

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Adventure Glenn Miller was photographed standing in front of his helicopter in October 1980, just six months before he was killed.

Boat survives high-seas saga

Glenn Miller sailed craft after treasure

By Hilary Hesser
Special Staff Writer

The last words Capt. Glenn Miller ever spoke to his son, Zachary, were in the form of a joke about marriage.

"Ever wish marriage is like taking a bath?" Miller asked. "Once you get used to it, it isn't so hot."

Zach, 26, recently recalled the wreckage in detail of his colorful, adventurous father, who died in 1980, when he crashed his helicopter at an Arizona desert base.

Miller was captain of perhaps the most prominent boat berthed in the Santa Barbara Harbor for a number of years — the Coral Sea, an stranger to adventures on the high seas.

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Zach Miller

In recalling the crazy, mixed-up events that followed his father's death, Zach said the chaos was just the sort of thing that Glenn Miller himself would have gotten a laugh out of, because he loved the humor born of his own disasters.

For one thing, Zach said, his father, who was cremated in July

1986, was "put in the mail" until the United Parcel Service tracked down his ashes somewhere between Arizona and Santa Barbara. "He was always late," Zach joked. "That's why they still call him the late Glenn Miller."

Zach and his sister, Catty, decided to spread their father's ashes at sea — from a helicopter, over Albert's Anchorage at Santa Cruz Island.

"He told me he had more good nights in Albert's than anywhere else," Zach said. "He'll have a lot of good nights there."

Glenn's craft during charter boat, Coral Sea, was reported to high-seas distress before and after his death.

The 21-foot steel-hulled boat, built by Glenn in a Milpas Street workshop in 1974, was originally designed for strong charters to the Channel Islands.

But in March 1980, Glenn and a crew of 10 took the boat to the Channel Islands to hunt treasure. However, it was wrecked at sea by Colombian waters, who took it for two weeks of gale-force winds searching for drift.

After the Coral Sea was recovered, the treasure hunters proceeded to the Bahamas, where they planned to salvage the Maravilla, a Spanish galleon that sank in 1686.

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The Coral Sea ended up being confiscated by the state of Florida after Zach Miller and his sister, Cathy, bought it to a man who turned out to be a drug runner. It's being used today to study sea animals.

Glenn

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The bottom line on the trip is that the people involved got a lot of good writing," Zach said.

After the expedition failed, Zach and Cathy took the Coral Sea to Lauderdale, Fla., where they planned to run charter trips. But before the first trip was made, Glenn made a side trip in a helicopter in Arizona, to fly in a plane called "American Eagle." On April 17, he was about 30 feet over the Colorado River at Lees Ferry when the helicopter struck a side and crashed. Glenn and two passengers were killed. A third survived.

Afterward, Zach went to Florida to retrieve the Coral Sea and run a charter business in Santa Barbara.

However, other charter boats filled the void left by the Coral Sea's leaving, and the Glenn charter business was being used.

"There was \$6 million worth of wrongful death suits against the estate," Zach said. "Gene Larry Magnus filed a \$25,000 claim because he said the crash held up production. The claim was denied."

Glenn's aviation insurance company eventually paid about \$1 million to settle all claims, Zach said.

Zach and Cathy decided to sell the Coral Sea, but it took about 1 1/2 years "because it wasn't a yacht, and it wasn't a work boat," Zach said.

In October 1983, the Coral Sea was sold — but its saga didn't end there.

The man who bought it turned out to be the operator of a major cocaine ring — and the vessel was being used for drug runs off Florida.

Eventually the drug runners got caught.

"They were rounded up pretty quickly in Miami," Zach said. "It was a front-page article in the Miami Herald, the best guy was locked up for 45 years. They were running cocaine — this is really

funny — from Crooked Island to the mainland."

The Coral Sea was confiscated and put up for auction, but the day before the auction, the state decided to keep the vessel.

The Florida Department of Natural Resources is using it for scientific studies of sea animals.

Now berthed in St. Petersburg, the Coral Sea has been renamed Roman Carlos II, Zach said.

Today, Zach is the editor of *Slavebirds Magazine* in Santa Barbara.

"I wanted to be a boat captain, too," he said. "It is a great way to have a lot of fun. But I wanted to do some writing, too, which unfortunately my father's death pushed me into."

And although Zach said he is glad to be living his own life, not in the shadow of his father but as a writer, he also pointed out: "I miss the hell out of my dad. I missed he was immortal — which must be why he had no life insurance."

Another in a periodic series following up on past newsmakers.

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