



# My Engine's OUT!

By Capt Greg Tolmoff, Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz.

I decided that a little low-level flying would be fun, so I pulled the throttle of the Cessna and descended down from 3,000 feet Above Ground Level (AGL) to 500 feet AGL. Then it happened. The engine quit.

Illustration by SSgt Carrie Atwood

I was on top of the world! I had completed Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training, and was at my A-10 Flying Training Upgrade (FTU). On a day off, wanting to use my private pilot's license, I got checked out at the local airport and re-hacked my currency flying single-engine-propeller planes. On this day, the sun was shining and the weather was perfect — even by Southern Arizona standards.

I rented a Cessna 150 and flew from Tucson to Phoenix to complete some licensing paperwork with the FAA. After completing the paperwork, I headed

back home. On the flight, I thought about how much I loved flying. I was about 4 months into my 6-month A-10 FTU, so I was feeling good and thought that I knew it all! I decided that a little low-level flying would be fun, so I pulled the throttle of the Cessna and descended down from 3,000 feet Above Ground Level (AGL) to 500 feet AGL.

Then it happened. The engine quit.

I established my glide, picked a field for my landing area, and aimed straight for it. As I descended, I tried to figure out what had just happened. I ran through the appropriate engine failure/re-

start checklist — Fuel, Mixture, Throttle, Carb Heat, Master, Primer, Key. None of it worked; the engine was still out. In the back of my mind, I remembered my civilian instructor years earlier saying, *"If it doesn't work the first time — try it again — what do you have to lose?"* So I tried the sequence again, and the engine fired up!

I leveled off, and found an old, abandoned airstrip about 2 miles off my nose. Luckily, I was in a perfect base position — just a little bit low. The engine ran for only about 10 seconds before it quit again. That was just enough time to guarantee that I

would make my intended landing point. I glided the aircraft to a picture perfect landing on a less than perfect runway.

Safely down, I finally realized the enormity of what had just happened. My legs shook and I felt nauseous. I had done everything correctly, I had landed safely and I saved my own life. There was nobody else in the cockpit with me who could have helped me with my problem. I was alone. But was I?

I had aviated, I had navigated, I had communicated, and I had landed as soon as possible. Well, I actually didn't communicate, because time and condi-

tions did not permit it. However, the concept is one that saved my life.

I have reflected on that day often. I now understand why all of the early morning stand-ups stressed the basics — Aviate, Navigate, and Communicate; Maintain Aircraft Control; Analyze the Situation; and Land as Soon as Conditions Permit. Throughout my career, the Air Force was trying to help me develop habit patterns that I could fall back on when routine flights went south. And on that day — even though I was not in an Air Force aircraft flying an Air Force mission, those habit patterns

saved my life. Now that I am teaching the young Hawk Drivers, I continually emphasize the basics. I try to instill in them the development of good habit patterns. You never know when your day is going to go south and your life or the lives of others are placed at risk. Take it from me — you want solid habit patterns on your side. ▶

**Editor's Note:** A large piece of debris was found in the fuel filter. At certain angles of attack, it would close off the fuel flow to the engine, causing it to stall. When Capt Tolmoff pulled the throttle and started the descent, he hit the "critical" angle of attack causing engine failure.