



SAVED BY THE TOSS OF A COIN

“As we move through life, we move accompanied. Call it what you will - spirit, energy, angel, being. I call it... The Guardian.”

– Patricia Chapman Meder

Thursday, June 9, 1949 was a first-class day to fly at Barksdale Air Force Base. Beautiful morning, gentle wind, and not a cloud in the sky. It would be the third time Jim Louden had gone up in the B-45.

As public information officer for the first jet bomber group in the history of the United States Air Force, Capt. Louden had coordinated a contest the previous year to name the aircraft. The name “Tornado” was chosen.

Tornados are also known as twisters; it was a fortuitous choice.

The first two times Jim had flown in the B-45 Tornado he made radio broadcasts from the plane’s cockpit. Jim’s broadcasts, which captured the impressions of a pilot flying a B-45 at 45,000 feet, were radioed to the local NBC station in Shreveport and relayed nationwide from there.

The B-45 featured a tandem cockpit: the front for the pilot, the rear for the co-pilot. On his first two flights, Jim sat in the rear behind the instructor pilot who was flying the plane.

But today, Jim and Capt. Ralph Smith would learn to fly the B-45 Tornado, under the tutelage of Instructor Pilot Capt. Milton Costello.

Jim had flown the B-26 Martin Marauder on 64 missions in World War II. But the B-45 Tornado was another kind of plane entirely, and he was looking forward to getting to know how this beauty handled.

Jim had survived one harrowing mission when his B-26 got hit by flak, lost an engine, and made it back on a wing and a prayer to the emergency-landing strip near the white cliffs of Dover. Jim had survived that turbulent