

Blinded Pilot Creates New Career As Broker

MENLO PARK, Calif. (UPI)—Eighteen months ago Oscar W. Cleal settled himself in the pilot seat of a Pacific Airline plane in Chico, Calif., for another routine flight in his 15-year career with the company.

A few moments later, Bruce Britt, 40, boarded the DC3 without a ticket and pulled a gun from his coat when the ticket agent tried to force him off. Britt opened fire, killing the agent and narrowly missing a passenger.

The gunman forced his way into the cockpit and ordered Cleal to take off immediately for Arkansas. When the pilot attempted to restrain Britt, the berserk man fired a bullet into Cleal's head.

Britt was subdued by the copilot and other passengers, and Cleal was rushed to a hospital where doctors saved his life. But he lost one eye completely and lost the vision in the other.

Cleal's flying career was over at 42, an age when few men, especially a blind one, would consider starting over. Cleal decided to be an exception.

During his convalescence, after he was released from the Stanford-Palo Alto Hospital, Cleal turned to the investment securities business in which he long had an interest.

At his Menlo Park home with his wife, Evelyn, and their two children, Lindsay, 7, and Wendy, 4, Cleal studied economics, finance and all facets of the securities business.

His wife read to him in the evenings, and he used tape-recorded textbooks when she was busy at her duties as a housewife.

Last summer he went into training with the Menlo Park office of Shearson, Hammill & Co., a brokerage firm. And Monday, after a year and a half of study, Cleal was registered by the New York Stock Exchange as an authorized broker.

James E. Ryan, manager of the Menlo Park brokerage office, said Cleal has a fulltime secretary and the use of electronic sound equipment that enables him to handle securities work, despite his blindness.

"As far as we can tell, he's the only blind broker registered with the stock exchange," Ryan said. "His friends are very proud of him."

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