



The Cornfield Bomber: The F-106 That Landed Itself

by [MiGFlug Team](#) | Apr 9, 2026 | [History & Legends](#), [Military Aviation](#) | [0 comments](#)

On February 2, 1970, somewhere over the frozen plains of Montana, Captain Gary Foust of the 71st Fighter Interceptor Squadron had a problem that no amount of skill could solve. His F-106A Delta Dart — a supersonic interceptor designed to hunt Soviet bombers at the edge of the stratosphere — had entered a flat spin. The aircraft was rotating like a frisbee, nose high, falling at thousands of feet per minute, and nothing Foust tried could break the rotation. He did what any pilot in an unrecoverable spin is trained to do: he ejected. The canopy blew off, the rocket fired, and Foust was flung into the freezing Montana sky under a parachute. Below him, the unpiloted Delta Dart continued to fall. And then something happened that no engineer, no pilot, and no textbook had predicted. The F-106 stopped spinning. It levelled its wings. And it flew — by itself — to a gentle belly landing in a snow-covered cornfield near Big Sandy, Montana. The engine was still running when a farmer found it.

Quick Facts

Aircraft: Convair F-106A Delta Dart, serial 58-0787 — “The Cornfield Bomber”

Unit: 71st Fighter Interceptor Squadron, Malmstrom AFB, Montana

Date: February 2, 1970

Pilot: Captain Gary Foust (ejected safely)

Landing Site: Snow-covered cornfield near Big Sandy, Montana

Damage: Minor — aircraft repaired and returned to service

Subsequent Service: Flew for another 16 years until 1986

Current Location: National Museum of the United States Air Force, Dayton, Ohio

The Spin Nobody Could Break

Foust was part of a training exercise that day — a simulated dogfight over the Montana high plains. During an aggressive manoeuvre, the F-106 departed controlled flight and entered a flat spin. This is the most dangerous type of spin for a delta-wing aircraft: the nose sits well above the horizon, the aircraft rotates around its vertical axis, and aerodynamic controls become essentially useless because the airflow over the wings and tail is completely disrupted.



The Convair F-106A Delta Dart — a Mach 2+ interceptor. Aircraft 58-0787 would earn the nickname Cornfield Bomber for the most improbable landing in aviation history. Wikimedia Commons Foust tried everything in the recovery checklist. Full opposite rudder. Forward stick. Throttle to idle, then to military power. The F-106 ignored all of it. The aircraft had been falling for several minutes, altitude bleeding away, when Foust made the call no pilot wants to make: he reached between his legs, grabbed the ejection handle, and pulled.

The Miracle Recovery

When Foust ejected, the canopy departed, the seat rocket fired, and approximately 200 pounds of pilot and equipment left the aircraft in an instant. This sudden change in weight and centre of gravity did something that all of Foust's skill could not: it shifted the aerodynamic balance just enough to break the spin. The F-106's nose dropped. The delta wing, now flying clean without a canopy or pilot, found stable airflow. The aircraft

transitioned from a tumbling death spiral into a gentle, nose-low glide. The throttle, still set to idle from Foust's last recovery attempt, kept the engine purring at just enough power to sustain a slow descent. With no pilot to command it, the aircraft descended through the clouds, crossed the frozen Montana landscape, and touched down belly-first in a snow-covered wheat field belonging to a farmer near the town of Big Sandy. The snow cushioned the landing. The engine continued to run. The aircraft slid to a stop, largely intact, sitting upright in the field as if it had been parked there on purpose.



An F-106 Delta Dart. The Cornfield Bomber made a remarkably gentle belly landing with no pilot aboard, sustaining only minor damage. Wikimedia Commons

Found by a Farmer

A local law enforcement officer, alerted by the sound of the low-flying jet, arrived at the field to find the F-106 sitting in the snow with its engine idling, canopy missing, and cockpit empty. The scene was surreal: a supersonic interceptor, designed to fly at twice the speed of sound at 40,000 feet, had landed itself in a wheat field with less damage than many controlled landings produce. Meanwhile, Foust had landed safely by parachute several miles away, fully expecting that his aircraft had cratered into the Montana wilderness. When he learned that the F-106 had not only survived but had landed itself almost perfectly, his reaction was one shared by everyone who heard the story: disbelief.

Back in Service

The Air Force recovered the aircraft, assessed the damage, and made a decision that surprises people to this day: they repaired it. Aircraft 58-0787 was trucked back to a maintenance facility, given a new canopy, patched up, and returned to flying status. It served for another sixteen years, finally retiring in 1986 when the F-106 fleet was phased out of service. Today, the Cornfield Bomber sits in the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, Ohio — one of the most popular exhibits in the collection. A small placard tells the story. Visitors shake their heads. And somewhere, the ghost of Gary Foust is probably still shaking his. *Sources: National Museum of the USAF, Air Force Magazine, Aviation Geek Club*