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State Fair Thrill Jumper Is Killed

By Fred Mendell

"We want to introduce a young man—while we can," the State Fair grandstand announcer said Tuesday.

Half an hour later the young man was dead.

He was Denny Midland, St. Paul, parachutist.

He died instantly when his chute failed to open.

The tragedy momentarily stunned the crowd of 12,000 persons in the grandstand, gathered for the motor car races.

Midland, who had been working his way through the University of Minnesota by making parachute jumps, was killed when his parachute didn't open in time.

The jump was programmed as a "2000 foot fall and delayed chute opening."

The chute "popped" when Midland was less than 200 feet in air. It was starting to open — but was still just a ribbon — when Midland hit hard ground.

Merle Cecil, captain in the Hutchinson fire department, watched the jump through field glasses.

"I saw him step from the plane," Cecil said. "He had fallen only a hundred feet or so when I saw him clawing at the rip cord. Apparently it was stuck. He seemed to be fighting the chute. Then his arm swung free and the chute streamed out but too late."

The plane was about 1200 feet in the air when Midland jumped.

Midland fell in a cane field, about 200 yards east of Plum and the same distance north of 17th.

His crushed body was imbedded face down, in the earth. The body was covered by the silk of the chute.

Few persons in the stands were immediately aware anything had gone wrong. Many persons on the grounds thought the whole show a stunt, that a dummy had been tossed from the plane.

It had been announced Midland would try to control the jump so that he would land on the track infield.

He seemed too far east to be aiming for the infield when he stepped from the plane, but the fall was in full view of the crowd. His crash to the ground was screened from the stands by the high board fence circling the track.

Probably most of the fair people were only vaguely aware anything had gone wrong. They had watched as the plane circled the field. They seemed to be holding breath as Midland plummeted downward, falling as if reclining in a rocking chair. There was an audible intake of breath as the chute streamed out. Then Midland was out of sight, but many may have thought the chute opened in time.

Officials knew something had gone wrong.

Mrs. Fern Winkley, racing judge, yelled. "It should open now —now—get it out there, Sid—now—now — it isn't opening — it's too late!" all in one breath.

Stewart Reamer, announcer for the auto races, who had joked with the blond haired youth while introducing him on the public address system, dispatched the ambulance.

The hurly-gurly of amusement devices back of the stands could be heard above the quiet murmur of the crowd. The tension wasn't broken until Reamer called for music from the band. It was Reamer's unpleasant duty, a few minutes later, to inform the crowd Midland had been killed.

But the show went on. Midland's stunt was programmed just before the feature race. The roaring cars seemed quickly to restore the normal tenor of the fair.

Midland spoke a few words to the crowd before making the jump. "We want to introduce a young man — while we can," said Reamer. He then explained how Midland would jump from a plane and fall as far as he dared before pulling the cord.

"How far do you dare fall before letting that chute out?" asked Reamer of Midland.

"Well," said Midland with a big grin, "if it doesn't open at 200 feet it will be too late."

Midland came to Hutchinson in his car. He made arrangements with Ed Isaacs, Wichita distributor for Piper Cubs, to take him aloft.

The plane circled four times above the stands.

Midland made his jump at 2:46 p.m.

John Zentner, CAA safety inspector from Wichita, checked Midland's chute after the jump.

He will make a report to the CAA office at Kansas City. Zentner said the front-pack emergency chute had not been opened.

Frank Winkley, auto race promoter, said he had not met Midland before Tuesday. Winkley had contracted for a jumper with Don Kruse, Minneapolis stunt talent agent. When Midland arrived here he simply told Winkley, "I'm your man."

Midland had been booked for a low altitude jump. He believed it would be too hazardous because of the high wind, and offered to do the delayed chute jump instead.

"I'll give you a good delay," he said.

"I don't want it too good," Winkley answered. "It's windy up there and I want you to be careful."

The parachute belonged to the Twin City Parachute Co., Minneapolis. Midland had several others of the same make in his car.

Winkley believed Midland delayed too long in attempting to open the chute, then may have had trouble with it momentarily.

"But I believe he would have been okay, if he'd just had another 50 or 60 feet leeway," Winkley said. "It was a stronger when he hit but it looked as if it were starting to bloom."

Patrolman Bob Wingert of the Hutchinson police department recognized the name when Midland had been in his division overseas. He talked with Midland briefly. Both had been paratroopers in the 82nd Airborne division, 505th regiment in World War 2.

"I didn't know him personally," Wingert said, "but we'd been to the same places. We talked about war experiences at Frankfort and Heidelberg. It was just like meeting an old buddy.

"Then, just a few minutes later, I helped pull him from the ground."

Midland was about 27 years old. His home address is 2167 Dudley Ave., St. Paul. A brother and sister are enroute to Hutchinson.

Tricky Bands On Wednesday Program Here

Well, it's a long time between bands said Maurice Dyer, Chamber of Commerce, to Harvey Schneckman, Highway Patrol, Wednesday morning.

And that's just the way the third morning of Hutchinson's Parade of Bands started off.

The Burdett high school kids got up before the chickens, drove 100 miles and were lined up and rarin' to go at 8:30. Fifteen minutes later Drum Major Darolyn Hunsberger got the nod from Dyer, the drums crashed into the marching cadence and Burdett was on its way.

Just one hour later Director Daniel Duerksen got together his Douglas High group and the parade was on in earnest.

The 19 bands parading Wednesday were full of tricks and it remained for the stick, blue and gray clad Ellinwood group to ring the bell. No old routine march for them. No Sir! These kids swung down Main street to the catchy rythm of "Shoe Shine Boy." And how those twirlers did step.

The Kingman band uncorked a jazz dance routine while playing "Put Your Little Foot", and the Arlington band did its ribbon to the music of Harry's tune, "Missouri Waltz."

Three bands were about as busy keeping their uniforms clean as they were playing. The reason — new duds.

The Arlington band was resplendent in red and blue grey. The Chaca group cut a collective dashing figure in beautifully blending blue and grey. Ashland's uniforms are blue and gold.

The "fronts" for the 19 bands follow:

Burdett—Denver Childs, director; Darwyn Hunsberger, drum major; Barbara Ann Hunsberger, Ann Hunsberger, Verlie Ruble and Twinnie Miller, twirlers.

Partridge — Joseph Yonai, director; Ronald Hoffman, drum major; Ronald and Harrison Riddle, twirlers.

Nia — Clarence Gilliland, director; Virginia Gilliland, drum major; Twirlers Evelyn Smith, Phyllis Smith, Mary Ann Korte and Ruth Gilliland, twirlers.

Kingman — Lee Hoffman, director; Catherine Chambers, drum major; Nina Mayer, Phyllis Mantz, Lois Avery and Phyllis Hoffman, twirlers.

Arlington — W. L. Turner, director; Marlene Warta, drum major; Judy Warta, Sharon Warta, Sharon Ann Warta, Shirley Wyrick, Rita and Nelda Schmidt, Joyce Forgey, twirlers.

Haven — Ralph Bowers, director; Ronnie Hamilton, drum major; Nancy Johnson and Akiko Nagel, twirlers. Color guard: Jerry Hamilton, Darlene Lingrean and Patricia Schultz.

Sylvia — Richard Nelson, director; Ann Olson, drum major; Kenny and Lila Bruhl, Kathleen Schultz, Mary Oliver, Jeanette Nelson, twirlers.

Arkansas City — Ralph Trotter, director; Jerry Parker, drum major; Sherry Largent, Phyllis Long, Gregory Chaney, Lavonne Hunter, Barbara Hunter and Marilyn Bowerbank, twirlers.

Hutchinson — Ralph Trotter, director; Alice Ott, Dorothy Watkins and Sue Graves, twirlers.

Ellinwood — R. Buck director; Marilyn Warren, drum major; Maryanne Post, Donna Locke, Lanna Reynolds, Carolyn Ann Hoffman, Sharon Ann Hoffman, Sue Stewart — Albert Pankratz, director; Ann Frey, drum major; Nannie Woods and Barbara Ann Hoffman, twirlers.

Buhler — Elton Wright, director; Carole Hughes, drum major.

Hoisington — Ralph Trotter, director; Nevada Byers, drum major; Charlotte Morris and Georgia Mohn, twirlers.

Douglas — Dan Duerksen, director; Jane Dawson, drum major; Helen Schroeder, Joyce Moore and Arlene Koop, twirlers.

Ellinwood — Robert Copley, director; Marcella Mumma, drum major; Elaine Perry, Ann Hollowell and Nadine Crawford, twirlers.

Lyons — C. W. Phillips, director; Roy Haskell, drum major; Mary Ann Stinson, Jean Hilbert, Elaine Bowling, Ann Hutchinson, Donna Sparks and Rita Dean, twirlers.

Nickerson — Jim Holcombe, director; Elaine Miller, drum major; Twirlers Sharon Miller, Peter and Andrew Wills, Frances Wells and Mary Lou Bauer.

Pretty Prairie — Robert Fry, director; Nadia Smith, drum major; Millicent Schultz, Sharon Ann Schultz, Sharon Ann Taylor and Sherry Smith, twirlers.

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