

THE CATERPILLAR CLUB



It is estimated that at least 100,000 persons have saved their lives with a parachute.

Membership is open to those whose lives were saved with any type of parachute in an emergency jump.

Members include

Charles Lindbergh

General Doolittle

"Cobber" Kain

Sir Douglas Bader

"Bluey" Truscott

"Pathfinder" Don Bennet

Germany's Ernst Udet

Britain's Lord Douglas Hamilton

Corporal F.H. Poser

and a score of test pilots including Alec Henshaw, Geoffery de Havilland and John Cunningham



The Caterpillar Member Pin

One evening in 1922, two airmen, Lieutenant Harold R. Harris and Lieutenant Frank B. Tyndal met Leslie Irvin at McCook Field (near the site of Wright-Patterson AFB) to have drinks and share stories about lives saved by parachutes. One of the airmen said "We ought to start a club for guys like us. As time goes by more and more fliers all over the world will owe their lives to your chutes, it should be quite a thing in years to come."

And that was how the Caterpillar Club, an exclusive club for those who had their lives saved by a parachute, was formed. By 1939, membership had risen to 4,000 and included fliers from China to Peru and nearly 50 countries in between.

At the outbreak of WWII, a shortage of gold – and reasons of economy – made it necessary to substitute the gold Caterpillar Badge for a gilt one but no person who applied, and could substantiate his story, was declined membership. Into the member files went the names of some of the greatest air aces of the war – "Cobber" Kain, Sir Douglas Bader, "Bluey" Truscott, "Pathfinder" Don Bennet and hundreds of others.

An individual and carefully indexed file was created for each member to document their amazing tales of escape. Many of the heroic stories made the adventures of James Bond seem like child's play. Some of the fliers were blown out of their aircraft during combat, and then some floated safely to earth with their parachute canopy ripped by enemy bullets. Some jumped at 30,000 feet and others at 200 feet or lower.

More than 13,000 R.A.F. officers and airmen wrote from P.O.W. camps to apply for their memberships after parachuting from crippled bombers and fighters over enemy territory. Two



Leslie Irvin

brothers in Bomber Command bailed out over Germany within 12 months of each other to qualify for membership. One sergeant-pilot wrote on a P.O.W. postcard to thank Leslie Irvin for an easy let down "on behalf of my future – as yet unknown- wife and children."

Among these thousands of R.A.F. men, only one airwoman received the coveted Caterpillar Badge during the war – Corporal F.H. Poser, who jumped from 600 feet while serving with a meteorological unit in the Middle East. Since then, many more women have become fully qualified members of the Club.

Today, the Club boasts tens of thousands of members, but that is only a fraction of the total number of actual lives saved who are eligible. It does not include, for example, the thousands of Americans who parachuted safely in the Pacific War nor the Luftwaffe airmen, most of whom carried an Irvin-designed parachute made at a factory bought-out by the Nazis in 1936.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS



Shawn Kinmartin

Shawn Kinmartin, the pilot of a skydiving plane, had never done any skydiving himself. On a skydiving flight on June 14, 2014, he knew he was in trouble when the last skydiver, upon exiting the plane, accidentally hit and damaged the tail of the aircraft, making it impossible to land.

Shawn was able to fly the plane to a cornfield, reducing his altitude to 2,000 ft before jumping out.

Shawn was presented with his Caterpillar Club membership in July 2014.



Joe Moser

Joe Moser was flying over Germany on August 13, 1944 when his P-38 aircraft was shot down. To prevent the fire on both wings from engulfing the cockpit, he turned his plane upside down. He then pulled his canopy back even though his hands were burned by the intense heat, and released his seat belt only to have the toe cap on his boot catch the rear view mirror of his plane. Joe was suspended upside down as the plane headed for the ground. At the last moment, the toe cap on his boot ripped free and he was able to pull the parachute's rip cord handle. The chute was released and after only two swings (maybe 1½ swings) he hit the ground. His life was saved by the parachute made by Irvin, which is now Airborne Systems.

Joe was inducted into the Caterpillar Club at an event at the Heritage Flight Museum in Bellingham, WA in June 2013.



Vernon Blucher

Vernon T. Blucher was part of an allied forces flying formation on a mission in Germany on September 28, 1944 when he had to bail out of his plane. As he descended, he looked down to see where he was going to land and saw he had three choices - a thatched barn roof, high power electric wires, or into a canopy of trees.

Vernon grabbed the strings of his chute steering away from the barn and the power lines and sending him crashing through the trees. Vernon kept his feet together and his hands above his head. He was dangling about eight feet off the ground. To release himself, he wiggled, squirmed, pulled, and tugged and finally found himself on the ground.

Vernon was presented his Caterpillar Club membership in May 2014.

