

Sgt. Still Jumping at 55

Clark's Own Version of George Blanda



Left; M. Sgt. Tom Monley inspects his parachute prior to one of his 350 jumps.

At an age when many men are tending their gardens, watching football on TV, or playing golf with the aid of an electric cart, M. Sgt. Tom Monley is a little different.

He turned 55 this month and to celebrate that birthday parachuted from a C130 Hercules 1,500 feet to the ground below.

Age has never been a problem for Monley, though. He feels that it is just a state of mind.

After serving as an aerial photographer over Germany during World War II, he left the military only to return 10 years later at the age of 36. Then, while stationed at Pope AFB, N.C., he began sport parachuting with the 18th Corps Sport Parachute Club. The next year he attended jump school, probably becoming one of the oldest men ever to go through the rugged training at Fort Benning, Ga.

Since jump school, Monley has spent most of his career in the Far East, serving at bases in Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan and here.

"I have spent so much time in the Far East that I feel like a native," the native North Dakotan said, noting that he plans to retire in Taiwan.

A Combat Controller with Det. 6, 6th Aerial Port Sq., the parachutist admits that he still feels a certain amount of fear when he jumps.

"There are old jumpers and bold jumpers," he said, "but there are no old bold jumpers."

Fear has not stopped him from making 350 jumps, even though he has broken each of his legs once. And fear did not preclude him from earning the Silver Star during the conflict in Vietnam.

Landing in a C123 at Khe Sanh during the 1968 siege, he noticed that a pallet of ammunition was burning in the area used to onload and offload passengers and evacuate the wounded.

Quickly he commandeered a forklift and moved the burning pallet to a safe area. Minutes later the ammunition exploded.

Though his thinning hair has turned gray Monley's square jaw and physique fail to betray his age. But age will be the traitor next year when he is forced to retire,

"I would stay on if they would let me," he concluded, "but I think I will have to go."

Sent by Patrick Aguilar