

'When He Shot at Me, I Got the Hell Out'

Chalk mechanic Stephen Lee, of 9900 Haitian Dr., Cutler Ridge, narrowly missed being wounded by the hijackers. Here he gives his first-person account.

By STEPHEN LEE
As Told to Jean Wardlow
Herald Staff Writer

The first we knew anything was wrong was when we heard the pilot yell out from his side some crazy guy hit him over the head.

"Come and help me," he said. I rushed over to the plane — we had been over on the side by the shack here (to the far right of the main office where passengers

check in) when I heard him call for help.

I GRABBED open the door, and this guy was yelling at me to get out. "Get out of the way! Get out!" He had a double-barreled shotgun and an automatic.

And when he shot at me — the shot went right between my legs — I got the hell out of there. I didn't wait around for anything else.

He was colored. In his 20s — 24, 25, maybe. But I didn't pay any attention to what he had on, how else he looked. When you've got guns going off in your face,

you don't stick around to pay attention to details.

I ONLY SAW one man (FBI and police indicated there were two hijackers). He was the guy doing all the yelling and telling. The rest of the passengers just seemed to be sitting there quiet. He was the one yelling, giving all the orders.

Mack (mechanic Douglas Mackenzie, nicknamed "Macaroni" by crew workers at the Chalk base) must have heard the pilot call for help when I did. He must've heard the shots also, because when he came out, he had his .22 with him. That's his little gun on the ground

there, beside the handkerchief with the blood on it that I guess he used after he was shot. He must've grabbed the gun when he ran over to see what he could do.

I didn't see what happened immediately after that. But I saw Mack after he had been shot. He had a hole in his shoulder. They took him to the hospital.

THE PLANE the hijackers took was a Grumman Mallard. The passengers were originally going to Bimini. They boarded it right here (he indicated a spot just off the roadway, an asphalt-paved stretch between road and waterfront off Government Cut on MacArthur Causeway).

The next thing, we hear Barbara Klayko from the office telling the pilot to check his passenger list, that there were too many aboard. These planes are only allowed to carry six passengers.

It was after that we heard the pilot call for help and all the yelling and shooting started.

THEN THEY moved another plane to block the path of the hijacked plane, and the hijacker then told them that if they didn't move that plane out of the way, he'd kill the pilot.

So they moved it, and the plane took off with the pilot injured, I'm told. But I only saw one man get shot and that was Mack.



Stephen Lee
... escaped unharmed



—Herald Staff Photo by BILL KUENZEL

Chalk's Flying Service Area on Watson Island

Modern-Day Mayhem Strikes The World's Oldest Airline

Bullet holes pierced the float of a Grumman Goose seaplane. Back by the mechanics' shacks — two dilapidated bus bodies — fresh blood mixed into the black grease on the concrete apron.

FBI men swirled about. Some toted high-powered telescopic rifles and bullet-proof vests. "All right, we'll need a sharpshooter," snapped Agent-in-Charge Ken Whittaker. "Better bring a shotgun too . . ."

"The guy shot at me three times and missed." A tense Bill Sorren, operations chief, was telling how it happened. "The cops started shooting. 'For God's sake,' I yelled, 'you'll hit passengers!'"

AFTER MORE than half a century of placid island-hopping from its tiny base squatting at the edge of Watson Island, the bloody, modern-day mayhem of skyjacking had struck Chalk's Service.

Never, in all its storied history of riding hurricanes, hauling rumrunners and revenueurs and crossing the brilliant seas to Bimini laden with pleasure-bound passengers, had anything like this ever happened.

For Chalk's, with its quaint eight-plane fleet of stubby Grumman Mallard and Goose seaplanes, its stubborn resistance to change, its legendary founder, things never would be quite the same again.

Up to now, nobody had ever taken seriously the likelihood of a skyjacking. Not even when the FBI men had come nosing around, checking the island, the tiny terminal, planning emergency procedures — just in case.

"We just never thought it would happen," said Capt. Dean Franklin, 61, the



CHARLES WHITED

stocky, gray-haired general manager who runs the line for Capt. A. B. (Pappy) Chalk, now 83.

WHILE OTHER, newer airlines such as Pan Am and Eastern and the rest had plunged into frantic expansion and huge planes, Chalk's has stuck doggedly to its traditions.

The newest of its Grumman went out of production nearly 20 years ago, and Dean Franklin has scrounged the world over for spare parts to keep the fleet flying. Chalk's eight Grumman ply the twice-daily route to Bimini and Cat Cay (fare: \$36 round-trip, including tax) and haul the rich to nearby island hideaways for fishing, sunshine and booze.

AND THE MEN who muscle the little Grumman into the sky could boast that they had never had a serious accident, never hurt a passenger and worked for a company that always made money.

For although the firm has taken on the grandiose name "Chalk's International Airline" in recent years, the philosophy hasn't altered since the Golden Age of Aviation. Old Capt. Chalk, a thickset man with white hair and sparkling blue eyes who still flies, despite his age, for the lark of it, prefers it that way.

PAPPY CHALK'S seaplanes make up the world's oldest airline in continuous service. When he set up shop with one plane in Miami in 1919, long-distance air passenger travel was still a pipe-

dream. Chalk started flying in 1911, when a barnstorming pilot turned up at the Paducah, Ky., auto works where he was employed. The pilot wanted somebody to fix his burned-out piston. Chalk did, and took his pay in flying lessons.

After service as a Marine pilot in World War I, Chalk arrived in Miami with an amphibian, set up a table and umbrella at the foot of Flagler Street and launched his enterprise.

He moved to Watson Island in 1936, and built himself a terminal building out of coral rock and scrounged materials. The original structure has since been expanded — but not much.

Today, Pappy Chalk arrives daily at the little terminal to feed the Watson Park pigeons and spin tales. On emergency runs to Miami, Bimini women have given birth in flight.

For years, Capt. Chalk's wife Lillian was his office manager and top assistant. Not long after she died, he gave up fulltime flying. "I was 75.

After half a century of it,

IN HIS LITTLE planes, he has ridden the hurricanes.

"In '26, the road linking the Keys to the mainland was cut. We picked up 21 bodies in the Keys, people who were trying to get to Miami when the storm hit," he tells you.

He has also dared the rages of men.

In 1933, Cuban Dictator Gerardo Machado escaped the wrath of his enemies aboard a chartered Chalk

plane. The plane took off from the island in a hail of bullets.

CHALK'S planes have been the lifeline to Bimini. He sat one day in the little terminal and mused: "All that time, the sharks have had me on their menu. But they haven't served me yet. I've been damned lucky. I haven't hurt anybody and nobody's hurt me."

OLD CAPT. CHALK didn't hear about the wild melee on Watson Island right away Tuesday. It was late in the morning when he stopped into a restaurant in northeast Miami and heard someone talking.

Pilot Never Injured Before the Skyjack

For 10 years, Jim Cothron piloted crop-dusting planes over South Florida's farmlands — traditionally, flying's most dangerous civilian job.

But he never got a scratch before Tuesday, when he tried to stop two hijackers armed with shotguns from taking over his Chalk's Airways plane.

AN HOUR or so later, he was in emergency surgery at Jackson Memorial Hospital in serious condition from gunshot wounds. But his plane was still on his mind.

"How are they doing with the plane?" Cothron asked his sister-in-law as the twin-engine Chalk's plane headed for Havana.

"He was very worried about the airplane," said Mrs. Frances Frost, sister of Cothron's wife Patricia. "But I told him he had more to worry about than the plane and not to be concerned."

COTHRON, a 49-year-old

Told that an engine wouldn't start, a seaplane hijacker Tuesday morning warned the pilot that "you better start it or I'll kill you," a would-be passenger said.

The passenger, Harry Davis, 38, of Bailey Town, Bimini, had planned to return to Bimini with repair parts for his charter fishing boat. He leaped off the plane and escaped during the gunplay.

"We were all aboard the plane when two fellows jumped on," Davis said.

"AT THE STEPS, they pulled out pistols. The first colored man went to the pilot's section, and the second stayed back with a shotgun."

After the hijacker warned the pilot to start the engine, Davis said, "I heard one shot, and they started to scuffle."

"The second man ran up to help the man who was being overpowered."

Davis said two more shots were heard and the copilot scheduled to make the Bimini run, Buzz Allsup, kicked open the door.

"I JUMPED out right behind him and ran over to the Phillips 66 station and told a woman to call the police because a fellow was shooting."

"Before she could call, I heard the sirens coming."

With Allsup racing to safety, and the captain wounded, the hijackers seized another Chalk's employe, 24-year-old co-pilot Bob Wallis, and ordered him at gunpoint to fly the seaplane to Havana.

They chose "our best copilot," Chalk's chief pilot Richard Gateley said.

ALTHOUGH a Chalk's employe only since November, the bachelor pilot had logged more than 2,500 hours of flying time since he soloed at 16.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Wallis of Lexington, Mass., Wallis, a finance graduate of Lowell (Mass.) Tech, worked as a flight instructor in Bedford Mass. before joining Chalk's.

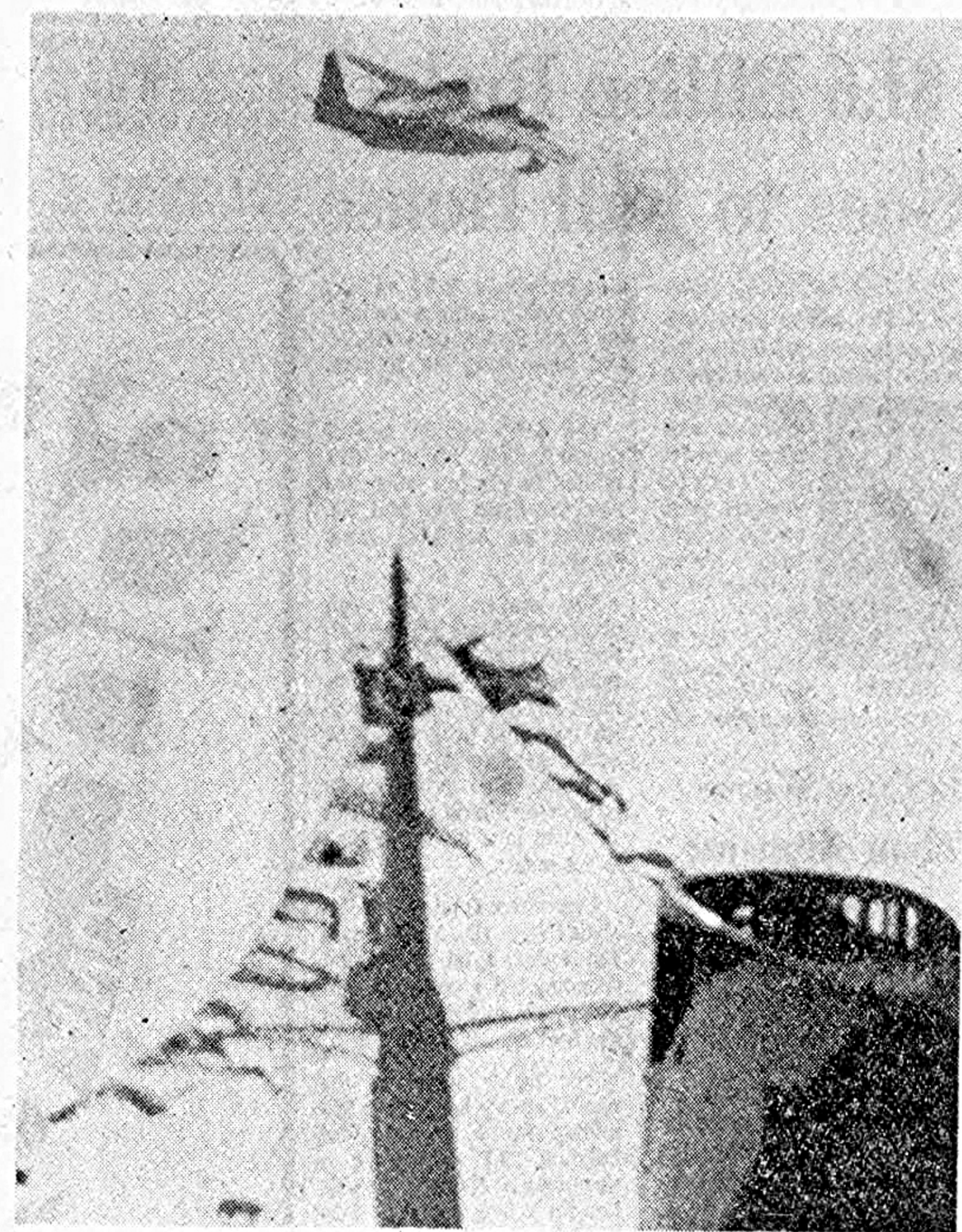
Davis, the passenger, said he had seen the two hijackers at Chalk's earlier Tuesday.

"They were there around 8:30, and they showed up again just before take-off."

DAVIS described the hijackers as Afro-coiffed men in brown overcoats and dark glasses, each carrying a black briefcase.

Pilot Claimed Engine Trouble

'Start It or I'll Kill You,' Passenger Quotes Hijacker



—Herald Staff Photo by DAVE DIOIO

Hijacked Seaplane Is Airborne, En Route to Cuba . . . it landed at Havana at 11:15 a.m., with copilot and passengers safe

Miami Plane Hijacked; Pilot, Mechanic Hurt

From Page 1

they were. Lt. Paul Shepard of the homicide squad sent a telegram to Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, asking that the hijackers be returned here.

"Please return subjects wanted for attempted murder (shot crew members in cold blood), hijacking and also suspected of other larcenous crimes against property and persons," the telegram reads.

THE HIJACKERS were first seen hanging around a telephone booth outside the Chalk's office at about 8:30.

Davis, 38, the captain of a charter fishing boat, in Bimini, was returning there after buying parts for his boat in Miami.

"We were all aboard, and two fellows jumped on the plane," Davis said later at police headquarters. "One pulled out a pistol. The first one went up to the pilot, and the second one stayed behind with a shotgun."

"The pilot said the engines wouldn't start, and he said, 'You'd better start it or I'll kill you.' He fired one shot. Later they started scuffling and I heard two or three more shots."

"THE SECOND man ran up (to the cockpit), and the copilot kicked the door open, and I jumped out right behind him."

The copilot who kicked out the door was Allsup.

Allsup, also at the police station, said he was aboard the plane and Bob Wallis was outside on the pavement when he called to Wallis to move the portable boarding stairs away in preparation for take-off.

with a pistol," Allsup said. "He said to keep cool. The second man came up outside. He pulled a gun and told Wallis to get on board. Then when the second man was aboard, he pulled a double-barreled shotgun."

"He yelled, 'Keep going,' but I had already shut down one engine. I toppled the boarding stairs and shut the door, but I didn't slam it because I figured I could jump out."

"A mechanic ran around to put up the steps, and he opened the door, but the second man fired at him. As soon as he did, I dived out the door."

AS WALLIS knelt to help Allsup, the man who had fired at the mechanic ordered Wallis into the plane.

It was not certain at exactly what point in the sequence of events pilot Cothron was shot.

When he came tumbling out of the plane, he staggered toward two old buses that Chalk's uses for tool and repair shops. He passed the buses and collapsed next to a car parked behind them.

AT THE NEARBY Watson Island yacht dock, Charles Robison of Pepper Pike, Ohio, a Cleveland suburb, was drinking coffee with his wife. They had docked their yacht Monday night after experiencing minor engine trouble.

Robison had heard the shooting. He started toward Cothron but had to duck behind a palm tree as another volley of fire erupted. By that time, police had arrived and were trading shots with the hijackers.

Robison said he wrapped a bandage around one of Cothron's wounds.

"HE WAS HURT badly but

was just as calm and cool as could be," said Robison, 49, a manufacturing executive. He quoted Cothron as saying:

"I made a mistake. I told him I wasn't the pilot. They pushed me out the door and shot me . . . I've learned my lesson . . . Have they caught the SOB's? I hope they kill them."

Harry Cooper, 59, Chalk's chief of maintenance, said he was near another airplane when "I heard a loud bang."

"I saw the pilot coming out, and he was bleeding," Cooper said. "He was yelling, 'Get the cops, get the cops,' and then he sat down by that trash container. It looked like he keeled over."

"THEN I SAW Mackenzie (Douglas Mackenzie, the mechanic) running for his car. I asked, 'What's the matter?' Then I heard a zing right past my ear. Mack ran to his car and pulled out a little pistol, I think a .25 caliber, and he got under the wing of the plane that was going out."

"He knelt to fire. I don't know if he did shoot, because I was getting out of the way. Then I heard a bang, bang, and I saw Mack come running over, bleeding."

"He said, 'I'm dying, Harry, I'm dying. Get an ambulance.' Then he laid down on the ground."

STEVE LEE, a Chalk's mechanic, opened the airplane's door just before take-off and was fired at by a hijacker.

One of the first policemen on the scene was Miami Officer Frank Arostegui, 27, a former Army helicopter crewman who was riding a three-wheeled police motorcycle.

Arostegui flagged down a private helicopter piloted by Gerard Fidler of 1540 NW 127th St., North Miami Beach, as the helicopter was heading for Watson Island.