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Mike Touzeau

Green Valley News, iwumag@iwu.edu

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Taking the Plunge

Story by MIKE TOUZEAU

Thomas Edison always said he was “long on ideas, but short on time.”

Like the great inventor, 1942 Illinois Wesleyan graduate Dave Simpson of Green Valley, Ariz., figured if he was ever going to, “then I better get to it.”

He hatched the idea several months ago that he would like to try to jump out of a plane to celebrate his 90th birthday.

“He said, ‘I think I’d like to skydive,’” his wife Janet recalls him saying one day. She naturally asked, “Are you crazy?”

But, once his doctor gave him the green light after her insistence that he get checked out first, there was no stopping him. “I’ve always been adventuresome,” said the spry and fearless former lawyer, an ex-octogenarian on April 14.

Forced to conquer fear at a young age like most of his fellow World War II vets, Simpson became accustomed to a lot of dangerous night missions as a reconnaissance specialist, awarded a Bronze Star for leading a patrol behind enemy lines to safety, but he had to admit that he hung onto his harness for dear life in the tandem dive, receiving his “First Jump Certificate” May 8 at Skydive Arizona in Eloy.

Simpson watched as six “free-fallers” left the plane in front of him.

He remembers nervously thinking then, “What’s this going to be like?”

But, strapped like a papoose to his instructor Jared Miller, who controlled all aspects of the descent and landing, he eventually was able to relax and enjoy the ride.

“He sort of pushed me out the door,” Simpson said.



After a somersault and a one-minute free-fall for 5,000 feet, the deafening roar of the wind with temperatures so cold at nearly three miles high, his ears plugged so he couldn't hear any of Miller's instructions. Simpson took the jolt of the chute opening and began to watch the ground rushing to meet him.

"I put my full confidence in him," said the former star athlete whose only experiences close to this were the parasailing and gliding he did for his 80th birthday.

He has slowed down his activity quite a bit, as one would expect, from the days when he and doubles partner Tudor ApMadoc, also 90 but still competing, used to win a lot of senior tennis tournaments locally, as well as taking the gold at the Senior Games in St. George, Utah.

He met Janet on the courts, and they married after losing their spouses. She finally quit playing at age 85.

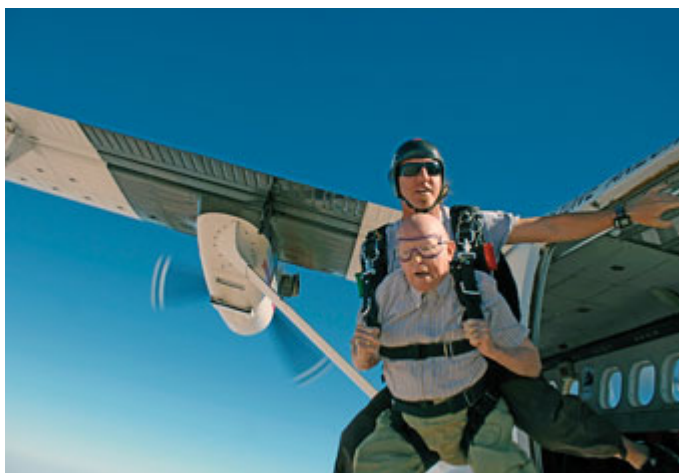
Acknowledging she was concerned about his "challenge," she nevertheless gave him her full support.

"I thought he'd do fine," she said, although she was a little worried when it took a while for him to get up from a hard landing.

A 1937 graduate and three-sport letterman in Edwardsville, Ill., he was a tennis star at Illinois Wesleyan University and was inducted into the Edwardsville High Athletic Hall of Fame in 1985, holding a long jump record there for more than 25 years.

After college and his duty in World War II, Simpson kept a successful law practice back in Edwardsville for 33 years before retiring to Bonner's Ferry, Idaho.

He moved to Green Valley in 1990 and was an active tennis player into his 80s.



Simpson successfully exits the plane with his instructor Jared Miller.

He has no plans for another jump, although he says his grandson wants to try it with him now. If it appeals to him, he'll do it.

Another lawyer from Illinois who became one of our most famous presidents once said, "It's not the years in your life, it's the life in your years."

Dave Simpson can sit back now and say he added a little more life to his 90 years and counting.

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