



A FLIGHT TO REMEMBER

By Wendy Karppi

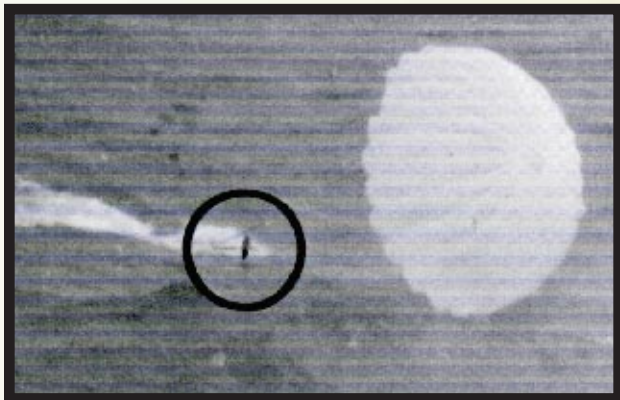
Lieutenant Louis A. Menard, Jr., launched his F6F *Hellcat* from *Randolph* (CV 15) on 17 February 1945 to participate in an attack on an aircraft engine factory in Tokyo, Japan. As he flew over Yokohama on the return leg, “one of the guys I passed had his right stabilizer and elevator shot up, and I thought I better stick with him to help him out of the area,” Menard recalled. He turned his plane around to join up with the disabled plane. But this good deed soon turned into a nightmare as antiaircraft fire seared through the air and struck his *Hellcat*, destroying the right aileron control rod and knocking him into a spin at 7,000 feet.

“I got out of the spin and started to

climb. Then the aircraft shuddered, stalled and spun again, and I got out of that one about 3,000 feet.” Accompanied by another pilot, Menard managed to keep the plane under control until he got back over the fleet. Unable to fly below 140 knots, Menard realized he couldn’t make a carrier or a water landing. To save himself, he had to bail out. “In those days, if you had to get out of your airplane you opened your canopy and got out on either the right or the left side, and pulled the cord,” he explained. Indeed, Menard had personal experience with the procedure—he had followed it after a midair collision while in the aircraft carrier training group in Norfolk, Va. But this

time, things would not be so simple.

The first obstacle was the canopy. “To jettison the canopy you pulled two heart rings on the canopy railing and it would fly off. Well, that didn’t happen. One of them came out and the other didn’t.” The half-released canopy blew open, “putting a binding on the other pin. I had to take my survival knife and hammer it out,” he said. With the second pin removed, the canopy was free, but not clear—it was dangling outside the aircraft, hanging from a cable which fell across Menard’s chest, pinning him to the seat. “I took my survival knife and started cutting on the cable. There was a lot of strain on it—one strand broke, then the next, and then they all let



Opposite, Lt. Menard faced many obstacles before he could bail out of his stricken *Hellcat*, as rendered by artist Robert A. Keeton. This page, top: As the destroyer *Taussig* maneuvered to intercept the pilot, a crewman captured this image of Menard's parachute dragging him through the water. The cushion that kept him from disentangling himself is circled, but he is not visible because he was underwater. Middle: the day before *Taussig* recovered Lt. Menard, right, one of the destroyer's crew, Seaman First Class Frank Applegate, center, rescued another pilot, Ens. George Salvaggio. Drawing and two photos courtesy of Roy Bruce. Bottom, Cdr. Menard, USN (Ret.), in April 1998.

go," he went on. Throughout this struggle, to remain airborne he had to counteract the plane's tendency to spin right due to the damaged control rod. "I had to keep the stick all the way over to the left side of the cockpit. I did that with my leg and my feet because my hands were busy trying to get rid of the cable."

Finally, Menard dived out of the cockpit, pulled the D ring to open his parachute and floated to the water. Menard could see a destroyer "maybe a quarter of a mile away, going wide open and making a lot of waves from the bow, and I knew it was coming to rescue me." But his ordeal was not yet over. "The parachute didn't collapse; the wind was so strong and steady it just kept blowing me downwind and dragging me through the water," he remembered. Even worse, a seemingly harmless modification to his equipment prevented him from releasing the chute. He had had a parachute rigger attach a seat cushion to his seat pack to raise him up in the cockpit, but this meant the cushion was attached to the risers of the parachute and remained there when the chute was deployed. "Although it served its purpose in getting me up to the desired height in the cockpit, it almost caused my demise because I couldn't get around the risers to get out of the chute."

The skipper of the destroyer *Taussig* (DD 746) demonstrated remarkable seamanship in coming to the rescue. First aiming for the likely spot for the pilot to land, he then had to correct course to intercept Menard as he was being pulled through the water. "He had to turn his destroyer around, go past me downwind, make



a 90-degree turn in my path and then stop dead in the water," he recalled. Miraculously, the parachute drifted over the destroyer's deck, and the crew pulled Menard to safety. "The last thing I can remember is being pulled up by my risers. My hands were touching the side of the ship and I could feel the rivets. I said to myself, 'They've got me now, they've rescued me.' Then I must have lost consciousness."

By the time he was safely aboard, he had ceased breathing. Fortunately, *Taussig* was the destroyer group commander's ship, and her complement included a doctor, who resuscitated Menard. He was brought below deck and placed in a bunk to recuperate. When he opened his eyes, he saw a pair of baby shoes that someone had tacked to the bunk above him. He and his wife had not yet had their first child, but they had found these shoes in their car when they got married and he carried them in the pocket of his flight suit as a memento. "Lying there, I could see those little pink shoes,

and I said, 'Well, I'm alive.'"

On his third day aboard *Taussig*, Menard was on the destroyer's bridge and heard the skipper say they were steaming to *Randolph* to pick up some replacement parts. "I said, 'Fine, I'll get off then. That's my carrier.'" *Randolph* had not been informed

that Menard had been rescued—his shipmates' first indication that he was alive came as he traveled the highline strung between the two ships. Menard explained that one of his squadron buddies spotted him and said, 'Hey, Lou, is that you?' and I replied, 'Yep, it's me' and that's how I got back aboard." Menard's third and final WW II combat tour was over, and he was on his way back to the States.

Lou Menard returned home a fighter ace, with 9 enemy kills to his credit. He had also received many other decorations, including the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart and numerous Air Medals. But one memento holds special meaning for both him and his family. Before Menard returned to *Randolph*, some of the *Taussig* crew presented him with a panel of his recovered parachute. A year later, a family tradition was born when his first child was christened in a dress his mother made from the parachute remnant. This tangible reminder of near tragedy became a symbol of his family's future. ✨



Photo by JO2 Blake Towler

Cdr. Menard retired in 1968. He related these events to *NANews* during a visit to Washington, D.C., this year.