

CLINT EASTWOOD'S AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT *1

"Clint Eastwood has played all types of tough guys in the movies, but as a 21-year-old wet-behind-the ears Private in the U. S. Army, he had a near-death experience in 1951." *2.

Clint said he "...was in basic training at Fort Ord and had a weekend pass to visit my folks in Seattle, and in those days anybody in uniform could claim a vacant seat on a military flight going their way." Clint had no problem going to Seattle, but getting back to Ft. Ord was a different problem and he had to get back by Monday morning or he would be absence without leave (AWOL).

Clint called the Sand Point Naval Air Station and "the guy" said he didn't have anything. Then he said, "How claustrophobic are you?" It was not exactly first class, but he had a Douglas AD, a single engine fighter-bomber that carried a single pilot.

Eastwood recalled "He was headed to Alameda, and I figured I'd just hitch a ride from there down to Monterey so I climbed in the back compartment, which was very small, and had this tiny circle window." The flight was uneventful until the plane reached the coast of California, when things started to go wrong—lots of things.

"The intercom stopped working, so I couldn't talk to the pilot, and then the oxygen went out," Eastwood said. "I started getting drowsy when we went up high, but I figured the pilot—his name was Anderson—had to be OK. But he didn't have oxygen in his compartment either."

This meant the pilot had to descend to avoid losing consciousness. Unfortunately, the lower altitudes were full of storm clouds. "It was very stormy, and we were bouncing around, and I couldn't figure out why we kept changing altitude," Eastwood said. "The plane headed south, and then it turned west. I didn't know what was going on."

Not only was the pilot unable to communicate, he was lost, and running short of fuel. "We finally got near San Francisco, and there was a little blue spot in the sky, and a place where you could see the water, and we went toward that," Eastwood said. "When we got below the clouds, we could see the Farallon Islands and the coast, and you could see the bridge, and I thought, 'This is going to be great ... we're going to make it.'"

But all of a sudden, the pilot turned northwest, paralleling the coast, and when he got near Pt. Reyes, the engine just stopped. "That gets your heart racing," Eastwood said. "Everything was quiet. He tried starting it again, and the engine ran for a little bit, and then it stopped again, and we were just gliding."

At first, Eastwood thought the pilot would bail out, which would leave him helpless and alone in a plane about to crash, but there wasn't enough altitude for that, so the pilot decided to attempt a water landing. "I tightened my seatbelt and my shoulder straps to the point of cutting off my circulation, and when the plane started to hit, things were pretty good for a while. It was like being in a high-speed boat," Eastwood said.

But when the front-heavy plane came to a stop, it suddenly went nose down, with Eastwood hanging face down in his straps. The pilot climbed from the cockpit to see if he was OK, but the future Hollywood superstar and mayor of Carmel was already heading out the door. Splashing into the cold Pacific just behind the wing flaps, Eastwood tried to inflate a life jacket, but couldn't get it to work enough to do any good, "so I just started swimming."

"It was getting dark very fast, but I could see a few lights way off, so I knew that had to be land," Eastwood said. An accomplished swimmer, he was pretty sure he could make it, though he had no idea how far he had to go—and it turned out to be 4 miles through waters he later learned were full of sharks.

"Along the way, I felt big things bump into me a few times, but I just decided they were seals, ... and there were jellyfish everywhere, and a lot of phosphorescence in the water—it was a surreal experience."

He lost sight of the pilot (who also survived after swimming for his life) and struggled against a current toward land, fearing that once he got there, he might be smashed by heavy surf on the rocks. Finally reaching dry land, he clambered over some boulders, crossed a lagoon and climbed a chain link fence before reaching a small shed where a radio operator was calmly manning a relay station.

Eastwood recalled, "He was sitting in this chair, and he looked up and said, "What the hell happened to you?"

Good story, I bet you've never heard that one before! Glad Clint and pilot Anderson made it back alive and Paul Miller was able to get the article out on **'Front Page.'**

"We are all in the same boat in a stormy sea and we owe each other a terrible loyalty." (G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936).

***1.** A portion of an article written by Paul Miller for the edition of **'Front Page'** published September 16, 2016 when he was discussing Clint Eastwood's film "Sully" and how the director of the film (Clint Eastwood) was once the survivor of a wintry crash landing of an aircraft into the water.

*2. Ibid **Front Page**, published September 16, 2016.