

MILITARY SEA SERVICES MUSEUM, INC.



SEA SERVICES SCUTTLEBUTT

October 2014

A message from the President

Greetings,



Tony LaMorte

Summer is over and Highlands County's winter guests (snow birds) are slowly arriving. Bud Farmer one of our snow birds will be here before the end of October. Bud volunteers to stand watch at the Museum while he is in Sebring and he is very helpful in making improvements to the Museum. Fred Carino will also be back in Sebring. Fred has been captaining boats and working out west during the summer months. Fred is a long time Museum member who willing helps out when called upon. This past summer was a fairly good one for the Museum. We had a couple of group visits and we had a least one walk-in visitor on about 75 percent of the days the Museum was open. The Museum always sees more visitors during the winter months, and this coming winter is starting out good. We are already seeing more walk-in visitors and we have a group of school children scheduled to visit on 7 November. Hopefully, there will be more school and other groups to follow as well as more walk-in visitors. The holidays will be here before you know it. Have a happy Thanksgiving and please be careful if you are traveling to visit family or friends for Thanksgiving.

Tony

Stories Wanted

We would like to publish in the Scuttlebutt short stories of Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard personal experiences, and/or short stories of sea services historical events. We are sure there are plenty of stories out there that would be of interest to Scuttlebutt readers. Please email your stories to navmargrd@gmail.com or mail to the Museum.

Military Sea Services Museum
1402 Roseland Avenue, Sebring,
Florida, 33870 Phone: (863) 385-0992
E-Mail: navmargrd@gmail.com

Hours of Operation
Open: Wednesday through Saturday
Noon to 4:00 p.m.
Web site: <http://milseasvcmuseum.org/>

An Aviator's Adventure

The story of Cliff Judkins' "bailout" from his F-8 Crusader in the early 1960s. "I fell 15,000 feet and lived" by Cliff Judkins. Source: Chapter 7 of Ron Knott's book "Supersonic Cowboys."



"Jud, you're on fire, get out of there!"

Needless to say that startling command got my attention. As you will read in this report, this was just the beginning of my problems!

It had all started in the brilliant sunlight 20,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean as I nudged my F-8 Crusader jet into position behind the lumbering, deep-bellied refueling plane. After a moment of jockeying for position, I made the connection and matched my speed to that of the slowpoke tanker. I made the graceful task of plugging into the trailing fuel conduit so they could pump fuel into my tanks.

This in-flight refueling process was necessary, and routine, because the F-8 could not hold enough fuel to fly from California to Hawaii. This routing mission was labeled "Trans-Pac," meaning flying airplanes across the Pacific. This had been going on for years.

Soon, after plugging-into the tanker, my fuel gauges stirred, showing that all was well. In my cockpit, I was relaxed and confident. As I was looking around, I was struck for an instant by the eeriness of the scene: here I was, attached, like an unwanted child, by an umbilicus to a gargantuan mother who was fleeing across the sky at 200 knots as though from some unnamed danger. Far below us was a broken layer of clouds that filtered the sun glare over the Pacific.

In my earphones, I heard Major Van Campen, our flight leader, chatting with Major D.K. Tooker who was on a Navy destroyer down below. Major Tooker had ejected from his aircraft, the day before, in this same area, when his Crusader flamed out mysteriously during the same type of refueling exercise.

At that time no one knew why his aircraft had flamed out. We all supposed it had been some freak accident that sometimes happens with no explanation. One thing we knew for sure, it was not pilot error. This accident had to be some kind of mechanical malfunction, but what? Our squadron had a perfect safety record and was very disturbed because of the loss of an airplane the day before.

"Eleven minutes to mandatory disconnect point," the tanker commander said. I checked my fuel gauges again, everything appeared normal.

My thoughts were, "In a few hours I knew we'd all be having dinner at the Kaneohe Officer Club on Oahu, Hawaii. Then after a short rest, we'd continue our 6,000-mile trek to Atsugi, Japan, via Midway and Wake Island. Our whole outfit-Marine All Weather Fighter Squadron 323 - was being transferred to the Far East for a one-year period of operations.

An Aviator's Adventure- cont'd

“Nine minutes to mandatory disconnect.”

My fuel gauges indicated that the tanks were almost full. I noticed that my throttle lever was sticking a little. That was unusual, because the friction lock was holding it in place and was loose enough. It grew tighter as I tried to manipulate it gently.

Then – thud! I heard the crack of an explosion.

I could see the rpm gauge unwinding and the tailpipe temperature dropping. The aircraft had lost power – the engine had quit running – this is a flame-out!

I punched the mike button, and said, “This is Jud. I’ve got a flame-out!”

Unfortunately, my radio was already dead; I was neither sending nor receiving anything via my radio.

I quickly disconnected from the tanker and nosed the aircraft over, into a shallow dive, to pick up some flying speed to help re-start the engine. I needed a few seconds to think.

I yanked the handle that extended the air-driven emergency generator, called the Ram Air Turbine (RAT) into the slipstream, hoping to get ignition for an air start. The igniters clicked gamely, and the rpm indicator started to climb slowly, as did the tailpipe temperature. This was a positive indication that the re-start was beginning. For one tantalizing moment I thought everything would be all right. But the rpm indicator hung uncertainly at 30 percent of capacity and refused to go any faster. This is not nearly enough power to maintain flight.

The fire warning light (pilots call it the panic light) blinked on. This is not a good sign. And to make matters worse, jet fuel poured over the canopy like water from a bucket. At the same instant, my radio came back on, powered by the emergency generator, and a great babble of voices burst through my earphones.

“Jud, you’re on fire, get out of there!”

Fuel was pouring out of my aircraft; from the tailpipe; from the intake duct; from under the wings, and igniting behind me in a great awesome trail of fire.

The suddenness of the disaster overwhelmed me, and I thought: “This can’t be happening to me!”

The voices in my ears kept urging me to fire the ejection seat and abandon my aircraft.

I pressed my mike button and told the flight leader, “I’m getting out!”

I took my hands off the flight controls and reached above my head for the canvas curtain that would start the ejection sequence. I pulled it down hard over my face and waited for the tremendous kick in the pants, which would send me rocketing upward, free of the aircraft. Nothing happened! This was very surprising. Both, the primary, and the secondary ejection procedures had failed and I was trapped in the cockpit of the burning aircraft.

An Aviator's Adventure- cont'd

The plane was now in a steep 60-degree dive. For the first time, I felt panic softening the edges of my determination. I knew that I had to do something or I was going to die in this sick airplane. There was no way out of it. With great effort, I pulled my thoughts together and tried to imagine some solution.

A voice in my earphones was shouting: "Ditch the plane! Ditch it in the ocean!"

It must have come from the tanker skipper or one of the destroyer commanders down below, because every jet pilot knows you can't ditch a jet and survive. The plane would hit the water at a very high speed, flip over and sink like a stone and they usually explode on impact.

I grabbed the control stick and leveled the aircraft. Then I yanked the alternate handle again in an attempt to fire the canopy and start the ejection sequence, but still nothing happened. That left me with only one imaginable way out, which was to jettison the canopy manually and try to jump from the aircraft without aid of the ejection seat.

Was such a thing possible: I was not aware of any Crusader pilot who had ever used this World War II tactic to get out of a fast flying jet. I had been told that this procedure, of bailing out of a jet, was almost impossible. Yes, the pilot may get out of the airplane but the massive 20 foot high tail section is almost certain to strike the pilot's body and kill him before he falls free of the aircraft. My desperation was growing, and any scheme that offered a shred of success seemed better than riding that aircraft into the sea, which would surely be fatal.

I disconnected the canopy by hand, and with a great whoosh it disappeared from over my head never to be seen again. Before trying to get out of my confined quarters, I trimmed the aircraft to fly in a kind of sidelong skid: nose high and with the tail swung around slightly to the right.

Then I stood up in the seat and put both arms in front of my face. I was sucked out harshly from the airplane. I cringed as I tumbled outside the bird, expecting the tail to cut me in half, but thank goodness, that never happened in an instant I knew I was out of there and uninjured.

I waited...and waited...until my body, hurtling through space, with the 225 knots of momentum started to decelerate. I pulled the D-ring on my parachute, which is the manual way to open the chute if the ejection seat does not work automatically. I braced myself for the opening shock. I heard a loud pop above me, but I was still falling very fast. As I looked up I saw that the small pilot chute had deployed. (This small chute is designed to keep the pilot from tumbling until the main chute opens.) But, I also noticed a sight that made me shiver with disbelief and horror! The main, 24 foot parachute was just flapping in the breeze and was tangled in its own shroud lines. It hadn't opened! I could see the white folds neatly arranged, fluttering feebly in the air.

"This is very serious," I thought.

Frantically, I shook the risers in an attempt to balloon the chute and help it open. It didn't work. I pulled the bundle down toward me and wrestled with the shroud lines, trying my best to get the chute to open. The parachute remained closed. All the while I am falling like a rock toward the ocean.

An Aviator's Adventure- cont'd

I looked down hurriedly. There was still plenty of altitude remaining. I quickly developed a frustrating and sickening feeling. I wanted everything to halt while I collected my thoughts, but my fall seemed to accelerate. I noticed a ring of turbulence in the ocean. It looked like a big stone had been thrown in the water. It had white froth at its center; I finally realized this is where my plane had crashed in the ocean.

“Would I be next to crash?” were my thoughts!

Again, I shook the parachute risers and shroud lines, but the rushing air was holding my chute tightly in a bundle. I began to realize that I had done all I could reasonably do to open the chute and it was not going to open. I was just along for a brutal ride that may kill or severely injure me.

I descended rapidly through the low clouds. Now there was only clear sky between me and the ocean. This may be my last view of the living. I have no recollection of positioning myself properly or even bracing for the impact. In fact, I don't remember hitting the water at all. At one instant I was falling very fast toward the ocean. The next thing I remember is hearing a shrill, high-pitched whistle that hurt my ears.

Suddenly, I was very cold. In that eerie half-world of consciousness, I thought, “Am I alive!” I finally decided, and not all at once, “Yes, I think I am...I am alive!”

The water helped clear my senses. But as I bounced around in the water I began coughing and retching. The Mae West around my waist had inflated. I concluded that the shrill whistling sound that I had heard was the gas leaving the CO2 cylinders as it was filling the life vest.

A sense of urgency gripped me, as though there were some task I ought to be performing. Then it dawned on me what it was. The parachute was tugging at me from under the water. It had finally billowed out (much too late) like some Brobdingnagian Portuguese man-of-war. I tried reaching down for my hunting knife located in the knee pocket of my flight suit. I had to cut the shroud line of the chute before it pulled me under for good.

This is when I first discovered that I was injured severely. The pain was excruciating. Was my back broken? I tried to arch it slightly and felt the pain again. I tried moving my feet, but that too was impossible. They were immobile, and I could feel the bones in them grating against each other. There was no chance of getting the hunting knife, but I had another, smaller one in the upper torso of my flight suit. With difficulty, I extracted it and began slashing feebly at the spaghetti-like shroud line mess surrounding me.

Once free of the parachute, I began a tentative search for the survival pack. It contained a one-man raft, some canned water, food, fishing gear, and dye markers. The dye markers colored the water around the pilot too aid the rescue team in finding a down airman. All of this survival equipment should have been strapped to my hips. It was not there. It had been ripped away from my body upon impact with the water.

“How long would the Mae West sustain me? I wondered.

An Aviator's Adventure- cont'd

I wasn't sure, but I knew I needed help fast. The salt water that I had swallowed felt like an enormous rock in the pit of my gut. But worst of all, here I was, completely alone, 600 miles from shore, lolling in the deep troughs and crests of the Pacific Ocean. And my Crusader airplane, upon which had been lavished such affectionate attention, was sinking thousands of feet to the bottom of the ocean.

At that moment, I was struck by the incredible series of coincidences that had just befallen me. I knew that my misfortune had been a one-in-a-million occurrence. In review, I noted that the explosion aloft should not have happened. The ejection mechanism should have worked. The parachute should have opened. None of these incidents should have happened. I had just experienced three major catastrophes in one flight. My squadron had a perfect safety record. "Why was all of this happening?" was my thinking.

In about ten minutes I heard the drone of a propeller-driven plane. The pot-bellied, four-engine tanker came into view flying very low. They dropped several green dye markers near me, and some smoke flares a short distance from my position. They circled overhead and dropped an inflated life raft about 50 yards from me.

I was so pleased and tried to swim toward the raft. When I took two strokes, I all most blacked out due to the intense pain in my body. The tanker circled again and dropped another raft closer to me, but there was no way for me to get to it, or in it, in my condition.

The water seemed to be getting colder and a chill gripped me. I looked at my watch, but the so-called unbreakable crystal was shattered and the hands torn away. I tried to relax and surrender to the Pacific Ocean swells. I could almost have enjoyed being buoyed up to the crest of one swell and gently sliding into the trough of the next, but I was in such excruciating pain. I remembered the words W.C. Fields had chosen for his epitaph: "On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."

In about an hour, a Coast Guard amphibian plane flew over and circled me as though deciding whether or not to land. But the seas were high and I knew he couldn't make it. He came in very low and dropped another raft; this one had a 200 -foot lanyard attached to it. The end of the lanyard landed barely ten feet from me. I paddled gently backward using only my arms. I caught hold of it and pulled the raft to me. Even before trying, I knew I couldn't crawl into the raft due to my physical condition. I was able to get a good grip on the side and hold on. This gave me a little security.

The Coast Guard amphibian gained altitude and flew off. I learned later that he headed for a squadron of minesweepers that was returning to the States from a tour of the Western Pacific. He was unable to tune to their radio frequency for communications. But this ingenious pilot lowered a wire from his aircraft and dragged it across the bow of the minesweeper, the USS Embattle. The minesweeper captain understood the plea, and veered off at top speed in my direction.

I was fully conscious during the two and half hours it took the ship to reach me. I spotted the minesweeper while teetering at the crest of a wave. Soon, its great bow was pushing in toward me and I could see sailors in orange life jackets crowding its lifelines. A bearded man in a black rubber suit jumped into the water and swam to me.

"Are your hurt?" he asked. "Yes," I said, "My legs and back."

An Aviator's Adventure- cont'd

I was now very cold and worried about the growing numbness in my legs. Perhaps the imminence of rescue made me light-headed, for I only vaguely remember being hoisted aboard the ship. I was laid out on the ship's deck as they cut away my flight suit.

"Don't touch my legs! Don't touch my legs!" I screamed. I don't remember it. Somebody gave me a shot of morphine and this erased part of my extreme pain.

An hour or so later a man was bending over me and asking questions. (It was a doctor who had been high-lined over from the USS Los Angeles, a cruiser that had been operating in the area.)

He said, "You have a long scar on your abdomen. How did it get there?"

I told him about a serious auto accident I'd had four years earlier in Texas, and that my spleen had been removed at that time.

He grunted, and asked more questions while he continued examining me. Then he said, "You and I are going to take a little trip over to the USS Los Angeles; it's steaming alongside."

Somehow they got me into a wire stretcher, and hauled me, dangling and dipping, across the watery interval between the Embattle and the cruiser.

In the Los Angeles's sickbay, they gave me another shot of morphine, thank God, and started thrusting all sorts of hoses into my body. I could tell from all the activity, and from the intense, hushed voices, that they were very worried about my condition.

My body temperature was down to 94 degrees; my intestines and kidneys were in shock. The doctors never left my side during the night. They took my blood pressure every 15 minutes. I was unable to sleep. Finally, I threw-up about a quart or more of seawater. After this my nausea was relieved a bit.

By listening to the medical team, who was working on me, I was able to piece together the nature of my injuries. This is what I heard them saying. My left ankle was broken in five places. My right ankle was broken in three places. A tendon in my left foot was cut. My right pelvis was fractured. My number 7 vertebra was fractured. My left lung had partially collapsed. There were many cuts and bruises all over my face and body, and my intestines and kidneys had been shaken into complete inactivity.

The next morning Dr. Valentine Rhodes told me that the Los Angeles was steaming at flank speed to a rendezvous with a helicopter 100 miles from Long Beach, California.

At 3:30 that afternoon, I was hoisted into the belly of a Marine helicopter from the USS Los Angeles's fantail, and we whirred off to a hospital ship, the USS Haven, docked in Long Beach, CA.

Once aboard the Haven, doctors came at me from all sides with more needles, tubes, and X-ray machines. Their reaction to my condition was so much more optimistic than I had expected. I finally broke down and let go a few tears of relief, exhaustion, and thanks to all hands and God.

An Aviator's Adventure- cont'd

Within a few months I was all systems go again. My ankles were put back in place with the help of steel pins. The partially collapsed left lung re-inflated and my kidneys and intestines were working again without the need of prodding.

The Marine Corps discovered the cause of my flame-out, and that of Major Tooker, the day before, was the failure of an automatic cut-off switch in the refueling system. The aircraft's main fuel tank was made of heavy reinforced rubber. When the cut-off switch failed, this allowed the tank to overfill and it burst like a balloon. This then caused the fire and flame out. We will never know why the ejection seat failed to work since it is in the bottom of the ocean. The parachute failure is a mystery also. Like they say, "Some days you are the dog and others you are the fire-plug."



Do I feel lucky? That word doesn't even begin to describe my feelings. To survive a 15,000-foot fall with an unopened chute is a fair enough feat. My mind keeps running back to something Dr. Rhodes told me in the sickbay of the Los Angeles during those grim and desperate hours.

He said that if I had had a spleen, it almost certainly would have ruptured when I hit the water, and I would have bled to death. Of the 25 pilots in our squadron, I am the only one without a spleen. It gives me something to think about. Maybe it does you as well.

Note: Amazingly, Cliff Judkins not only survived this ordeal but he also returned to flight status. He was flying the F-8 Crusader again within six months after the accident. After leaving the Marine Corps he was hired as a pilot with Delta Airlines and retired as a Captain from that position.

Contributed by CDR Doc Savage, USN (Ret)

Anniversaries

12 October 1492. Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas.

13 October 1775. U.S. Navy established. The Continental Congress established the Continental Navy by authorizing the procurement, fitting out, manning and dispatch of two armed vessels to search for munitions ships supplying the British Army in America. All together the Continental Navy numbered some 50 ships with about 20 warships active at its maximum strength over the course of the War for Independence. Today, the U.S. Navy is the most powerful Navy in the World.

1 October 1880. John Philip Sousa appointed leader of the Marine Band.

27 October 1922. U.S. Navy Day established by the Navy League of the United States. The Navy League selected October 27th to celebrate Navy Day because it was the birthday of President Theodore Roosevelt, a naval enthusiast.

26 October 1944. The U.S. Navy defeated the Japanese in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The Japanese Navy was rendered virtually powerless.

23 October 1983. A truck pulled up to the four-story U.S. Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Seconds later, the Hezbollah suicide bomber inside the truck detonated explosives equal to 12,000 pounds of TNT. The Marine Barracks collapsed killing 241 Americans, 220 Marines, 18 Sailors, and 3 Soldiers. This was the deadliest terrorist attack on Americans before 11 September 2001, and the deadliest single day for the U.S. Marine Corps since Iwo Jima.

13 October 1987. The United States Navy Memorial opened in Washington, DC.

12 October 2000. The USS COLE (DDG-67) attacked by Al Qaeda terrorist using a small boat laden with explosives in the harbor at Aden, Yemen. Seventeen USS COLE crewmembers were killed and 39 were wounded. The USS COLE was severely damaged, but was repaired.

10 November 1775. U.S. Marine Corps established. Captain Samuel Nicholas working out of Tun Tavern in Philadelphia formed two battalions of Continental Marines as Naval infantry. Since then, the U.S. Marine Corps served in every American conflict. Today, the U.S. Marine Corps is the world's dominant practitioner of amphibious warfare.

11 November 1918. World War I ended at 1100. On the first anniversary of the end of World War I, President Wilson declared November 11th, Armistice Day. However, it wasn't until 1938 that Armistice Day became a federal holiday. At that time the holiday was to promote world peace and to honor the service of members of every military branch. In 1954, Congress, working under President Eisenhower, changed the name of the holiday to Veterans Day to include soldiers who fought in World War II and the Korean War. Today, Veterans Day is a day to honor all veterans for their patriotism and honorable service.

Anniversaries- Cont'd

12-15 November 1942. Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. A Japanese task force led by two battleships set out to demolish U.S. Marine held Henderson Field and its aircraft. Two U.S. Navy task groups led by Rear Admiral David Callaghan and Rear Admiral Norman Scott intercepted the Japanese warships before they could range Henderson Field. During three nights and two days of fighting, the Japanese lost 2 battleships, 3 destroyers, 11 transport ships, and 64 aircraft. The U.S. Navy lost 2 light cruisers, 7 destroyers, and 36 planes. The Japanese failure to neutralize Henderson Field and to put appreciable reinforcement troops and supplies ashore was a significant U.S. strategic victory. Within a month, the Japanese Navy and Army abandoned Guadalcanal. Admirals Callaghan and Scott were killed during the battle. They are the only two U.S. Navy Admirals to be killed in a surface engagement.

13 November 1942. During the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, the light cruiser USS JUNEAU (CL-52) was hit by a torpedo fired from the Japanese submarine I-26. Approximately 115 of USS JUNEAU's crew survived the explosion. Because of uncertainty about the number of Japanese ships in the area, rescue attempts did not begin for several days. Due to losses from exhaustion, exposure, and shark attacks, only ten sailors were rescued from the water eight days after the sinking. The five Sullivan brothers from Waterloo, Iowa, were among the 687 men lost.

Did You Know That

about six miles from Maastricht, in the Netherlands, are buried 8,301 American soldiers who died in the fall and winter of 1944-5 during the battles of Operation Market Garden to liberate the Netherlands from the Germans. Each man buried in the cemetery, as well as those in the Canadian and British military cemeteries, has been adopted by a Dutch family who mind the grave, decorate it, and keep alive the memory of the soldier they have adopted. It is even the custom to keep a portrait of "their" soldier, their liberator, in a place of honor in their home.

Annually on 5 May, Liberation Day, memorial services are held for the men who died to liberate the Netherlands. The day concludes with a concert. The final piece played is always "Il Silenzio," (The Silence) first played in 1965 on the 20th anniversary of the Netherlands' liberation. It has been the concluding piece of the memorial concert ever since.

Quotable Quotes

Man is not free unless Government is limited. ----Ronald Reagan

I find that the harder I work the more luck I seem to have. ---Thomas Jefferson

The power of accurate observation is frequently called cynicism by those who don't have it.
---George Bernard Shaw

I don't measure a man's success by how high he climbs but how high he bounces when he hits bottom.
---General George S. Patton

A politician will do anything to keep his job – even become a patriot. ---William Randolph Hearst