

my friend would disappear from the ship for several weeks, only to meet up with us at another port. He never explained these absences, and I always had the feeling that he was more than just a petty officer machinist's mate! At any rate, two days later he handed me a set of keys that he said would open the elevator door. Sure enough, they worked! We could not only ride to the top in style, but lower the elevator all the way to the base of the structure where we could load the gear without being seen. What a deal!

Our preparations culminated in the meeting of July 3rd on the command boat Truth Ferry. All 29 of us were discussing communications, film angles, pick-up approaches and emergency procedures. We resolved that three boats would be used for the mission: the command boat, a 16-foot Avon inflatable for retrieval, and a 25-foot motor sailboat as a backup. We were all well prepared as we left the pier that night, but the fog could ruin everything. With a scant five hours remaining, I resolved myself to the fact that only time would tell. I found the Toyota after several minutes, and drove off to get something to eat.

Crew call was at 7 a.m. the next morning, at the overlook on the Marin County side of the bridge. Our spirits rose dramatically as we approached the parking lot: there in the distance lay a completely unobstructed view of our goal! The sky was clear as a bell, and it was obvious to me that my prayer had been answered. I'd have to go to church again soon!

We drove in a caravan down the access road to the tower's footing, our spirits and anxiety both running high. Contact was soon established with each of the boats, and all was "go" for a 10 a.m. launch. Just as we prepared to climb the foundation, however, a concerned voice came over the radio: "Top Dog, this is number one. Don't look now, but it's the Coast Guard on parade." We looked across the bay, and were shocked to see a myriad of harbor patrol and Coast Guard vessels in the water, and police helicopters swarming through the air! There was instant relief a moment later when we realized that they were giving escort to what appeared to be a massive, floating antenna. Over 100 feet high and 300 feet long, it was lying on its side and slowly moving in our direction. Word followed that it was a deep sea oil rig that had broken from its moorings during the night. The authorities were towing it out to sea, and at a most inappropriate time for us! At

its present speed it would be directly under the bridge exactly at launch time; there was no question that if it was anonymity we wanted, we'd have to wait.

As we pondered our fate, my cameraman, an assistant and I slowly made our way into the tower with all the gear. No one said a word until we were on top. Once there, we set up communication with the boats again. Everyone was still in -- we had come too far to give up! So we waited. By 10 a.m. the rig had not even passed under the bridge, and the ominous fog began steadily creeping in. The base of the south tower was already invisible as we waited helplessly on top of the world. At about 3 p.m. the beast was finally out to sea, and the escort ships were back in their slips.

By this time the top of the south tower had completely disappeared in the fog, which was quickly encroaching on our end as well. Ground features became concealed as if by some giant liquid blob, and we realized that the jump must go soon. The camera was quickly set up and all units were given a five minute standby. The fog rolled in even more as I placed one foot on the catwalk railing, and the other on the massive saddle which supports the three-foot-diameter main suspension cable. All crews reported "ready" and we started the one-minute countdown.

The fog began wisping all around, and the lighthouse directly below me was visible only in short glimpses. Surrounded by razor ribbon, I hoped to have it in view at all times. Fortunately, there was a 20-knot wind which I hoped would keep me clear of the obstacles at the base. Ten seconds to launch. "We love ya, Ron!" yelled my cameraman. Five seconds. I saw the Avon circling below. "Now!"

I left the catwalk with a powerful lunge. For a few brief moments, I was truly free ... alone. It was a spiritual journey as much as a physical one. I delayed no more than 1-1/2 seconds before releasing my 52-inch pilot chute, and was quickly snapped upright by the deployment of my T-10 main canopy. In my excitement, however, I had also deployed my 17-foot cargo chute reserve. "Shit!" I looked above and saw the two canopies bumping, fighting for air, and then I attempted to steer the configuration into some semblance of an approach for landing. Seven-teen seconds after stepping from the railing, I splashed down.

The wind caught my canopies, and they

began dragging me unmercifully through the frigid waters of San Francisco Bay. I porpoised along at 25 mph in the choppy swells. "Choppy! That's it ... chop the main!" My wild ride instantly turned into a controlled tow behind the 17-foot reserve. *And now where's the Avon?* I wondered. An instant later, I heard two splashes: the rubber boat was beside me, and the divers were in the water. Five minutes later I was aboard the sailboat and we were on our way to Sausalito. What a great adventure it had been! I looked up at the tower from which I had plummeted just moments ago ... the top was obscured in the haze, and it was obvious my jump had been made at the last possible second.

Within a few minutes we pulled into the pier at Zack's restaurant, and the celebration began. We watched the video over and over, as we reveled in the success of a great team effort. And apparently no one of any consequence had seen us; we had done it "clean." I made a little speech thanking everyone on the support crew for a job well done. As we sat around toasting ourselves, the inevitable question was asked: "So, Ron, what's next?" "Well, to be honest, that south tower looked awfully inviting ..."

*About the Author: Hollywood stuntman Ron Broyles did eventually get to jump the Golden Gate's south Tower: on Sept. 8, 1984. Not all went as well the second time around, however: Broyles' main opened with several line twists, causing Ron to collide with the bridge's roadway level.*

*Broyles began cutting suspension lines which were draped over and below him, then deployed his 16-foot cargo chute reserve. He was arrested by the Coast Guard and charged with trespassing on the bridge's superstructure and "having no identification."*

*In 1982 Broyles climbed Houston's 1,000-foot Texas Commerce Bank, using a camming device in the window washing track to hoist himself to the top. Half-way up, the police held a hand-written sign to the window, stating: "You are illegally trespassing. Get off the building immediately." Broyles continued his ascent was arrested at the top.*

*During his trial, Broyles told the judge, "My camming device was designed to go up. Going up was the fastest and only safe way off." The judge pondered this statement briefly, and directed a verdict of not guilty.*