

Fred Sattler was kind enough to write up his memories of Jim Werner and the details of his ejection and subsequent passing. Fred also found this article from the Modesto Bee. The accident date was Tuesday, July 27, 1971.

And this from the Thursday, July 29, 1971 edition of the Modesto Bee, page 5:

[LEMOORE NAVAL AIR STATION \(UPI\) - An Air National Guard pilot who bailed out of his F102 jet before it crashed died late Tuesday during surgery for severe chest injuries. Capt. James D. Werner, 31, Clovis, bailed out of the craft Tuesday morning before it crashed to earth 10 miles west of here. He was picked up by a Navy helicopter and transported to the base hospital here where he died. Werner was returning to the Fresno Air National Guard Base on a routine training mission when the plane went down. The cause of the crash is under investigation.](#)

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Sorry, no articles or photos of Jim, only faded memories from 42 years ago. I had the same negative results as you when searching for info on him. I'll tell you what I remember about my friend and the day of his untimely death.

Jim was senior to me, he was about 28 years old in 1972 and had previously served Palace Chase tours on alert in Germany flying from Bitburg and Hahn. About six feet tall, 170 lbs with light brown wavy hair and a fairly quiet, unassuming personality. Good company in the air and on the ground. Trustworthy, as it should be. Interesting stories too about the cold war games being played in Europe, close to hostile borders. All that time on alert made him a formidable ping-pong opponent and he used to wax my butt with no trouble. Gin Rummy was the same so I never had much money on me at the end of a shift. As I recall, Jim's dad was a general officer on the active duty side, I believe he was at Norton in some capacity. However, the only family member I'd met personally was Jim's younger sister.

The morning of the accident I'd just come off alert and was wandering through the briefing room when I noticed that Jim was scheduled to fly the same tail number I'd flown the night before. It was a good jet and I mentioned that to him in passing, then I was off for home and a fresh goat suit. When I returned around 11 a.m. for an early lunch in the coffee shop everyone was asking about Jim. "What?" "Yeah, Werner had to jump out of his jet a half hour ago."

Dave Cobb filled me in later on the details, he was there. Seems about an hour into the morning mission the master warning light on Jim's panel had come on due to low oil quantity, something was dumping a lot of oil into the engine bay. With Dave flying escort they headed for Lemoore as it was the closest suitable airfield with clear weather on their return from W-283. Jim set up for an SFO pattern and landing but when he lowered the gear at 10k the belly erupted in flames. Dave advised Jim of the fire and told him to eject. Dave didn't see the ejection sequence because of his clearing turn but saw a good chute afterwards and he remained overhead to watch the rescue ops. Apparently okay, Jim was standing in a muddy field shooting pen gun flares at the helo when it arrived, so they lowered the horse collar for him instead of landing in the mud. The rescue guys said Jim complained of chest pain but he preferred to remain upright and he walked into the hospital. Medical examiners found fractured ribs on both sides of his chest but no other significant injuries were apparent. While under observation in the hospital he was talking with his dad and Doc Ginsburg so the initial reports on his condition were fairly optimistic. Later that evening Jim began having trouble breathing and the docs were called back in to investigate. They discovered his lungs were hemorrhaging so a surgical team had to open his chest. To no avail as it turned out, the crush damage to his lungs was too extensive to stop the bleeding and Jim passed away that night.

The culprit turned out to be a steel rip chord guide channel that ran north/south along the spine of the parachute. The force of ejection caused the bottom of the steel channel to penetrate the pack container next to where the risers are tacked. As the chute deployed one of the risers caught the channel and pulled it up and out, forcing Jim's parachute harness to severely contract around his chest for a brief instant. Jim was fatally injured the moment his chute opened. Doc Ginsburg later told us that no power on earth could have saved him after that. The ballistic chute was part of a fairly new system designed to expand our ejection envelope to near zero-zero, I think it was called Stencil Dart. The fleet was grounded for a while but the fix turned out to be nothing more than a layer of canvas reinforcement sewn into the bottom of the pack container. A cheap fix like the boat popper in the T bird but the price paid for that knowledge was immense.

-Fred