Introduction

This report is the culmination of five years of work collecting and documenting the stories of people who have survived long falls without a working parachute. This work was inspired by some incredible stories from World War II; specifically Joe Jone's descent in the severed tail of a B-17 bomber and Alan Magee's fall through the skylight of the St. Nazaire train station. The open question for anyone looking at these incidents is whether they could possibly be true. Taken individually, these stories appear outlandish and miraculous. Seen as a group, patterns begin to emerge. These patterns are the basis for the categories described below.

The purpose of this report is to provide a collection of the many stories, while presenting the documentary evidence and analyzing the data to determine any underlying patterns. While some of the data collection can be done from published sources, one of the benefits of the Internet is that it can be used to solicit responses from far-flung individuals who may have information of value to the research. This is the purpose of the Free Fall Research Page (www.greenharbor.com/fffolder/ffresearch.html), which was begun in 2001 and is where confirmed and unconfirmed incidents are posted for the web site's visitors to peruse. The resulting e-mails from all over the world have proved to be a rich source for many of the accounts included here.

Methodology

Collection

These stories were collected over a five year period. Each story was catalogued with relevant information including name, date, location, height, type of incident, circumstances aiding survival, injuries, references, and a general description of the incident. Each story was assigned a category and then given a confirmation status. These are described below.

Categories

Early on in this research it became apparent that the incidents could be grouped fairly easily into a few categories. As more incidents came to light, additional patterns appeared that helped to clarify these categories.

The following categories are used in this report:

- **Freefallers:** These individuals fell long distances without the benefit of a parachute. They fell with nothing to slow them. Some of these individuals may have been wearing a parachute, but for whatever reason it was not deployed.

- **Wreckage Riders:** These individuals fell within the wreckage of a destroyed aircraft. Perhaps the remnant slowed their fall in some fashion or cushioned them from the inevitable collision with the earth. The wreckage of the aircraft ranges from large components, such as the tail, to smaller pieces such as the seat that the individual sat in.

- **Unlucky Skydivers (Civilian):** This group contains recreational skydivers whose parachutes failed entirely or malfunctioned to some degree. They were unlucky in the sense that their parachutes failed, but very lucky overall to have survived.

- **Unlucky Skydivers (Military):** These individuals, generally airmen or paratroopers, jumped as part of their military service either in planned jumps or in emergency exits from aircraft. Their parachutes failed or malfunctioned but they survived.

Note: In some incidents the parachute begins to deploy at the last second. It may not be clear to the participant whether the parachute really opened or not. These stories are categorized under the Unlucky Skydivers (Civilian or Military) category. Under "Circumstances aiding survival" it is noted that a late-opening parachute may have been a factor. These incidents are referred to as low-altitude openings.

- **Low Altitude Ejections:** These individuals ejected from their aircraft at very low altitudes and survived the ejection without the benefit of a fully open parachute.

- **Saved by Other:** In this category, the rescue of a seemingly doomed individual happens through the actions (sometimes intentional, sometimes fortuitous) of another individual. This category includes accounts of two airmen who survived a descent under a single parachute.

- **Lucky/Unlucky:** This category includes individuals whose parachutes worked, but something else went terribly wrong. This category includes jumpers who were drawn upwards in a storm and those who collided with an aircraft on the way down.

- **Skyscraper Falls:** Although the accounts in this report are primarily falls from aircraft, there are some other long falls that do warrant attention. This category includes multi-story falls from buildings, and currently only includes two falls, each of which is more than 10 stories. (See Nicholas du Plooy and Brent R.)

- **Fabrications:** A few accounts appear to be jokes or are otherwise not believed to be true. This category serves to identify any such fabrications.

Some incidents, however, may not fit clearly into one category or the other. In addition, some incidents are hard to categorize since the details may be sparse or contradictory. It is always possible that a story that today is put in one category may tomorrow be moved upon the discovery of new information.

Verification

Each incident has been evaluated based on the supporting evidence and given one of the descriptors defined below:

- **Confirmed:** Reliable supporting evidence exists. This evidence, frequently a published account, includes the name of the person and other relevant details.

- **Plausible:** Supporting evidence exists but some open questions remain. Where a first-person account is the only source, the incidents are considered plausible until a third-party source is found.

- **Unconfirmed:** These incidents have been reported but additional supporting evidence is required to confirm them. All incidents where the name is not known are considered unconfirmed.

- **Suspect:** These incidents have little supporting evidence and are implausible based on the evidence that exists.

- **Non-qualifying:** Upon examination of the evidence these cases do not warrant inclusion among the confirmed accounts. The reason for including them in this report is to identify the fabricated or borderline accounts in order to separate them from accounts that may one day be confirmed.