# RIP â€“ 1LT Jim Helinger, US Army Air Corps

## Description

James Helinger, Sr passed away this morning at 11AM, peacefully at home.




Feb 22, 1924 â€“ May 4, 2009

I met him by accident, but grew by my association with him over the last 4 years.Ã,  He was a character, proud of the moniker of â€œDamn Glider Pilot.â€•Ã,  He loved General George S. Patton,

his friends, and the things he did as Special Services Officer at the Munich Air Base during the Occupation period.Ã,  He tried to enter the service on Dec 8th, 1941, but was told he had to be 18 to fly.Ã,  He waited until Feb 22nd, 1942 to get in line at the Post Office in Louisville, KY to begin his service to the nation in a time of war.Ã,  He wanted to fly, and at that time, gliders werenâ€™t even part of the picture.Ã,  He loaned me some of his books.Ã,  After reading one (ther are actually very few written), I called to say how lucky I was to have gotten to know him.Ã,  Airborne Glider operations had a about a 60%+ fatality rate for pilots.

He spoke, for the Gliderâ€™s Pilotâ€™s Association

, telling the technical points of flying gliders into harmâ€™s way, but rarely mentioned combat, but certainly he knew things I never will.Ã,  We spentÃ,  many evenings, Mondays in particular, at a local pub, where the special was Fish and Chips.Ã,  He told and retold the story of being handed a newspaper cone on the streets of England, and how he enjoyed that new experience.Ã,  Other nights, he indulged in his habit of some fried chicken, something not on his diet, but he still thought he could have some, because he had earned it.Ã,  He and I could talk of common things the military life imparts upon oneâ€™s life, the fun, the not so fun, and the really unintelligible Army (Navy? way of doing things., and also of business and life in general.Ã, Some things, despite our age difference of 30 years, were the same for us, in our own times.

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Later, he brought a bit of London to the Tampa Bay area, buying double decker buses and using them for his advertising business.Ã,  He could buy one a year, and he did for several.Ã,  I understand they were regularly full for the trips between St Petersburg and the Tampa Bay Bucs games.Ã,  During our time together, we went to Sunâ€™nâ€™Fun a few years ago and he stood by the Steermans and Vultees and told me of what it was like to take them, particularly the â€œVibratorâ€• up for his flights.Ã, That year, we also had dinner with the Stinson owners who flew in for the event.Ã,  He got quite a thrill out of meeting those people and sharing about his escapades in the old days.

He had a big heart and was always ready with a joke.Ã,  At his 85th birthday, just recently, the crowd was large and you could tell he had known many of them for a very long time.Ã,  I was blessed to have helped get some of his recollections out to the world in this blog.Ã,  I was also fortunate to have had some of his pictures to scan in.Ã,  Here are some of them:



Glider pilots were also rated as co-pilots in the C-47s.


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Jim â€œat the officeâ€• in a CG-4 Waco glider. Lots of plywood and steel tubing, and canvas.




Jim with his L-5 Stinson Spotter plane. This may have been to one he flew under the Eiffel Tower, with the not yet famous actress Denise Darcell in the front seat. I failed to find out definitely.

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Work got in the way, this past year, for traveling to Ohio for the Reunion with Jim and his wife.Ã,  We had discussed it, but, I let some of real life interfere.Ã,  This year, in October, the Reunion, most likely the last one that will be held (they voted to stick it out one more year in the 2008 meeting), will be in New Orleans.Ã,  I had already mentally committed to not let anything stop me from being his escort this year.Ã,  Jim and I discussed it a few weeks back at dinner.

I have his stories he shared posted around the blog.Ã,  Hereâ€™s an easy way to get to them

.Ã,  Read of a young man, who survived to come back,Ã,  have a family, grow a business, raise two guide dogs, become my friend and tell me some tall, or maybe not so, tales of a time before my time.

Update 5/6/2009: Jimâ€™s Obituary  in the St Pete Times.

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**Date Created**
May 4, 2009
**Author**
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