

NO ALTERNATING CURRENT POWER

Captain Dave Hall, the combat information control officer (CICO) on Crew 31, had taken 30 days' leave, and I was substituting for him. Shortly after we took off on a mission, the alternating current (AC) generator on engine # 4 went out. No problem; since there was an AC generator on both outboard engines and we still had the # 1 generator, we went about our business.

During the mission, two significant things happened. First, one of the inboard engines started slinging oil more than usual, and there was a concern that damage could result. On top of that, due to another problem, # 1 had to be feathered. But Connies were very versatile, so we weren't in imminent danger.

However, all of the combat information compartment (CIC) equipment was AC powered, so since we had no AC power at all, we had no mission capability—either manual or automatic. I notified Bankrupt Control (BRC) of our situation, and the operator there asked if I could give him details of the situation and inform him if we were returning to base (RTB) or not. I told him that we were not RTB as of that moment but that I would provide him with an assessment as soon as possible. I don't think I realized just yet the impact on the mission equipment.

So I went to the navigator, First Lieutenant Jim Hardee, and asked if he could give me a rundown on things. He began to list things that were out of commission, so I interrupted him and asked him what WAS working. He replied, somewhat sardonically, "The J-2 compass."

That was one of those "Oh hell!" moments.

I radioed BRC and briefed the operator on our lack of mission capability, but he then asked if we could remain on station for another hour or two until another aircraft could take off relieve us!

Now I am neither a pilot nor a navigator, and I know absolutely nothing about the workings of an aircraft or flying one. But I could not understand the rationale for that; it just didn't compute. I then went to the aircraft commander, Lieutenant Colonel John Banner, and reported BRC's request. He said that there was no point in remaining on station without the capability to perform the mission. Because of that and the risks involved, he said he was going back to Korat.

We made it back to Korat without further mishap.

When the debriefing and the Monday morning quarterbacking were done, the organizational hierarchy was not happy with Lt Col Banner's decision. Of course, none of them was in the aircraft either. From what I heard—and this is secondhand information—Lt Col Banner was raked over the coals for that and relieved as aircraft commander. There seems to have been a mindset that emphasized 24/7 coverage to such an extent that there was no room for judgment and command decisions—especially when no operational capability existed and flying safety was in jeopardy.

I had flown with Lt Col Banner on several occasions before and thought he was a fine officer. The whole thing just seemed wrong.

I think of that flight from time to time and just shake my head.