



INVITED  
COMMENTARY

# Clarifying Muddied Waters, Part 1: A Secure Timeline for the James Leininger Case

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## HIGHLIGHTS

A well-publicized case of a young boy's 'past life' memories remains highly controversial due to a debatable chronology of the reported details and events. Recent research arguably offers the most accurate timeline that supports early witness testimony in favor of reincarnation.

## ABSTRACT

Drawing on dated emails and unpublished materials unavailable to Michael Sudduth, this paper establishes a secure, detailed timeline for the James Leininger reincarnation case. This secure timeline invalidates the timeline used by Sudduth in his critique of the case, while validating that of the Leininger family and investigator Jim Tucker. Links are provided to PDFs of supporting documents posted to the Psi Open Data repository.

## Confusions and Controversies in the Case of James Leininger

The James Leininger case has become one of the best-known American reincarnation cases, thanks to the Leiningers' many media appearances and their best-selling book, *Soul Survivor: The Reincarnation of a World War II Fighter Pilot* (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009). This tells the story of a Louisiana boy who claimed to have died when his plane was shot down during the Battle for Iwo Jima. The Leininger case has become one of the most controversial reincarnation cases, in part because of confusions over the role of counselor and author Carol Bowman and the order in which major developments transpired.

The case was initially investigated by James's father, Bruce Leininger. The independent investigation by Jim Tucker did not begin until after the publication of *Soul Survivor*. Tucker wrote about the case in *Return to Life* (2013), following this with treatments in a scholarly book chapter (Mills & Tucker, 2015) and a paper in the journal *Explore* (Tucker, 2016). Carol Bowman (2010, pp. 54–57) wrote about the case and her involvement in it for *Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine*. Leslie Kean (2017, pp. 17–42) surveyed

the case in *Surviving Death*, and it was featured in an episode of the Netflix series spinoff of the same name. Bruce Leininger (2021) summarized it in a submission to the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS) essay contest for "best available evidence for the survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death," for which he received an honorable mention.

Skeptical pushback began online after a 2005 replay of an ABC *Primetime Thursday* segment featuring the Leiningers (Skeptico, 2005). The anonymous blogger gave a brief overview of the case, then offered an interpretation alternative to reincarnation. He presumed that James's fascination with aircraft began after the visit to the Cavanaugh Flight Museum outside Dallas, Texas, where supposedly he saw a Corsair, "the plane James will later say he flew." After this, the blogger submitted,

The child's grandmother, for no obvious rational reason I can think of, suggests he is remembering a past life. She brings in Carol Bowman (an author of several books on reincarnation), to "affirm" James' nightmares. . . . Bowman "encourages" James in his fantasies, also with leading questions. Unsurpris-

ingly, the child cooperates in this fantasy building. After all, they're telling him he was a real pilot.

From the TV program we know they bought him a toy plane big enough for him to sit in, and every shot showed him in pilot's goggles or by a plane. Carol Bowman asked him leading questions and encouraged his fantasy at every turn. Being a young child, he loved making up fantasies of being a pilot, to go with the toys he had been given. But they were just stories.

Bowman is the author of two books on reincarnation (1997, 2001), not several. This is a forgivable mistake, but not so the assertion that she asked leading questions of James and encouraged fantasizing. The latter charges are readily controvertible by viewing the segment—Bowman was interviewed at the ABC studios in New York City, not with the Leiningers in Lafayette, Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> Two other assertions—that James's grandmother had no reason to suspect that he might be recalling a past life and that his nightmares of dying in a plane crash were triggered by seeing a Corsair at the Cavanaugh Flight Museum—were undermined with the appearance of *Soul Survivor* in 2009 and *Return to Life* in 2013, respectively. Bruce Leininger told Jim Tucker that there was not a Corsair on display when he visited the Cavanaugh with James and Tucker confirmed this with a call to the museum (Tucker, 2013, p. 69). The Cavanaugh's Corsair had been loaned to a Wisconsin airshow where it crashed in July 1999 and was not replaced until 2003.

John Fischer and Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin (2016, pp. 124–131) took a constructionist position similar to the Skeptico blogger, starting with James seeing a Corsair in a museum he and his parents visited “when he was eighteen months old.” According to Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin, James not only saw the plane, he walked around it on this occasion. “His parents have even claimed that he was conducting a flight check” (p. 127). In support of this notion they give a footnote citing page 114 of *Soul Survivor*, which refers to a visit to the Lone Star Flight Museum in Galveston on June 29, 2002, taped for the (unaired) pilot of a series to be called *Strange Mysteries*, not the Cavanaugh Flight Museum in the Dallas suburb of Addison that James visited with his father at 22 months. The aircraft inspection did not occur in Galveston, but during a Blue Angels performance at the Lafayette, Louisiana, Sertoma Airshow on October 30, 2001, and it was not James's parents but *Strange Mysteries* interviewer Shari Belafonte who observed that he appeared to be conducting a preflight check.

In their conclusion, Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin proposed that the reason James “had the dreams, told the sto-

ries, played the games, and said the things he did may be due to a *combination* of various factors,” including “chance coincidence, past events, normal childhood tendencies, and even suggestions and projections on the part of the adults involved in the case” (p. 129, their emphasis). Michael Shermer (2018, pp. 102–106) further extended this line of reasoning, again building on the idea that James's fascination with World War II aircraft began after seeing a Corsair at the Cavanaugh Flight Museum. However, because James's memories had largely faded by age 11, when he met him on *Larry King Live*, Shermer thought that James's parents must have imposed the James Huston identity on him. Shermer averred,

the boy's experiences, nightmares and fantasies that resulted in this apparently coherent narrative were constructed only *after* the trip to the World War II museum featuring a Corsair plane, *after* the grandmother suggested past lives as an explanation, *after* the reincarnation therapist was consulted and engaged the boy in guided fantasy, *after* the father read to the boy books about World War II fighter planes, *after* the parents bought the boy toy planes, and *after* the parents became less skeptical and began to look for evidence to fit the reincarnation scenario. . . . (Shermer, 2018, p. 105, italics in original)

This series of skeptical exegeses becomes progressively more extreme and detached from the facts of the case. Shermer's maligning of Bowman is especially egregious. She is, he said, “a reincarnation counselor and past lives regression therapist who guided the boy to ‘recover’ more details about the plane crash and the deadly incident” (Shermer, 2018, p. 103). Bowman does sometimes employ hypnotic regression with adult clients, but not children. She never had the opportunity to lead James in guided fantasy. Her role in the case is much more limited than has been portrayed by critical commentators. When contacted by James's mother Andrea after she read *Children's Past Lives*, Bowman did advise encouraging James to talk more about his memories during the day, which had the salutary effect of making his nightmares subside.<sup>2</sup> From then until the *Primetime Thursday* segment, Bowman had no contact with the Leiningers, however. They had a brief period of email and telephone contact afterward and Andrea contributed a few posts to Bowman's Past Life Forum (since renamed the Reincarnation Forum) in 2004 and 2005, but Bowman met James only once, during the *Strange Mysteries* taping in 2002, and on that occasion did no more than say hello to him with others in the room.<sup>3</sup>

The most concerted skeptical treatment of the case is that by Michael Sudduth, who has addressed it in several

blog posts (2021a, 2021b, 2022) and in a recent paper in this journal (2021c). Sudduth appears to be more open to the possibility of fraudulent contrivance than his fellow skeptics.<sup>4</sup> Although toned down in a revised version of his blog (2021a) and in the peer-reviewed publication (2021c), in the original blog posting<sup>5</sup> he clearly insinuated fraud by the Leiningers. “The James Leininger story is a sham,” he asserted. The story “is based on outright falsehoods, factual distortions, and bogus reasoning.” More precisely, “The James Leininger story nearly everyone knows about is a story the Leiningers evolved over many years beginning in 2002. They altered their story in multiple ways in the light of what they later discovered.” In his recent blog concerning the submission to the BICS contest (B. Leininger, 2021), Sudduth (2022) attempts to hold Bruce to academic standards of discourse inappropriate to his lay contribution. Sudduth ridicules Bruce for holding that he has provided “definitive proof” of reincarnation and questions his veracity at every turn.

Sudduth (2021c) also goes after the investigation of Jim Tucker, to which Tucker has responded in this issue. Tucker alleges that Sudduth’s “report is filled with distortions, mischaracterizations, and at times outright misinformation” (p. 84) and addresses some examples. Not surprisingly, Sudduth (in this issue) rejects Tucker’s response and doubles down on his criticisms of Tucker and the Leiningers. It is not the purpose of the present study to examine each of the contested points. To the extent that Sudduth’s arguments rest on a faulty timeline, however, my analysis unquestionably supports Tucker and the Leiningers. A confirmed timeline also reveals the representations of the case by the Skeptico blogger (2005), Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin (2016), and Shermer (2018) to be largely conjectural.

### Establishing a Secure Timeline

Sudduth (2021c, 2022) is rightly concerned with chronology. The evaluation of any reincarnation case<sup>6</sup> depends on having an accurate chronology not only of memories, behaviors, and happenings in the case, but of these in temporal relation to events that might potentially impact them. Fortunately, Bruce provided me with a “James 3 Master Timeline” that he and Andrea helped Ken Gross work out in 2007 in preparation for writing *Soul Survivor*.<sup>7</sup> Bruce reports that this was painstakingly constructed, using emails, letters, and dated internet downloads, as well as placing James’s statements and behaviors in relation to occurrences whose dates were known. I have checked this Master Timeline against other sources and I think we may trust it as authoritative. I have augmented it with additional materials, most importantly emails from the Leiningers

to Carol Bowman in 2001 and 2002.

My introductory synopsis of the case furnishes a comprehensive overview, not only of the development of James’s memories and behaviors related to the previous life, but also of the way the case was investigated by Bruce Leininger. By the time Tucker became involved in the case, James’s memories were presenting much less insistently, so it is important to look at exactly what Bruce did, how he did it, and when he did it, especially inasmuch as Sudduth (2021c, 2022) gives extensive attention to this topic.

The timeline dates in Bruce’s BICS contest essay (B. Leininger, 2021) are sometimes confusingly at variance with the Master Timeline and *Soul Survivor* (as Sudduth 2021c, 2022, has observed), but importantly, Bruce tried to include scans of documents he collected during his investigation. Unfortunately, BICS wanted to publish only PDF versions of submissions on its website, to prevent unauthorized copying or tampering. Bruce prepared a Microsoft Word version of the essay’s appendix, which includes the supporting documents, but this is not available through the BICS website. Bruce sent me the Word file and granted permission to make the embedded PDFs publicly available. I have sent them to the Psi Open Data repository, to which I supply references in the Notes to the following narrative.<sup>8</sup>

### Little Man Can’t Get Out

James Madison Leininger was born on April 10, 1998, in San Mateo, California. He was named after his maternal great-great-great-great grandfather, James Madison Scoggin. Shortly after his birth, the family relocated to Richardson, Dallas County, Texas, where he spent the remainder of his first year. According to an email from James’s mother Andrea to Carol Bowman in February 2001 one of his first words was “airplane.” Soon thereafter he began to say “airplane crash,” as often as twenty times a day. Passenger jets traveling in and out of the Dallas-Fort Worth international airport regularly flew overhead, so James had many opportunities to see and hear them as an infant. Andrea added that the only kind of toys he wanted were airplanes, particularly WWII airplanes. James had a collection of wooden planes, some resembling vintage aircraft with propellers on their noses, even before the family moved again, to Lafayette, Louisiana, in March 2000. Most were gifts from his extended family, in response to the strong interest in them he evinced from an early age.<sup>9</sup>

On August 15, 1999—while they were still in Richardson—James’s parents Andrea and Bruce went out for the evening, leaving him with Andrea’s mother Bobbi. They returned to find James shrieking and crying in his sleep, although what he was saying was unintelligible. This was the first incidence of what would become his recurrent

nightmare. He was then 16 months old. During this period Bruce recalls seeing James standing at the side of his crib, looking up and jabbering as if holding a conversation with someone unseen.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly before they left Richardson in February 2000, Bruce took 22-month-old James to the Cavanaugh Flight Museum. On the way in, James wanted to look at the toy planes in the gift shop and Bruce purchased a plane along with a Blue Angels video for him.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, when they reached the World War II hangar, James was transfixed by the real thing. He kept returning to the WWII planes and Bruce was able to get him out the museum only with considerable difficulty after almost three hours. Upon their return home, James watched the Blue Angels video over and over until it was worn out and had to be replaced.<sup>12</sup>

One day in mid-March while on a shopping outing in Lafayette, Andrea pulled a toy airplane from a bin in a store and commented that it had a bomb fixed to the bottom. "That's not a bomb, Mommy," said James, not yet two years old. "That's a dwop tank." He was correct—the finless vessel on the bottom of the plane represented a drop tank, an external fuel tank—but how he knew this Andrea could not fathom. The term was not mentioned in the Blue Angels video he had been watching and certainly was not used in the children's TV shows of which he was fond.

Not long thereafter, James began to experience nightmares on a regular basis, several times a week. He would scream and kick his legs in the air and wake up crying. Andrea consulted his pediatrician, who told her that they were night terrors, normal for children, and would resolve on their own. But the nightmares continued. Gradually James's words became clearer. When she first understood them, Andrea called Bruce to hear them too. James was screaming, "Airplane crash! Plane on fire! Little man can't get out!" Other members of the family witnessed the nightmares over the ensuing months. One of Andrea's sisters told Jim Tucker that "they were like someone in terror fighting for his life" (Tucker, 2013, p. 68).

Around this time, James started bashing his toy planes on a coffee table in the family room of his home, breaking the propellers off their noses, proclaiming variations of, "Airplane crash on fire! Little man can't get out!" Then on August 11, 2000, at three years and four months, he began talking about the little man in his waking state. He did this the first time when his mother was reading him a Dr. Seuss book before going to sleep. He lay on his back "and said 'Mama, the little man's going like this,' and then he kicked his feet up at the ceiling, as if he were upside down in a box, trying to kick his way out. 'Little man's going like this.' And he kicked again. It was the same kind of kick as in his nightmares, but now he was wide awake" (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009, p. 54).

When Andrea asked James who the little man was, he said "me." Andrea went to get Bruce, so he could witness this development. James repeated the scene for his father. Bruce asked what happened to his plane and James said that it had crashed on fire. Why did it crash? Because it was shot. Who shot it? The Japanese! At this juncture, Andrea's mother Bobbi proposed they begin to think "out of the box"—maybe James was recalling a previous life. This suggestion was readily adopted by all the family except Andrea and Bruce.

Not long thereafter, when James was again talking about the little man and identified him as himself, Andrea asked what his name was. James, he said. As this was his own name, she and Bruce dismissed it as a lack of comprehension on his part. Bruce asked what sort of plane he had flown and James said a Corsair. From where had it taken off? A boat. And the name of the boat? *Natoma*. Bruce asked Andrea to fetch paper and pen so he could jot down the name. A few days later, on August 27, he discovered in an internet search that there was a ship, the USS *Natoma Bay* (CVE-62), which had served as an escort aircraft carrier during World War II.<sup>13</sup> This was the first indication that James might be recalling a real event, not simply exercising his imagination. Around the 1st of September, James was heard to say, "Before I was born, I was a pilot and my airplane got shot in the engine and crashed in the water and that's how I died."

On October 5, when Bruce came to say goodnight to James, he told him he hoped he would not dream about the little man that night. James said, "The little man's name is James too, Daddy." Andrea asked whether he could remember the little man's last name, but he could not. She then asked whether he recalled anything else from his dream. His face lit up, and he said, "Jack!" Did he remember Jack's last name? "Larsen. It was Jack Larsen." Bruce again asked Andrea to fetch pen and paper so he could make a note of the name. When he asked James who Jack Larsen was, he said that he was another pilot. Bruce did not have an opportunity to search for Jack Larsen for several days, but on October 16, he checked the American Battle Monuments Commission website, which lists casualties from America's foreign wars. This listed an Army sergeant Jack Larson and staff sergeant Jack Larsen, but no Larsons or Larsens from the Navy.<sup>14</sup> Bruce did not learn for another two years that a Jack Larsen who served as a fighter pilot on the *Natoma Bay* was still living.

Shortly after Thanksgiving, Bruce and James were leafing through a book Bruce had purchased as a Christmas present for his father, who had joined the Marines at the end of World War II and had a strong interest in the Pacific theater. The book was *The Battle for Iwo Jima 1945*, by Derrick Wright (1999). When they reached a photo of the

island, James said, “Daddy, that’s where my plane got shot down.”<sup>15</sup> Bruce retrieved the history of the *Natoma Bay* he had downloaded on August 27 and confirmed that the ship had participated in the battle for Iwo Jima in March 1945.

On December 8, Bruce contacted *Natoma Bay* veteran Leo Pyatt. Pyatt wanted to know the reason for his interest in the ship and Bruce explained that he had heard someone in his neighborhood talk about it and was considering writing a book. He asked Pyatt about Corsairs on the *Natoma Bay* and learned that there had been none. Regarding Jack Larsen, Pyatt recalled that he had flown off one day and nothing more was heard from him. From this, Bruce formed the idea that James was remembering the life of Jack Larsen, although, inconsistently, he was still skeptical of the possibility of reincarnation. In January 2001 he made another search for Larson or Larsen, this time confining it to fatalities from escort carriers, but again without success.<sup>16</sup> The following day, he found a list of men from escort carriers who had been killed in action during World War II.<sup>17</sup> Among them was a James M. Huston, Jr., who was associated with CVE-62, the *Natoma Bay*, but at the time neither Bruce nor Andrea realized the significance of this.

The previous November, Bobbi had sent Andrea a copy of Carol Bowman’s (1997) *Children’s Past Lives*. Still not convinced of the reincarnation interpretation of James’s story, Andrea did not immediately read the book. After finally doing so, she emailed Bowman, on February 18, 2001, describing James’s memories and nightmares and asking for advice on how to deal with them.<sup>18</sup> Bowman suggested encouraging James to talk about his memories of the little man during the day. In doing so, Andrea should assure him that the life he was recalling was over and that he was now safe in his new life, Bowman advised. Andrea followed the recommendations, and the nightmares, which had been recurring three to four times a week, began to come weekly or biweekly. In addition to his nightmares, James had been telling everyone they took to their local airport that their planes would crash, but his concern with plane crashes also diminished.

For his third birthday on April 10, 2001, James was given a GI Joe action figure. The doll had brown hair and he named it “Billie.” For Christmas that year he received a blond GI Joe doll, which he named “Leon.” James was greatly attached to these dolls—he played with them daily, carried them to the bath, and slept with them.

Shortly after his third birthday, James started drawing aircraft battle scenes, most of them naval. One of the first depicted a boat and a plane with the sky covered with black dots. James placed red suns on the fuselages of Japanese planes, some of which he identified as “Zekes” and others as “Bettys.” Asked about the distinction, he explained that

the boy planes (Zekes) were fighters and girl planes (Bettys) were bombers. He made drawings of this kind almost daily for a year, signing several, including the one with the black dots, “James 3.”<sup>19</sup> Andrea and Bruce supposed that was because he was three years old, but James persisted in the James 3 signature after he turned four. Bruce wondered whether the 3 might refer to the Number 3 slot pilot in the Blue Angels video, but when asked for an explanation, James said it was because he was “the third James.”

Early in March 2002, Carol Bowman called to say that ABC’s *20/20* TV program had contacted her regarding American children with past-life memories who might be featured in a planned television program. After consideration, Bruce and Andrea agreed to have James’s case included, although this created a dilemma for Bruce, who in his interview with Leo Pyatt had not mentioned James’s memory claims. Moreover, Bruce, a fundamentalist Christian, was still not comfortable with the reincarnation interpretation, unlike Andrea, her sisters, and her mother.

In May, *20/20* field producer Shalini Sharma visited the Leiningers. She asked James to tell his story, then to show her a picture of a Corsair. He found one in a book and told her, “That’s a Corsair! They used to get flat tires all the time! And they always wanted to turn left when they took off!” These were other details he could not have learned from the Blue Angels video, but later turned out to be true of Corsairs landing on and taking off from aircraft carriers. Shari Belafonte came to the Leiningers’ house to interview them on July 12, 2002. An experienced pilot, she arrived in a flight suit. Shown a CD recording of James inspecting a plane at the Sertoma Air Show in Lafayette the previous October 30, she said he was behaving as if he were performing a preflight check. Carol Bowman was there also, but she spent most of the time being interviewed by Belafonte outside the house and had only a brief interaction with James.

James’s story was to be included in the pilot episode of a series to be called *Strange Mysteries*. The show never aired, but Jim Tucker was interviewed for it as well and he learned about the case from a tape he was sent. In *Return to Life* (Tucker, 2013, pp. 64, 74, 77), Tucker notes that the Leiningers described James’ fascination with World War II aircraft, his nightmares, and his claim to have flown off a boat. Andrea relayed that James had asserted that his plane was shot in the engine by the Japanese, then crashed into the water, and that was how he had died. Still hoping to identify Jack Larsen, following the taping Bruce enlisted the aid of ABC researchers, but they too failed to locate him.<sup>20</sup>

In late May and early June the Leiningers went on a ten-day vacation to Hawaii. They made a four-hour tour of Pearl Harbor with James, who naturally was fascinated

with the facility but related no new memories as a result.<sup>21</sup> Later that summer, Bruce overheard James, who liked to pretend he was a singer, talking to an imaginary audience about Pearl Harbor. He told them that the Japanese had bombed it, then added, "I was a Navy pilot and the Japanese shot me down."<sup>22</sup> That fall, James surprised Bruce by telling him that he had picked him and Andrea because he knew they would be good parents. When Bruce asked where he had seen them, James said Hawaii, but not when they were there that summer, but earlier, when it was just Bruce and Andrea. Bruce wanted to know where he had seen them. At "the big pink hotel," James said. He had also seen them dining on the beach one night. In fact, the Leiningers had celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary in Hawaii. They had stayed at the coral-pink Royal Hawaiian resort in Honolulu and one night had dined on the beach.<sup>23</sup>

Although Bruce remained skeptical of a reincarnation interpretation of James's memories, he was driven to understand their grounding. A breakthrough came in September, when he attended a *Natoma Bay* reunion in San Diego, continuing to pose as an author doing research on the ship with the intention of writing a book. He learned from *Natoma Bay* Association historian John DeWitt that the only fatality from the ship in the battle for Iwo Jima was 21-year-old James McCready Huston, Jr. When Andrea heard this, it closed the case for her—James Huston, Jr., must be their man, for if their James were his reincarnation, he would be the third James or James 3. For Bruce, many loose ends remained. Huston had died at Chichi Jima, an island 150 miles north of Iwo Jima, and no one from the *Natoma Bay* had seen his plane go down. Moreover, he had been flying an FM-2 Wildcat, not a Corsair.

Bruce learned at the reunion that Jack Larsen was alive and residing in Springdale, Arkansas, ruling out the possibility that James was remembering Jack Larsen's death. During Bruce's visit to Larsen later that month, Larsen related that he had flown on the mission with Huston and other members of their VC-81 squadron on March 3, 1945. They had been attacking Japanese supply ships in the Chichi Jima harbor to prepare the way for torpedo bombers. Larsen recalled that the flak was so thick that he "could have walked to the ground on it" and got out of the area as fast as he could. After two more strikes, he and the other flyers returned safely to the *Natoma Bay*, but Huston did not make it.

Larsen invited Bruce to stay the night in his home and at breakfast Bruce told him about James's deep knowledge of WW II aircraft and of the Pacific war, without mentioning his past-life memory claims. Larsen retrieved an old canvas bag which contained a cloth flight helmet with goggles and oxygen mask attached, equipment he was wearing on the mission with Huston, and sent it to James. James was

delighted with the gift and immediately incorporated it in his play.

Larsen also allowed Bruce to copy his logbook for the collection of materials he was amassing. Other documents soon were added. On September 25, John DeWitt sent Bruce the VC-81 squadron war diary. This gave the first details about the downing of Huston's plane that Bruce had seen. Eight FM-2s had participated in the attack on ships in the Chichi Jima harbor. Huston's plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire, sending it into a 45-degree dive. The plane crashed into the water, exploding on impact, leaving no wreckage visible on the surface.<sup>24</sup>

The war diary account did not mention Huston's plane having been hit on the nose or its being on fire as it descended toward the water. Those details of James's dream were not confirmed—but Bruce was left with a question. The rest of Huston's squadron was flying away from the scene when his plane was hit, so none had seen him go down—thus how was it known that the plane had suddenly begun to descend at a 45-degree angle and that it had exploded upon impact with the water? Someone must have seen something. Perhaps the information came from airmen on the torpedo bombers which followed Huston's squadron. They had flown off a different escort carrier, the USS *Sargent Bay* (CVE-83). Bruce found an internet site managed by *Sargent Bay* survivors and posted a request for witnesses to the March 3, 1945, attack on Chichi Jima.

The VC-81 war diary contained an appendix that showed that Huston had shot down a Zeke, the Japanese fighter plane whose name James had mentioned.<sup>25</sup> On December 5, Bruce received nine rolls of microfilmed records about the *Natoma Bay* from DeWitt and spent the next three weeks at a library copying them. Among other things from this new trove, Bruce learned that Huston had been awarded a posthumous Purple Heart.<sup>26</sup>

The Leiningers realized that the best way to redeem their subterfuge with the *Natoma Bay* veterans was to write a book about the ship and they decided to focus on the men who flew from it. Andrea managed to identify James Huston's family through census records. From there, she tracked down Huston's sister, Anne Huston Barron, then 84, and called her on February 17. Andrea described the planned book and Bruce followed up by sending Anne documents relating to Huston's death. In return, Anne sent the Leiningers a package of photos of Huston. Two showed him posed by a Corsair.<sup>27</sup> It turned out that Huston had been part of a team which had tested Corsairs for carrier landings, hence the photographs.

On June 3, Bruce was contacted by John Durham, who had just read the post Bruce made the previous September, looking for a witness to the assault on the supply ships in the Chichi Jima harbor on March 3, 1945. Durham had seen

Huston's plane go down. Before calling, he had looked up the details in a memoir he had written some years before, he told Bruce. There had been a huge barrage of anti-aircraft fire and one of the shells had struck Huston's plane. Durham had witnessed the hit, but had not known whose plane it was. "One of the fighters on our escort squadron was close to us and took a direct hit on the nose," he related. The plane, the tail-end Charlie of the escort, burst into flames after the engine was struck.

Durham gave Bruce the names of other men who had flown off the *Sargent Bay* on the torpedo bombing run and who had witnessed Huston's downing. In mid-June, Bruce drove to Nacogdoches, Texas, to interview one of them, John Richardson. Richardson confirmed the details John Durham had provided. He had made eye contact with Huston just before his plane was hit, a memory that continued to haunt him. In September, Bruce attended a *Sargent Bay* reunion and there met John Durham in person, along with two other airmen (Bob Skelton and Ralph Clabour) who had witnessed Huston's downing. Clabour recalled, "Huston's plane was hit right in the engine. There was an instantaneous flash of fire, and the plane immediately dove at a steeper angle and crashed into the harbor."

Bruce finally relinquished his skepticism that James was recalling the life of James Huston, Jr. He had now confirmed all the details of James's account, except for the Corsair and dying at Iwo Jima, but Huston had test-flown Corsairs and so had a connection to them and he had died on a mission that was part of the battle for Iwo Jima. At the *Sargent Bay* reunion, Bruce came clean about James's memories, to a generally positive reception.

A week later, the Leiningers received a call from Shalini Sharma, now with ABC's *Primetime*. After being apprised of the new developments, Sharma asked whether the Leiningers would be receptive to telling James's story again for *Primetime*. They agreed, although because the show wanted to interview men from the *Natoma Bay* and Anne Barron as well, this necessitated informing them about James's memories of James Huston. The Leiningers called Anne on October 12. She was surprised and asked for time to think over the revelation, but soon accepted it.

Chris Cuomo interviewed the Leiningers at their home on October 20. They were preparing to wrap when a package arrived for James from Anne Barron. It held two items of Huston's effects that were sent to his parents following his death—a small pewter bust of George Washington and a Bakelite model of a Corsair that had hung in the ready room on the *Natoma Bay* for recognition training.<sup>28</sup> James can be seen holding these in the show. Off-camera, he took the bust and placed it on his desk, the place where Huston had had it displayed, according to a letter Anne sent

along with the items.<sup>29</sup> After carefully examining the Corsair model, James sniffed it and declared that it smelled like an aircraft carrier. Indeed, it had a smoky diesel oil smell. In her letter, Anne stated that she had considered cleaning the model before sending it, but decided to leave it as it was.

The 14.26-minute segment about James aired on *Primetime Thursday* on April 15, 2004.<sup>30</sup> The next day the Leiningers received a call from Bob Greenwalt, a friend of Huston who had been a member of the unit which test-flown Corsairs designed for aircraft carriers. He reported that they landed rough and tended to blow out their tires, as James had stated. Moreover, Corsairs tended to turn to the left on take-off due to high engine torque. Also as result of the segment, Tucker emailed Bowman to inquire if she thought the Leiningers would be open to an investigation. He then wrote to the Leiningers, who at first sounded receptive, but before a visit could be arranged they asked to postpone it (Tucker, 2013, p. 65).

For Christmas 2003 James was given a third GI Joe doll. This had red hair, and he named it Walter. Bruce had noticed a Leon Conner on the list of fatalities from Huston's squadron, and when he consulted that list again he found a Walter Devlin also. When he asked James why he had given these names to his dolls, James said: "That's who met me when I got to heaven." In fact, both Leon Conner and Walter Devlin had pre-deceased Huston, prior to the battle for Iwo Jima.<sup>31</sup> Further digging determined that Billie Peeler had belonged to the same squadron but had died in an off-duty accident and so was not on the war fatalities list.<sup>32</sup> The hair colors of the three fliers matched the dolls to which James had assigned their names—Billie Peeler's hair was brown, Leon Conner's was blond, and Walter Devlin's was red.<sup>33</sup>

The 2004 reunion of the VC-81 squadron was held in San Antonio, and Andrea, James, and Bobbi accompanied Bruce there that September. James met Bob Greenwalt, recognizing him by his voice. James was comfortable with the other flyers and sat with them during meals, although he confessed to Andrea that he was saddened by how old they had become. During a tour of the National Museum of the Pacific War (the "Nimitz Museum") in Fredericksburg, Texas, a *Natoma Bay* veteran and his wife overheard James' remark about a five-inch cannon on display, "*Natoma Bay* had one of these." When the veteran inquired where it was located, James said, correctly, "on the fantail."

Anne Barron attended the reunion as well and she and James met. When Andrea had told James that they would be seeing Anne, he had replied, "It's not Anne, it's Annie." Annie was four years older than James Huston, Jr., and he had another sister, "Roof" (Ruth), who was four years older than Annie, James added. Andrea recognized the names from the census report and Anne confirmed the age spread

when they met her. She revealed also that Annie had been her brother's pet name for her, although he alone had called her that past her childhood. Anne Huston appeared to be entirely comfortable with James addressing her as Annie.

James continued to relate memories of Huston's family after returning from the reunion. On an occasion in mid-December, when Andrea entered his room with a glass of wine, he recalled that Huston's father had been an alcoholic. When he was drunk he would smash things about the house, James said. When he (James Huston, Jr.) was 13, his father had been sent to a hospital for six weeks. During this time, his mother had worked as a maid, which upset "Roof," who was a society columnist for a local newspaper. When his father returned home, Annie moved in with grandparents. All this was later confirmed by Anne Barron. She sent James a portrait that had been painted of her brother by their mother and when she and James spoke on the telephone, James asked, "Can I have the painting Mom made of you?" Only Anne and her brother had known about this second painting, which was in the attic of her home. Anne sent James the painting of her, along with another letter.<sup>34</sup> Andrea noticed that throughout the phone call, James talked about the Huston family in a familiar way, referring to Huston's parents as if they were his own.

In March 2005 James did not re-experience Huston's downing in a nightmare, as he had on the anniversary of his death in 2003 and 2004. He was then almost seven years old, an age at which many children's past-life memories are fading, but he continued to recall occasional episodes when reminded of them. On March 3, when Bruce assembled a model of an FM-2 Wildcat, James said there was an antenna missing from the side of the plane. Bruce asked how he knew, and James said he remembered that it stuck out and you would bump into it if you didn't pay attention. Bruce researched this and found it to be true. A few days later James recalled using drop tanks as crude napalm bombs, something Jack Larsen, the squadron's armaments officer, confirmed that *Natoma Bay* airmen had done.

Bob Greenwalt called on April 1 to alert the Leiningers to an upcoming History Channel documentary about Corsairs. Bruce taped it for James, and they later watched it together. At one point James corrected the narrator's identification of a Japanese plane as a Zero, saying that it was a Tony instead. A Tony was a fighter, he explained, and was smaller and faster than a Zero, a bomber. Bruce searched his records and found a document showing that Huston had shot down a Tony, so he would have been familiar with that model of plane as well as a Zeke.<sup>35</sup> On an evening walk with Bruce shortly after his birthday that October, James paraphrased a line from the show that evidently had impressed him: "Every day is like a carrier landing—if you walk away from it you're okay."<sup>36</sup>

In the late summer of 2006, the Leiningers were invited to Japan by a program called *Mystery Experience—Unbelievable* for Fuji National Television. They were in Japan the first two weeks of September. A memorial service for Huston in the Futami port on Chichi Jima was arranged for September 4. James broke down standing on a ledge overlooking the harbor, tugged on Bruce's arm, and said, "This is where the planes flew in when James Huston was killed," apparently having recognized the view. Bruce subsequently confirmed the direction of attack from an aerial map in the mission's after-action report.<sup>37</sup>

While at Chichi Jima, the Leiningers took a boat ride and threw out bouquets of flowers near the spot Huston's plane had gone down. When they stopped in San Francisco on the way back home, James drew a picture of a Japanese boat anchored in the water, dolphins and a whale swimming around it, an airplane and a bird flying peacefully overhead. He signed the drawing simply "James."<sup>38</sup> It was his last drawing, Bruce reports.

The Leiningers began working with Ken Gross in 2007. *Soul Survivor* was published in June 2009 and for the week of June 28 stood in eleventh place on the *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list. On December 22, 2009, the family appeared on CNN's *Larry King Live* (*Larry King Live*, 2009) along with Michael Shermer (Shermer, 2018, p. 103). At that time, James retained only vague memories of what he said when he was younger. In 2010, Jim Tucker was welcomed by the Leiningers to begin his investigation of the case (Tucker, 2013, pp. 66–67).

## Timeline of Developments

A chronology of the James Leinger case is presented in Table 1, which includes citations to sources not provided in the narrative above. "DOPS"<sup>39</sup> indicates an unpublished tabulation of James's statements and behaviors created following Tucker's investigation of the case in 2010. In the interest of compactness, where there is additional information provided in the narrative above, this is indicated in Table 1 by the note "[see text]." Where links to supporting documents are given in Notes, this is indicated with "n" followed by the appropriate number. James's statements (S) and behaviors (B) related to James Huston, Jr., are flagged by the initials S and B in boldface font.

Sudduth and I have different views of departures from this timeline, which was followed in *Soul Survivor* but not always faithfully elsewhere. This is particularly true of the many media appearances given by the Leiningers in which they told the story, not always consistently. I find this inconsistency more excusable than Sudduth (2021c, 2022, this issue) does. I do not see evidence for changes in relation to what the Leiningers learned as the case unfolded.

**TABLE 1.** Timeline of Developments in the James Leininger Case

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March 3, 1945. JH's plane shot down in Chichi Jima harbor in Battle for Iwo Jima.

Late May/early June, 1997. Leiningers visit Hawaii for fifth wedding anniversary.

April 10, 1998. JL born in San Mateo, California.

September 1, 1998. Leiningers move from California to Richardson, Dallas County, Texas.

April 10, 1999. *James turns 1 year.*

1999, from about April. JL is fascinated with aircraft, **B1** points to them in sky multiple times a day. (T 67; BL phone 1/30/22)

1999, date uncertain. S1 One of JL's first words was "airplane." He would also say "airplane crash" whenever he saw or heard an airplane. (AL in Feb. 2001 email to CB)

1999, July 29. Cavanaugh Corsair crashes at Wisconsin airshow, not immediately replaced. (T-RTL 69)

1999, Aug. 15. BL and AL go out for evening, leaving Bobbi babysitting. **B2** They return home to find JL shrieking and crying in his sleep. (MT)

1999, before moving to Lafayette, LA. JL had a collection of wooden airplanes given to him by his extended family in response to his obsession with aircraft. (BL phone 1/31/22) [see text]

February 19, 2000. *First visit to Cavanaugh Flight Museum in Dallas.*

2000, Feb. 19. At Cavanaugh Museum, BL purchases Blue Angels video and plane for JL. (MT; LLG 19)

2000, Mar. 1. Ls move to Lafayette, LA. (MT; LLG 15)

2000, Mar. 14. **S2** JL identifies "dwop tank" on toy airplane. (MT; LLG 16) [see text]

April 10, 2000. *James turns 2.*

May 2000. *James's nightmares begin in earnest.*

2000, early May. **B3** JL begins having nightmares as often as five nights a week. AL consults with JL's pediatrician, who tells her that they are normal night terrors. (MT; LLG 3-4, 10; T-RTL 69)

2000, May 27. BL and JL return to Cavanaugh Flight Museum; BL purchases replacement Blue Angels video for JL. (MT; LLG 22)

2000, May-June. **B4** JL begins bashing planes into coffee table, breaking off their propellers. (LLG 33; T-RTL 67)

2000, May-June. **B5** JL begins ritual when getting into car seat of putting on imaginary headphones, facemask, and harness (seatbelt), as if preparing to fly a plane. (L)

2000, July 1. JL begins talking about Corsairs. (MT)

2000, Aug. 1. **B6** JL demonstrates little man trying to kick his way out of plane in his waking state. (LLG 54) [See text]

2000, Aug 11. **S3** JL identifies little man as "me", says **S4** his plane crashed on fire **S5** because it got shot by the Japanese. (MT; LLG 55-56) [see text]

2000, Aug. 12. AL's sister Jenny witnesses nightmares for first time. (MT; LLG 60-61)

2000, Aug. 12. Asked how he knew it was the Japanese who shot down his plane, JL says **S6** he knew it was the Japanese by "the big red sun." (MT; LLG 59)

2000, c. Aug. 14. First speculation about reincarnation from Bobbi. (LLG 62)

2000, Aug. 27. JL again talks about little man, identified as "me," says **S7** his name was James; that **S8** he flew Corsair **S9** off boat **S10** named *Natoma*. (MT; LLG 68-69) [See text]

*Bruce's search begins.*

2000, Aug. 27. BL searches for *Natoma* on internet, finds *Natoma Bay*. (MT; LLG 69-70) [See text, note 13]

2000, Oct. 5. JL insists little man's name was James, like his; asked if he remembers anyone else in the dream, says **S11** Jack Larsen, another pilot. (LLG 78-79) [see text]

2000, Oct. 16. BL searches for Jack Larsen or Larson on American Battle Monuments Commission web site. (MT; LLG 87) [see text, n14]

2000, c. Nov. 1. Bobbi sends AL copy of CB's *Children's Past Lives*. (MT)

TABLE 1 *continued*

- 2000, Nov. 25. JL points to photo of Iwo Jima in book, says **S12** “That’s where my airplane got shot down.” (MT; LLG 91; T-RTL 73) [see text]
- 2000, Dec. 8. BL speaks with Leo Pyatt, the first *Natoma Bay* veteran he has been able to contact. (MT; LLG 97-98)
- 2000, Dec. 25. Bobbi gives James a retro-looking pedal airplane for Christmas. He is enamored of it and later is filmed riding in it.
- 2001, Jan. 6. BL makes a second search for Larson or Larsen, this time on [www.escortcarriers.org](http://www.escortcarriers.org). [n16]
- 2001, Jan. 7. BL finds and downloads list of people killed on aircraft carriers in World War II. James M. Huston, Jr., is included, along with the designation CVE-62, the *Natoma Bay*. [n17]
- February 18, 2001. First contact with Carol Bowman.*
- 2001, Feb. 18. AL emails CB. Following her advice to encourage James to talk about his memories, nightmares reduce from 3-4 times per week to 1 time every week or every other week, although interest in planes continues. (MT; LLG xi, 101-3; date per CB 1/31/2022) [see text]
- April 10, 2001. James turns 3.*
- 2001, Apr. 10. JL receives first GI Joe doll as birthday gift, names it “Billie.” (MT; LLG 104)
- 2001, late spring or early summer. **B7** JL begins drawing aircraft battle scenes, signs some James 3. Asked why, he says **S13** “I am the third James.” (MT; LLG 105-6; T-RTL 73) [see text, n19]
- 2001, July 12–21. The Ls go on 10-day vacation to Hawaii, take 4-hour tour of Pearl Harbor. (BL 2/16/2021).
- 2001, summer. **S14** JL identifies Japanese planes as “Zekes” and “Bettys”, says the “boy planes” were fighters and “girl planes” were bombers. (LLG 105)
- 2001, c. Sep. 1. JL says “before I was born, **S15** I was a pilot and **S16** my airplane got shot in the engine and **S17** crashed in the water and **S18** that’s how I died.” (MT; T-RTL 74) [see text]
- 2001, c. Sep. 1. **B8** While playing with an airplane, JL stands up and salutes saying, “I salute you and I’ll never forget.” (MT; LLG 105)
- 2001, Oct. 30. JL goes to see Blue Angels perform at Sertoma Airshow in Lafayette and **B9** conducts what the Leiningers are later told looks like a preflight check on a plane. [see text]
- 2001, Dec. 25. JL given second GI Joe doll for Christmas, names it “Leon.” (MT; LLG 156)
- 2001–2002. **B10** JL plays with GI Joe dolls daily, bathes with them, sleeps with them. (LLG 156)
- 2002, Mar. 1. CB calls regarding interest in JL story by 20/20. (MT; LLG 106-7)
- 2002, Mar. 2. **B11** James has nightmare on anniversary of JH’s death, although this is not realized at the time. (LLG 209)
- April 10, 2002. James turns 4*
- 2002, before Apr. 15. **B12** At local air show, JL mounts cockpit of Piper Cub, grabs headgear and puts it on “with chilling familiarity.” (LLG 111)
- 2002, Apr. 15. **B13** James makes cockpit in the closet of Bruce’s home office from old car seat and other articles, plays at plane crashing. (MT; LLG 110; L)
- 2002, Apr. 30. Bruce receives letter from Leo Pyatt regarding *Natoma Bay* reunion in California in Sept. 2002. (MT; L)
- Summer 2002. Strange Mysteries pilot preparation and taping.*
- 2002, early May. JL remarks to Shalini Sharma: **S19** Corsairs “get flat tires all the time.” **S20** “They always want to turn left on take-off.” (MT; LLG 109; L) [see text]
- 2002, June 29. JL taped at Lone Star Flight Museum in Galveston for *Strange Mysteries* pilot. (LLG 113-14) [see text]
- 2002, July 2. CB and Shari Belafonte at Ls’ house, Ls interviewed for *Strange Mysteries* pilot. JL says on camera **S21** that Corsairs got flat tires when they landed. (MT; LLG 114-16; T-RTL 64; L) [see text]
- 2002, early July. Following *Strange Mysteries* taping, BL corresponds with ABC producer regarding Jack Larson. [T-E 200]
- 2002, July?. BL overhears JL, who likes **B14** to pretend he was a singer, performing and addressing an imaginary audience about Pearl Harbor. He says, **S22** “I was a Navy pilot and the Japanese shot me down.” (BL email to CB, July 29, 2002) [see text]
- 2002, Sep. 2. Ls visit Dallas. **B15** JL and cousin play war and “shoot Japs” at community swimming pool. AL tells JL that Americans won the war and he “goes nuts.” (MT)
- September 8-10, 2002. Bruce attends Natoma Bay reunion in San Diego.*

TABLE 1 *continued*

- 2002, c. Sep. 9. At reunion, BL obtains documents showing a James M. Huston, Jr., died on Chichi Jima mission. (LLG 132-34) [see text]
- 2002, Sep. 14. BL posts inquiry for witnesses to Chichi Jima mission. (MT; LLG 139-40)
- 2002, Sep. 21-22. BL meets with Jack Larsen in Farmington, Arkansas. (MT; LLG 141-45; L) [see text]
- 2002, c. Sep. 25. BL receives war diary of JH's VC-81 squadron, confirming JH as the likely referent of JL's memories. (MT; LLG 146-47) [see text]
- 2002, Oct. 11. S23 JL tells parents he found them at "big pink hotel" in Hawaii. (MT; LLG 153-54) [see text]
- 2002, Dec. 5. BL receives 9 rolls of microfilmed records from *Natoma Bay* Association historian John DeWitt. (MT; LLG 154-55; L) [see text]
2003. Corsair acquired by Cavanaugh Flight Museum, replacing the one which crashed at airshow in 1999. (T 69)
- 2003, Feb. 17. AL locates AHB after lengthy search, calls her on the phone. (MT; LLG 198) [see text]
- 2003, Feb. 24. Ls receive package of photos from AHB. Included are photos of JH in front of Corsair. (MT; LLG 199) [see text]
- 2003, Mar. 2. B16 JL has first nightmare in a long time, as in 2002, on the anniversary of Huston's downing. (MT; LLG 209)
- 2003, June 3. BL is contacted by John Durham, responding to September 14, 2002, post re Chichi Jima mission. Durham witnessed downing of JH's plane. (LLG 213-14) [see text]
- 2003, mid-June. BL visits and interviews John Richardson, second witness to JH's downing, who saw the plane burst into flames after being hit in the engine. (LLG 216-17) [see text]
- 2003, Sep. 12-15. BL attends *Sargent Bay* reunion in San Diego, meets John Durham, Bob Skelton, and Ralph Clabour, other witnesses to downing of JH's plane. (MT; LLG 220-25) [see text]
- 2003, Sep. 19. Shalini Sharma calls. Now a producer with ABC Primetime, wonders if Ls would tell JL's story again for *Primetime*. (LLG 228-29) [see text]
- 2003, Oct. 12-17. BL and AL come clean with AHB and *Natoma Bay* veterans re JL's memories of JH. (MT; LLG 230-33) [see text]
- 2003, Oct. 20. *Primetime* crew interviews AL and BL, films JL. During taping, package arrives with JH's effects sent to JL by AHB. (MT; LLG 237-38; L) [see text]
- 2003, Oct. 20. JL appears to recognize pewter statue of George Washington and Corsair model from *Natoma Bay* from JH's effects. B17 JL places statue on desk in his room. B18 JL smells model Corsair, says S24 it smells like aircraft carrier. (LLG 238; L) [see text]
- 2003, Dec. 25. JL given third GI Joe doll, names it "Walter," says S25 Billie, Walter, and Leon met him when he got to heaven. S26 He had named them because of their hair colors—the Billie doll had brown hair, the Leon doll was blond, and the Walter doll was a redhead. (LLG 156-57; L) [see text]
- 2003, Dec. or 2004, Jan. B19 BL pieces together map and asks JL where his plane went down. JL points to vicinity of Iwo Jima and Chichi Jima. (T-RTL 73-74)
- c. 2004, Jan. S27 When JL sees BL use sanding disk, picks it up and says he has been looking for one of those because there weren't enough record albums on *Natoma Bay*. (T-RTL 82)
- 2004, Feb. 1. When AL makes meatloaf for dinner for first time in JL's life, he eats a large portion and S28 explains, "We used to get this all the time on *Natoma Bay*." "I haven't had meatloaf since I was on the *Natoma Bay*. They always had good meatloaf on board the ship. I always enjoyed eating it." (MT; DOPS; T-RTL 82)
- 2004, Mar. 2. B20 JL has nightmare on anniversary of JH's death. (MT)
- April 10, 2004. James turns 6.
- April 15, 2004. Primetime Thursday episode with Leininger segment broadcast.
- 2004, April 16. BL receives call from Bob Greenwalt, who test-flew Corsairs with JH. (MT; LLG 240; L) [see text]
- 2004, c. Apr 16-25. JT emails CB then Ls' about investigation. After initial receptivity, Ls decide to postpone meeting JT until they have decided what they want to do with their story. (T-RTL 65)
- 2004, Aug. 1. AL tells JL they will meet JH's sister Anne at JH's squadron reunion. JL says S29 "It's not Anne, it's Annie." Says JH also had sister "Roof." "Roof" was 4 years older than Annie and Annie was 4 years older than JH. (MT; LLG 236; L)

TABLE 1 *continued*

- 2004, Sept. 11. BL, AL, JL and Bobbi attend JH squadron reunion in San Antonio. S30 JL recognizes and names Bob Greenwalt by his voice. (MT; L; LLG 244) [see text]
- 2004, c. Sept 11. JL meets Anne Barron. (LLG 247-48). [see text]
- 2004, c. Sep. 12. S31 During tour of Nimitz Museum, JL notices five-inch cannon and remarks, "Natoma Bay had one of these." Asked where, correctly says "on the fantail." (LLG 249) [see text]
- 2004, Oct. 31. B21 At school, JL adds wings to pumpkin and paints it to resemble an F-16 Thunderbird. (MT; LLG 103; L)
- 2004, Dec.15. When AL enters his room with glass of wine, JL S32 talks about JH's father's alcoholism. (MT; LLG, 236-7; T-RTL 80-81; DOPS) [see text]
- 2005, Jan. 15. BL shows JL photo of Chichi Jima . S33 JL responds, "there were no fighters, only anti-aircraft fire "on this hop." (MT; L)
- 2005, Mar. 2. JL does not have nightmare on anniversary of JH's downing. (MT).
- 2005, Mar. 3. BL makes JL an FM-2 model. JL states S34 there was an antenna missing from the side. (MT; L) [see text]
- 2005, Mar. 7. S35 Looking at the FM-2 model, JL recalls using drop tanks as crude napalm bombs. "The planes would drop them. They would hit the ground and make a big fire." (MT; L; T-RTL 83; DOPS)
- 2005, Apr. 1. Greenwalt calls re History Channel show on Corsairs. JL watches, says S36 Japanese plane is not a Zero but a Tony, which "is smaller and faster than a Zero." (MT; LLG 239-40; DOPS; L)
- 2005, July 9. AL comments on case in CB's Past-Life Forum.
- 2005, Oct. 9. During evening walk with Bruce, Bruce asks James how his day went. James says "every day is like a carrier landing—if you walk away from it you're okay."
- April 10, 2005. James turns 7.
- 2005, July 7. Skeptico blog posted after rerun of *Primetime Thursday* episode with JL segment.
- 2005, late Dec. AHB sends JL painting JH's mother had made of JH. On phone thanking her, S37 JL says, "Can I have the painting Mom made of you?" (LLG 236; DOPS; L)
- 2006, Jan. 16. AHB sends JL the painting her mother made of her, along with dated note. [see text, n35]
- April 10, 2006. James turns 8.
- 2006, Aug. 30. Ls fly to Japan for two weeks to film *Mystery Experience—Unbelievable* for Fuji National Television in Tokyo. (MT; LLG 251-6)
- 2006, Sep. 4. Memorial service in Futami harbor on Chichi Jima for JH. S38 JL tells LL that he recognizes the direction from which JH arrived. [see text]
- 2006, mid-Sep. On way back from Japan, James draws his final, peaceful picture. (LLG 256) [see text, n38]
- April 10, 2007. James turns 9.
2007. Ken Gross begins working on *Soul Survivor* with Ls.
- April 10, 2008. James turns 10.
- April 10, 2009. James turns 11.
- 2009, June. *Soul Survivor* published, rises to Number 11 on *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list for week of June 28.
- 2009, Dec. 22. Ls appear on CNN's *Larry King Live* with Michael Shermer. JL's memories are fading.
2010. JT begins his investigation. (T 66–67)

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People: AHB = Anne Huston Barron. AL = Andrea Leininger. BL = Bruce Leininger. CB = Carol Bowman. JH = James Huston, Jr. JL = James Leininger. JT = Jim Tucker. Ls = Leiningers.

Sources: L = B. Leininger (2021). DOPS = Tabulation of Division of Perceptual Studies (unpublished). LLG = Leininger & Leininger, with Gross (2009). MT = James 3 Master Timeline (unpublished). T-RTL = Tucker (2013). T-E = Tucker (2016).

Feature Type: B = Behavior. S = Statement.

Media appearances began before 2007, but most followed the book's publication in 2009. If we accept the Master Timeline as authoritative, then the discrepancies look more like lapses in memory than attempts to rewrite history. More concerning are the many dating errors in Bruce's BICS contest entry (B. Leininger, 2021). I do not understand why Bruce did not check his memory before submitting the essay. However, I do not see important alterations in the sequence of events, only in some assigned dates, so this is for me evidence of carelessness, nothing nefarious.

My investigation uncovered an important neglected aspect of the story, although it is new only in emphasis. Tucker (2013, p. 67) noted that prior to his first visit to the Cavanaugh Flight Museum, James was in the habit of pointing to planes flying overhead, but James's obsession with aircraft in infancy was more extensive than this. In her February 18, 2001, email to Carol Bowman, Andrea Leininger revealed that one of James's first words was "airplane" and that he was talking about airplane crashes "about 20 times a day." Moreover, the Master Timeline records the following for August 15, 1999: "Bruce, Andrea, Jenny and Greg go to food and wine event at the Fairmont. Bobbi was babysitting. When we got home James was shrieking and crying. First nightmare?" Together, these items suggest that James's awareness of the James Huston story may have been present at a subliminal level well before the first visit to the Cavanaugh Flight Museum.

James spoke not only about Huston's death, but about many aspects of Huston's experience as a pilot, and about his personal life as well. Huston had test-flown Corsairs and knew how they handled on take-off and landing. He had shot down both a Zeke and a Tony, so had familiarity with those planes. Many of James's statements (S2, S12, S19, S20, S24, S25, S28–S38) were made in response to things he saw or heard, suggesting the importance of recognition memory in past-life recall. Sudduth takes many of James's statements to be about matters of general knowledge that he could have gained by ordinary means. Sudduth (this issue, pp. 92, 95–96) seems to think that it is enough to assert that James might have acquired this information from unspecified sources in his environment, when for his thesis to be credible not only must Sudduth show what sources on what occasions, he must explain why that information just so happens to be related to Huston.<sup>40</sup>

James is reported to have made many statements more than once, but I have marked only the first instance of each. When it makes sense to treat a series of statements as a group (e.g., S29 and S31), I have not broken them down into discrete units. Altogether, I have documented 38 statements or statement groups. Of these, I judge two to be incorrect (he was flying a Corsair; he was killed at Iwo Jima) and two (S23, S25) as unverified. I count *Natoma* (S10) as

correct in reference to *Natoma Bay*, although others might wish to code it as partially correct. By my judgment, 34 of 38 statements or statement groups (89.4%) are correct in relation to James Huston, Jr.

Tucker (this issue) reports, "We were able to verify that some 30 of the statements ascribed to James were indeed accurate for Huston" (p. 84), in close agreement with my tally. In another place (Mills & Tucker, 2015, p. 316), he reported a substantially higher total of 58 statements, 42 (72.4%) of which were correct for Huston. At my request, Tucker sent me the DOPS coding tabulation on which he based this number. In a few instances, Tucker learned of details that I had not seen elsewhere and with his permission I incorporated these into Table 1, acknowledging them as from DOPS. Overall, I see no important discrepancies between our counts. The differences are largely attributable to the DOPS practice of breaking down into separate statements longer locutions that I have treated as units and DOPS counting as unverified statements for which Tucker was unable to get independent confirmation through either documents or interviews.

Tucker (2013, 2016; Mill & Tucker, 2015) and I agree that James Huston, Jr., is the proper referent of James's memories. I think we may take September 25, 2002, as the approximate date the case was solved. This was the date that John DeWitt sent the VC-81 squadron war diary to Bruce. Prior to receiving the war diary, Huston's association with the *Natoma Bay* and his death during the Battle for Iwo Jima were known to Bruce, but he had insufficient information to evaluate the match of James's memories with Huston.

James expressed his identification with Huston not only through his memory claims, but through his behaviors. I have documented 21 of James's behaviors seemingly related to James Huston, Jr. Several of James's memories and behaviors have an "early-bird"<sup>41</sup> status, due to having been recorded before the case was solved. I consider these important early-bird items next.

## Early-Bird Statements and Behaviors

Normally in reincarnation case studies, a child's early-bird statements about the previous life consist of items recorded in writing before attempts at their verification begin (e.g., see Stevenson & Samararatne, 1988).<sup>42</sup> Because no list of James's statements existed when Ken Gross started working with the Leiningers in 2007, James's early-bird statements are established through emails, indirectly through internet searches, or mentions in the *Strange Mysteries* pilot, dated from before James Huston, Jr., was identified in the last week of September 2002. This is a retrospective listing, compiled after the case was solved, so James's behaviors corresponding to Huston are evident

and can be included along with his statements.

Tucker has provided two accounts of James's early-bird statements and behaviors. In *Return to Life* (2013, p. 78) he listed 8 early-bird statements and 2 behaviors (James's nightmares and his signing his drawings "James 3"). In his *Explore* paper, which highlighted the *Strange Mysteries* pilot, Tucker (2016, p. 204) also listed 8 statements, but they are in some measure different from those in *Return to Life*. The *Strange Mysteries* pilot does not refer to Jack Larsen or *Natoma Bay*, but it has Andrea relating that James said, "I was a pilot and my airplane got shot in the engine and crashed in the water and that's how I died" and James stating that Corsair tires had a tendency to go flat when the planes landed. Also, although James's nightmares are mentioned in the *Strange Mysteries* pilot, his drawings are not, so Tucker's *Explore* list includes only the nightmares as behavioral memories.<sup>43</sup>

Sudduth (2021c, pp. 998–1002) chose to focus his critique on Tucker's *Explore* paper (2016), but as Tucker (this issue) points out, in the process he added other items, not all derived from sources with early-bird status (e.g., a web post by Andrea Leininger, 2005, in which she gave a discrepant account of what James said about how Huston died: In this place, and here alone, James is said to have remembered drowning in a submerged plane). Sudduth (this issue) justifies his expanded list on the grounds that "it was another way of highlighting the problems in Tucker's uncritical and dubious dependence on the case's alleged early-bird items" (p. 94), but Sudduth's list then is no longer a list of early-bird items and he should have considered the full inventory of James's statements and behaviors documented in *Soul Survivor* and presented in Table 1.<sup>44</sup> Sudduth (2021c, pp. 998, 1001) listed 12 items, the most significant of which he discounted, and because the remainder he considered to be of a general nature ("I was a pilot," "I flew a plan [sic] off a boat," "The Japanese shot my plane down," "My plane crashed and sank in the water") he concluded that the identification of James Huston, Jr., as the referent of James's memories was unjustified and that the case remained unsolved.

In Table 2, I furnish my own list of early-bird items, including some from emails to Carol Bowman not available to Tucker and Sudduth. Despite Sudduth's objections, I have accepted the searches for *Natoma* and Jack Larsen as indicative of James's having mentioned these names, because I cannot understand why else Bruce would have searched for them when he did. Similarly, I have accepted the narrator of the *Strange Mysteries* pilot stating the downing of the plane occurred at Iwo Jima as indicative of James's having said that.

Sudduth (this issue) emphasizes the need to verify early-bird items. He says, "the ABC program only docu-

ments the Leiningers telling of the story in spring of 2002. Documenting *what* they said is not equivalent to documenting the *accuracy* of what they attributed to James" (p. 95, his emphasis). This should go without saying. The value of early-bird items is that they rule out the possibility that witnesses' memories were improved after a case has been solved, but the statements' applicability to the previous person must still be evaluated. Statements may be evaluated in one of two ways, either through witness testimony or through written or other records. Of 30 published early-bird cases, 15 have records (often medical or autopsy reports) related to the previous person and these help to mitigate problems of witnesses' memory about the previous life, in the same way that early-bird records serve to mitigate memory problems regarding what a case subject said (Matlock, 2021). Tucker (2016, p. 204) showed the basis of the verifications of the early-bird statements and behaviors covered in the *Strange Mysteries* pilot. In Table 2, I do the same for my items.

My list includes 12 statements and 3 behaviors, several documented in more than one early-bird source. The statement that Huston was flying a Corsair is incorrect. I count his statement that he died at Iwo Jima as incorrect, but it could be argued that it is partially correct, because although Huston died at Chichi Jima, he was on a mission that was part of the battle for Iwo Jima. All the remaining 10 statements or inferred statements are correct for James Huston, Jr., and James's three behavioral memories fit Huston's experience as well. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that James Leininger was recalling the life and death of James Huston, Jr., from these early-bird items alone.

Had someone documented James's statements about the previous life before Bruce began to verify them, we would still have a substantial list of early-bird items, even if we took the date at which Bruce began his search for *Natoma* (August 27, 2000) as the cut-off date for early-bird testimony. By then, James was reported to have made 10 statements (including the core ones about how Huston died) and demonstrated 6 behaviors (including acting out Huston's kicking the plane's canopy in both his sleep and waking states), all of which, with the exception of flying a Corsair and having died at Iwo Jima, are correct for Huston.

### Sudduth's Timeline Debunked

Sudduth's analysis is heavily dependent on an unsubstantiated chronology. This is what accounts for his conviction that the Leiningers altered their story in order to make it into a convincing tale of reincarnation.

In his journal paper (2021c), supplementary blog (2022), and now in his response to Tucker's reply (this issue), Sudduth privileges a timeline of events that Bruce

**TABLE 2.** James Leininger’s Early-Bird Statements and Behaviors

Statement / Behavior	Early-Bird Source	Source of Match to Huston
<b>Early-Bird Statements</b>		
He had been a (Navy) pilot.	AL to CB; BL to CB; SM	WD; AAR
He had flown off a boat.	AL to CB; SM	WD; AAR
The boat was named <i>Natoma (Bay)</i> .	Inferred from BL’s search for Natoma on Aug. 27, 2000.	WD; AAR
His plane was shot by the Japanese.	BL to CB; SM	WD; AAR
His plane was shot in the engine.	SM	4 eyewitness reports
His plane crashed on fire.	AL to CB; SM	4 eyewitness reports
His plane crashed in the water.	AL to CB; SM	WD; AAR
That’s how he died.	SM	WD; AAR
This happened at Iwo Jima (or during the Battle for Iwo Jima).	Inferred from SM narration.	WD; AAR
There was another pilot with him, Jack Larsen.	Mention of Jack Larsen inferred from BL’s search for Larsen or Larson on several occasions, beginning Oct. 16, 2000.	AAR
He was flying a Corsair.	AL to CB; SM	
Corsairs got flat tires when they landed.	SM	Bob Greenwalt, who had test flown Corsairs with JH. Also confirmed by naval historian contacted by SM producers.
<b>Early-Bird Behaviors</b>		
Recurrent nightmares of kicking canopy of plane, unable to open it.	AL to CB; SM	Unverified, but plausible for JH.
Drawings of battle scenes, mostly naval, several signed “James 3”, one showing flak in air surrounding plane.	Although not mentioned in any dated source, it is clear that JL drew these beginning when he was 3 years old, before the identification of JH.	A great deal of flak was shot at planes on the Chichi Jima mission, per AAR. A flak hit is believed to have brought down JH’s plane. JH was Jr., making JL James 3.
JL liked to pretend he is a singer and stands on head of parents’ bed and sings.	BL to CB	AHB told Ls that JH had a good singing voice, sang on radio in choir. (LLG 197)

\*The AAR may be consulted in the Psi Open Data repository (see Note 8) under the name “Table 2 AAR report of Chichi Jima mission.”

*People:* AHB = Anne Huston Barron. AL = Andrea Leininger. BL = Bruce Leininger. CB = Carol Bowman. JH = James Huston, Jr. JL = James Leininger.

*Early-bird sources:* AL to CB = email from AL to CB, Feb. 18, 2001. BL to CB = email from BL to CB, July 29, 2002. SM = *Strange Mysteries* pilot, May 2, 2002.

*Verification sources:* AAR = Natoma Bay Chichi Jima mission aircraft action report. \* LLG = Leininger & Leininger, with Gross (2009). WD = VC-81 squadron war diary.



**TABLE 3.** Comparison of Dates for Major Events in Different Chronologies

Event	2003 Chronology (prepared for DeWitt)	2009 Chronology ( <i>Soul Survivor</i> )	Table 1 Chronology (present article)
JL identified himself as the little man in the plane and said he was flying a Corsair that had taken off from a boat.	Late Sep.–Oct. 2000	Aug. 27, 2000, according to Sudduth, omitting earlier Aug. 11	Aug 11, 2000, repeated on Aug. 27, 2000
He flew off a boat named <i>Natoma</i> .	Late Oct.–Nov. 2000	Aug. 27, 2000	Aug. 27, 2000. That night, BL searched for <i>Natoma</i> and found <i>Natoma Bay</i> —dated search results. [n13]
Jack Larsen flew with him.	Late Oct.–Nov. 2000	Oct. 5, 2000	October 5; on Oct. 16 BL searched for Jack Larsen/Larson on the ABMC site—dated search results. [n14]
Initial correspondence between AL and CB.	July–Aug. 2000	Jan.–Feb. 2001	February 18, 2001—dated email.

*People:* AL = Andrea Leininger. BL = Bruce Leininger. CB = Carol Bowman. JL = James Leininger.

*Organization:* ABMC = American Battle Monuments Commission.

prepared for *Natoma Bay* Association historian John DeWitt in or around September 2003, a copy of which he secured from DeWitt's daughter Lucinda (Sudduth, 2021c, p. 987). That timeline presents a substantially different chronology than *Soul Survivor*, but because it was composed well before the book was written, Sudduth has confidence in it. If the dates of Bruce's searches do not fit the 2003 timeline, Bruce must have performed them for some reason other than James's having said the names, Sudduth reasons. Similarly, because the dates given in the 2003 timeline for the involvement of Carol Bowman suggest something different from what is said in *Soul Survivor*, Sudduth concludes that Bowman's involvement in the case has been recast in the interests of the story the Leiningers wish to tell. Table 3 provides a comparison of entries from the 2003 and 2009 chronologies with that presented in Table 1 of the present article, which for the first time provides a secure date for Andrea's initial email to Carol Bowman.

Sudduth comments on the comparison of the 2003 and 2009 timelines as follows:

The official [2009] chronology places each of these facts at a later date than the 2003 Chronology, as little as about a month and as great as six to nine months. The later the date when James makes the

claims attributed to him, the more opportunity there is for ordinary sources to shape his claims. Not only because there are more opportunities for exposure to sources, but his verbal skills would have been more developed and so also his capacity for internalizing information, and eventually he would have had reading skills. (Sudduth, 2021c, p. 988)

No doubt, but Sudduth has the chronologies reversed—for the first three items, it is the 2003 chronology which is later than the 2009 one. I see no justification for preferring the 2003 chronology, which is not anchored in dated documents. This conclusion is important especially when it comes to appreciating Bowman's role in the case. The date of her initial correspondence with Andrea appears earlier in the 2003 chronology and if one accepts its dates, it precedes the other events. However, the email to Bowman was sent and received on February 18, 2001, well after the other events rather than before them. "Regardless of when (on a calendar date) Bowman got involved, the crucial issue is whether she gave her advice to the Leiningers before or after James began making apparent past-life claims," Sudduth (2021c, p. 989; emphasis his) says. He is right about that, of course, and the dated documents leave no doubt about the matter.

## Clarifying Muddied Waters

Without question, the Leiningers are responsible for much of the confusion regarding this case, thanks to their inconsistent descriptions and dating of events in speaking and writing. They are not alone in contributing to the confusion. Sudduth (2021c, pp. 988–989) draws attention to Bowman’s Foreword to *Soul Survivor* (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009, p. xii), wherein she wrote that when she called the Leiningers in March 2002 on behalf of ABC, Andrea told her that following her recommendations of the previous year, James’s nightmares had all but ceased. Andrea also told Bowman that James had been talking about the type of plane he flew (a Corsair), the name of the aircraft carrier (*Natoma*), and the name of one of his pilot friends (Jack Larsen). James actually had related all these memories before Andrea wrote to Bowman in February 2001, but because Andrea had not included the last two in her email and she and Bowman had not spoken since they were new to Bowman and she gained the impression that James had mentioned them following her recommendation to encourage him to speak about his memories during the day. Because Bowman’s comment contradicts the narrative of *Soul Survivor*, and that contradiction is not explained, it is for Sudduth evidence that the Leiningers have altered the chronology in the interests of promoting a reincarnation interpretation of the case.

Fortunately, this case includes securely dated events at all stages, so it is possible to construct a reliable timeline and then view other chronologies in relation to it. When that is done, the 2003 timeline Sudduth employs is shown to be untenable. The only reason to favor it is to press an alternative reading of the case, but this is an alternative reading without foundation. Even absent the emails to Bowman, there were dated search downloads that suggested problems with the 2003 timeline, but Sudduth (2021c, 2022, this issue) seeks to explain these away so that he can use the 2003 timeline to cast doubt on the Leiningers’ story. He also repeatedly makes demonstrably false claims about the Leiningers’ narrative, even after having been corrected.<sup>45</sup> In Part 2 of this article, to appear in the Winter 2022 issue of this journal, I examine other problematical aspects of Sudduth’s critique, address the epistemological concerns he raises in his reply to Tucker (this issue), and reflect on lessons for reincarnation case studies that may be gleaned from the exchange between Tucker and Sudduth (this issue).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The *Primetime Thursday* segment featuring the Leiningers (ABC News, 2004, 2005) may be viewed on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uk7biSOzr1k>

- <sup>2</sup> Bowman has been much ridiculed for this suggestion, which is the recommended treatment strategy for dealing with posttraumatic nightmares (Spoomaker, 2008) and was urged to good effect also by a Canadian physician in the apparent (unsolved) reincarnation case of Heidi Hornig (Mills, 1994).
- <sup>3</sup> Personal communication from Carol Bowman, February 2022. Andrea Leininger’s contributions to Bowman’s forum from 2004 have been lost. A single post from 2005 (A. Leininger, 2005) survives.
- <sup>4</sup> Sudduth has shown in previous writings (2009, 2013, 2016) that he is strongly skeptical of postmortem survival in any form and believes “living agent psi” is capable of explaining the whole of the evidence put forward for it.
- <sup>5</sup> The changes in the blog are preserved by the Wayback Machine. The original September 20, 2021, version may be viewed here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20211120233751/http://michaelsudduth.com/crash-and-burn-james-leininger-story-debunked/>. On September 25, 2021, Sudduth removed the sentence, “The James Leininger story is a sham” and substituted “fallacious reasoning” for “bogus reasoning.” The September 25, 2011, language holds as of January 19, 2022.
- <sup>6</sup> I use “reincarnation case” in preference to Stevenson’s “case of the reincarnation type,” usually without qualifiers such as “apparent” or “seeming,” out of convenience. More precisely, a “reincarnation case” is a spontaneously occurring set of events that includes one or more common features, among them past-life memories. A case has been investigated, in contrast to an anecdotal account of such occurrences, which has not been investigated. Most reincarnation cases are suggestive of reincarnation but the terminology makes no assumptions about how best to interpret them.
- <sup>7</sup> Sudduth (2021c) cites the Hay House UK edition of *Soul Survivor*, given in his reference list as “Leininger, B., & Leininger, A. (2009). *Soul survivor*. Hay House UK,” rather than the original American edition (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009). By omitting Ken Gross from the authorship, Sudduth leaves the impression that the Leiningers alone are responsible for the book. When I spoke with Ken Gross by telephone in March 2022, he confirmed that he and the Leiningers worked out the Master Timeline in preparation for his writing. Tucker (Mills & Tucker, 2015, p. 317; Tucker, 2013, pp. 78–79; Tucker, 2016, p. 203) refers to notes made by Andrea Leininger which were lost, either before or after the publication of *Soul Survivor*, but Bruce does not recall using notes in constructing the Master Timeline and any

notes of James's statements may not have been dated. The Master Timeline in places includes more exact dates than are given in *Soul Survivor*, but the book seems rather clearly to draw from it. For more on the book's composition, see Gross (2009). The Master Timeline was among the documents provided Jim Tucker in 2010. It is undated, but its last entry is James's birthday in 2007 and I see no reason to doubt that it was created that year. I was sent a PDF that seems to have been produced from a Microsoft Word file.

- <sup>8</sup> The documents are collected under a single URL (<https://open-data.spr.ac.uk/dataset/supporting-documents-clarifying-muddied-waters-part-i-secure-timeline-james-leininger-case>) in the Psi Open Data repository, from which they may be downloaded collectively or individually as PDF files. Bruce will provide the Microsoft Word appendix to his BICS contest entry upon request and will open his extensive document archives to any researcher who wishes to visit him in Lafayette, Louisiana. Those who wish to contact Bruce should write to [bleininger@patriceandassociates.com](mailto:bleininger@patriceandassociates.com). He will supply photocopies of documents at the cost of 75 cents per page, plus shipping.
- <sup>9</sup> This paragraph is informed by personal communications from Bruce Leininger in February 2022 as well as an email from Andrea Leininger to Carol Bowman on February 18, 2001. The following narrative follows the account given in *Soul Survivor* (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009), with occasional supplementary information from other sources.
- <sup>10</sup> The nightmare precursor is taken from the Master Timeline.
- <sup>11</sup> In *Soul Survivor* (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009, p. 21), this video is identified as "It's a Kind of Magic," but as Sudduth (2021c, p. 947) points out, this is incorrect. The correct title is *Blue Angels: Around the World at the Speed of Sound* (it includes the track of a song called "It's a Kind of Magic"). The original full-length video was posted on YouTube in 2020 (Atkeison, 2020).
- <sup>12</sup> This last comes from a personal communication from Bruce Leininger, February 2022. He purchased a replacement video three months later when they returned to the museum with James's cousin on May 27, 2000. A photo taken at the museum, stamped with that date, appears in *Soul Survivor*.
- <sup>13</sup> Bruce's search for *Natoma*, dated August 27, 2000, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as "13 American Naval Fighting Ships."
- <sup>14</sup> Bruce's first search for Larsen or Larson, dated October 16, 2000, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as "14 Original search results for Jack Larsen."
- <sup>15</sup> In *Soul Survivor* (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009, p. 91), this quotation is given as "when my plane was shot down." (However, in the Master Timeline and other places, it appears as "where my airplane got shot down.") To Sudduth (2021c, p. 994) this suggests a deliberate attempt by the Leiningers to make James's statements appear more consistent with Huston's experience than they were. Tucker (this issue) discusses how the change may have come about. I think it is best to assume that James said some version of "where my plane was shot down" and that we should count this statement as incorrect or, at best, partially correct, because Huston did not die at Iwo Jima, but rather at Chichi Jima during a mission in support of the battle for Iwo Jima.
- <sup>16</sup> Bruce's second search for Larsen or Larson, dated January 6, 2001, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as "16 Second Larson search."
- <sup>17</sup> Bruce's search for list of fatalities associated with aircraft carriers, dated January 7, 2001, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as "17 Killed in action."
- <sup>18</sup> Bowman sent me a copy of the first page of this email so I could verify the date and contents, but prefers not have it made publicly available for ethical reasons having to do with client privilege.
- <sup>19</sup> James's drawing of a naval scene with flak surrounding a plane, signed James 3, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as "19 James 3 drawing."
- <sup>20</sup> For an account of this effort, see Tucker (2016, p. 200). The *Strange Mysteries* pilot provides one of the earliest documentations of James' memories and is the piece on which Tucker (2016) concentrates his attention.
- <sup>21</sup> Personal communication from Bruce Leininger, February 2022.
- <sup>22</sup> Bowman sent me the header and excerpt from this email so that I could verify the date and contents but prefers that it not be made publicly available.
- <sup>23</sup> See *Soul Survivor* (pp. 153–154). The Leiningers were in a different section of Honolulu with James and did not come near the Royal Hawaiian on that occasion (Bruce Leininger, personal communication, February 2022). Although Huston's remains were never recovered, there is a tablet in his name at the American Battle Monuments

Commission's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, viewable here: <https://www.abmc.gov/precedent-search/huston%3DJames-1>.

- <sup>24</sup> Sudduth (2021c, pp. 979–980, 984; this issue, p. 98) has repeatedly asserted that this information was “redacted” from *Soul Survivor* because it was inconvenient to the Leiningers. However, a lengthy passage from the VC-81 war diary giving many of the same details is quoted in the book (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009, pp. 146–147). Sudduth hammers the Leiningers for ignoring the aircraft action report, but the VC-81 war diary has essentially the same information. Bruce saw the war diary first, so the book quotes from that.
- <sup>25</sup> An appendix page from the VC-81 war diary sent to Bruce by John DeWitt on September 25, 2002, showing that Huston shot down a Zeke (and a Tony), appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “25 War Diary Zeke Shootdown.”
- <sup>26</sup> A list of Purple Heart citations including Huston's appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “26 Purple Heart.”
- <sup>27</sup> A photograph of James Huston in front of a Corsair, c. 1944, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “27 Huston with Corsair.”
- <sup>28</sup> The detail about the model being provided for recognition training comes from Bruce Leininger, personal communication, February 2022.
- <sup>29</sup> Anne Barron's first letter to the Leiningers, dated October 15, 2003, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “29 Anne Barron letter accompanying artefacts.”
- <sup>30</sup> ABC News (2004). See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uk7biSOzr1k>. A view of James's room in the Leininger house at 2:05–2:15 shows model planes suspended from the ceiling in the manner some would have been in the ready room on *Natoma Bay*.
- <sup>31</sup> A page showing the death dates of Leon Conner and Walter Devlin appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “31 Conner and Devlin deaths.”
- <sup>32</sup> A letter describing Billie Peeler's accidental death on November 17, 1944, dated December 4, 1945, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “32 Billie Peeler death letter.”
- <sup>33</sup> Photographs of Billie Peeler and Leon Conner appear in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “33 Photos of Peeler and Conner.” No photo of Walter Devlin is available, but he was called “Red” because of his red hair (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009, pp. 186–188).
- <sup>34</sup> Anne Barron's second letter, dated January 16, 2006, appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “34 Anne Barron letter accompanying painting.”
- <sup>35</sup> An after action report showing Huston shot down a Tony appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “35 Huston Tony shootdown.”
- <sup>36</sup> Sudduth (2021c, p. 976) draws attention to James's saying this, but his date is off. Sudduth identifies the program as an A&E documentary on Corsairs, *Battle Stations: Corsair Pacific Warrior*, which premiered December 26, 2002. According to Sudduth, the original quotation was, “Each day in life is like a carrier landing. If you can walk away from it, you're in good shape.” In his BICS essay (B. Leininger, 2021), Bruce credits James with having made his remark on October 7, 2003, which is too early, if James did not watch the taped show until around the time the *Primetime Thursday* segment aired (Leininger & Leininger, with Gross, 2009, p. 239). This reference apparently is to the segment in 2005, because according to the Master Timeline, Greenwalt called to alert the Leiningers to the documentary on April 1, 2005, and James used the line on an evening walk with Bruce on October 9, 2005, two years later than Bruce remembered. Since Bruce's dates in his BICS essay are frequently wrong and the Master Timeline is reliable, I think we may assume that in writing his BICS essay 16 years after the fact, Bruce misremembered the year. Bruce now recognizes that this is what happened (personal communication, March 2022).
- <sup>37</sup> A diagram from the after action report of the Chichi Jima mission showing the flight paths of VC-81 squadron planes appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “37 Diagram of strike on Chichi Jima.”
- <sup>38</sup> James's last drawing appears in the Psi Open Source repository (see note 8) as “38 James's final drawing.” Bruce Leininger (personal communication, February 2022) told me that this was the last drawing James made.
- <sup>39</sup> DOPS is a division of the Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia School of Medicine and is Tucker's professional affiliation.
- <sup>40</sup> Sudduth (2021c, this issue) suggests that James could have learned these things from the videos he watched and from the time he spent in the Cavanaugh Flight Museum gift shop, but James did not see the Corsair documentary until 2005. Neither the Blue Angels docu-

mentary nor the museum gift shop as reconstructed by Sudduth (2021c) provide any information about Huston's downing or the specific knowledge of World War II aviation James related, as Tucker (this issue) notes. Nor could they have served as models for James's behavior related to Huston. It seems more likely that repeated exposure, especially to the Blue Angels video, acted to remind James of Huston and helped pull memories about Huston closer to the surface of his awareness—indisputably an important factor in the case, but rather different from the one Sudduth imagines.

<sup>41</sup> "Early-bird testimony" is a term introduced by Stephen Braude (2003) as a shorthand reference to a reincarnation case subject's statements recorded (usually in writing) before verification attempts began. The term was adopted by Sudduth (2021a, 2021c, this issue) and I have elected to use it here. Early-bird cases are highly valued, but they are rare. DOPS files included only 33 as of 2005 (Keil & Tucker, 2005) and reports of only 30 have been published (Matlock, 2021).

<sup>42</sup> Sudduth (this issue, p. 94) appears to be confused on this point. He refers to Tucker (this issue, p. 84), where Tucker says, "In some of the cases, families or investigators have documented at least some of the child's claims before the identification was made," referring to a study by Schouten and Stevenson (1998). Sudduth wants to draw a distinction between this and what he calls "a third classification of cases" with "documentation made before anyone has even attempted to verify the claims of the subject" (this issue, p. 94, emphasis in original), but this "third classification" is the way that Schouten and Stevenson defined it and the way the term is routinely employed by Stevenson and his colleagues: early-bird cases are "cases with written records made before verification" (Schouten & Stevenson, 1998, p. 504). Generally this means before there is even a tentative identification of the deceased referent of a case subject's memories, but in two published cases Stevenson allowed cases in which there was a tentative identification but not yet attempts to verify the memory claims. The James Leininger case is unique in having a retrospective establishment of early-bird items (Matlock, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Tucker (2016) discusses *Natoma Bay* and Jack Larsen as additional early-bird items, but does not list them in his table (p. 204), which includes only what was presented in the *Strange Mysteries* pilot.

<sup>44</sup> Sudduth (this issue) appears to realize this, because he says: "If the Leiningers are reliable informants, then the early-bird items Tucker lists in his 2013 and 2016 tables

are not the only claims we're justified in attributing to James before the previous personality was identified. What's relevant is not whether these other claims have early-bird status, but whether they are part of the Leiningers' narrative and how they bear on the evidential status of the case." However, Sudduth in his own analysis fails to take into account the majority of James's memory claims made before the case was solved.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, Tucker (this issue, pp. 84, 88) points out that James nowhere is reported to have said that he died in a sinking plane except in Andrea's 2005 web post (A. Leininger, 2005), yet Sudduth continues to insist that the Leiningers "ignore (as does Tucker in his response) the ways in which the aircraft action report makes any struggle to escape a sinking plane improbable" (this issue, p. 98). What James is reported to have said is that his plane hit the water "and that's how I died" (S18). He was overheard to say this around September 1, 2001, and Andrea repeated it in the *Strange Mysteries* pilot in July 2002, making it a documented early-bird statement. The idea that Huston drowned in a sinking plane is Andrea's inference, voiced 3-4 years later. This interpretation of what James said is not included in *Soul Survivor*, published in 2009, by which time the Leiningers had realized that the inference was mistaken.

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