

*In 1962, at RAF Bentwaters, Robin Old's good friend Chappie James, was the Wing DCO and I was one of his Squadron*

*Commanders. We were the only Wing in the Air Force equipped with F-101s. And we were in Hog Heaven.*

*Right ?*

*That summer, Chappie, also a good friend of mine, and I had occasion to fly to Wheelus to the bombing and gunnery*

*encampment, so we went together with Chappie leading.*

*When we were over France, it looked like we would run a little low on fuel in Libya . . so Chappie decided to divert to Aviano,*

*Italy.*

*The weather forecast was rain showers . . or maybe thunderstorms in the Alps. But we had lots of fuel for the shorter distance.*

*So it didn't seem like there was anything to be particularly worried about.*

*When we crossed into Italy, there was a increasing undercast . . with thunder storm buildups up ahead.*

*Now, at 35M, we started to get into cirrus. Soon, we were on solid instruments . . got an enroute clearance to let down to cross*

*over Aviano's low frequency beacon at 20M.*

*The air became extremely bumpy with lightning flashes and all the rest of the good stuff that goes with when flying inside a*

*inside a thunderstorm. Of course, this was before the days of TACAN .  
. so our primary navigation instrument was the low*

*frequency ADF radio compass.*

*In the dark and turbulence . . I had my hands full just hanging on  
to Chappie's wing. Every once in a while, I'd sneak a*

*quick look at my ADF radio compass needle . . noticing it  
was aimlessly swinging around . . as it tried to figure out . . whether*

*to home in on Aviano's radio beacon . . or the closest thunderstorm.*

*When the needle seemed to settle on our tail, Chappie accepted the  
ADF's ' needle flip ' as the indication of station passage*

*over Aviano's beacon*

*-- I didn't know any different -- so we started our let down.*

*We were in a jet penetration passing down through 10M.*

*As we straightened out on our inbound heading when . .  
unexpectedly . . the surrounding cloud seemed to be getting . . a*

*little lighter.*

*Suddenly we broke out of its bottom. And the sight . . immediately . .  
in front of our startled faces . .*

**E-L-E-C-T-R-I-F-I-E-D**

**US !**

*We were ' close in ' staring . . at a small Alps valley bottom . .*

*LESS . . than 100 hundred feet away . .*



*With it rocks and boulders . . on both sides . . ' poked up ' into the cloud . .*

*Chappie s-h-o-u-t-e-d :*

*A-F-T-E-R B-U-R-N-E-R-S*

*Every man for himself . . as we both pulled up steeply . . and headed back into the more forgiving environment of . . .*

*thunderstorms.*

*' I lost you ' . . I had radioed . . as we both reached for clouds . . having no rocks.*

*We told Approach Control our plight, squawked emergency, and received individual steers, allowing us to miss the*

*bigger storms and let down to Aviano.*

*As a matter fact, the weather was good, right around the base, and we landed without further incident.*

*But what is imprinted indelibly on my brain, are the close-in piles of rocks and boulders—up close—and disappearing  
into the clouds.*

*On the ground, in our sweat-drenched flying suits, we looked at each other . . . and smiled. What else could we do ? Was it*

*pure chance, Lady Luck, or God that allowed us to survive and continue our full careers?*

*I don't know. But I do know that ' Chappie ' and I had a special relationship after that, up until his death from a heart attack  
at age 58.*

*' Chick ' Cleveland*

*[ Editor : Former ' Ivory ' Ace ]*



