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NAVAL MECHANIC'S AMAZING ESCAPE.

For fifteen minutes a Fleet Air Arm mechanic - who had been swept off the deck of an aircraft carrier, clung to the tail of a Seafire as it flew through a snowstorm. The rating, half frozen, was still hanging to the aircraft when it landed at a nearby air station.

Below he tells the story of his amazing experience.

"The aircraft carrier was operating in home waters on a cold windy day with a snow storm likely to break at any moment.

"We had headed out to sea at about 11.00 a.m. The snow storm had already begun and with a hurricane blowing we could hardly stand on the flight deck. When the order came over the loudspeaker the aircraft were duly ranged and placed into flying position, with the air mechanics standing by their respective "kites."

"I was responsible for 'A' for Annie, the first 'plane to leave on the word "GO". This machine was piloted by Lieut. (A) David Wilkinson, son of a former Lord Mayor of London. The 'planes were all being run up as the ship headed into the wind, and a terrible wind it was, too. 'A' for Annie was running at a fast "tick over" and the pilot gave the signal for two men to lie on his tail, while he revved up to full power.

"This task was undertaken by another rating and myself. We both lay prone on the tail plane, he on the port side, and I on the starboard side, and waited for the pilot to open up. After a while the other rating got off to warn the pilot that we were all waiting and ready.

"Then the fun began.

"The pilot opened his throttle to full boost, and up came the tail. I knew this had happened, but still thought he was just revving up.

"The aircraft started to move but, unfortunately, I had no feeling of forward motion. The terrific slipstream, plus the hurricane, was doing its utmost to remove me from the tail. The only grip I had was where the elevator is hinged; I could just get my four fingers into this slotted portion with the left hand. So with my legs swinging in mid-air, I held on.

/As soon

"As soon as a 'plane leaves the deck, it drops a few feet before climbing up again. When this happened I had the feeling that the tail had come back to the deck again and was prepared to get off at any second.

"Then I experienced a flating sensation. I had my eyes closed, and on opening them saw to my horror that the carrier was below and astern.

"How the pilot ever managed to get the 'plane off the deck is still a mystery, but there I was hanging on like glue. I thought my number was up, and that every moment would be my last. I thought of my wife and daughter.... and I prayed.

"I shut my eyes and just hung on. A few minutes later, I again opened my eyes and saw a cruiser astern of us. I was tempted then to let go and trust that they would pick me up. Had I done so, and had fallen from that height, they would have picked me up dead.

"I learned later that on leaving the Carrier the pilot was informed over the R.T. 'There's a man on your tail'. He replied 'Yes I know!'

"After a flight of approximately 15 minutes, we were over an airfield. I heard the engine slow down and prepared for a crash landing, not knowing where I was. The runway was covered with snow, so I thought he was landing in a field and pulled my legs up in order not to have them trapped under the fuselage.

"The general opinion of the crowd watching us was that the pilot made a perfect three-point landing; personally I only felt a slight jar, and the gradual slowing up of the plane. Finally it stopped and then I collapsed. I did not remember any more until I came to inside an ambulance.

"On the way to hospital, I was frozen stiff, but free of any pain or any feeling save that of admiration for the pilot whose skill had saved my life.

"I was told afterwards that the pilot removed me and placed me upon the snow, covered me with his overcoat and placed his Mac West under my head for a pillow. The hospital was prepared for my reception. A bed was ready, with electrically heated blankets and hot water bottles, but these I could not appreciate, having lost all feeling.

"When I thawed out, I had a strange sensation of "pins and needles" all over the body, I was then given a sleeping draught and a sound sleep was very welcome.

"Next morning, the pilot visited me in hospital, and although I was too full of admiration for his skill to speak, he said "Good show, jolly good show."