire one of the JATO rockets to determine their serviceability. Since there was no test range on BW-8,a flat sandy riverside site about three miles upstream from the Base was selected .The weapons and approximately twenty other "EXPERTS" came along to help and to photograph the occasion. In all, there were four cameramen ; two with Speed Graphics, one with a K-20 ,and one with a B-1 Motion Picture camera.

M/Sgt Carl "Pappy" Wicks was in charge of the test. The rocket was propped up on a crude frame made out of wood from packing crates .Wire was connected from the terminals of the JATO unit to be powered from the battery of the Jeep Command Post, approximately three hundred feet away. All spectators and test personnel were safely spaced in a circle the same distance from "Ground Zero".On the count down of ten" ,Pappy "Wicks sceintificaly applied the two firing wires to the Jeep's battery.There was a thundering silence, for there was no ignition.The launch crew held a hasty post mortem conference and it was decided that ignition failure was due to "line drop",and it would be necessary to move the Jeep and power source one hundred feet closer to the launch pad.After this was done,the circle of test personnel and spectators reduced accordingly. Again "Pappy" Wicks gave the count down and closed the firing circuit with no ignition. Another conference resulted in closing the circle to ;two hundred feet from the JATO unit being tested.The third count down and power application resulted in no ignition.The launch crew concluded line drop was still the cause of the failure of the unit to fire, And the launch crew and spectator circle moved to within fifty feet of the JATO unit.Another firing was attempted wih the same negative results.At this point,it was the almost unanimous opinion,that sea water had terminally damaged the deck loaded JATO units;all except one wanna-be electrical engineer,who opined that;" maybe we have been using the wrong polarity."With this suggestion, polarity was reversed and the circuit closed.WHOOOOOOOOOM!!!!Off she went into the WILD BLUE YONDER ! staight up for approximately a couple hundred feet,and with no fins she became a misguided acrobatic missile.After some loops an a Immelman or two with a dive back toward the launch site,the awe struck crew and spectators decided that it was time to evacuate.At the last moment the unit recovered and made one more wide loop and clobbered itself in the fjord.This however did not stop the frantic race for life.All scattered like a covey of quail. "Pappy" Wicks,who was also reffered to as Sgt.Step and a half, had a very bad limp,resulting from a parachute jump injury during WWII, This Old Timer; M/Sgt."Pappy"Wicks passed all of us youngsters on an uphill incline in our dash to safety.And it might added;that not one photo was taken to record this awesome event of Nanook's JATO Test.

The above was submitted to SAC's History book published by the Turner Co.

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