

LIFE SAVERS

MILUS HONORS HISTORICAL TIES TO
WARTIME MILITARY HEROISM

BY KEITH W.
STRANDBERG



The image of the modern fighter pilot is one of heroism and invincibility as he soars high above the action on the ground and evades enemy fire. But the reality is that pilots in combat over

enemy territory are quite vulnerable. And the greatest danger—as well as the most feared outcome—for a combat pilot, other than being blown out of the sky, is the prospect of being downed and captured behind enemy lines.

Since pilots first took to the skies in combat roles, they have been equipped for such contingencies. In the 1930s, for example, pilots flying over China wore a “blood chit” inside their flying jackets. This was basically a note written in Chinese, explaining who they were and that they were fighting for the Chinese, not against them.

During World War II, US Navy pilots were given something called Life Barter kits (LB kits for short). Each kit was designed to enable a fighter pilot to manage behind enemy lines by providing him with small valuables with which he could barter for safe transfer, food, information—or even his very life.



Poster for Milus-produced documentary on historical LB kits; an original World War II-era kit containing a Milus wristwatch and gold jewelry



Swiss watch company Milus recently discovered that its own 1940s vintage watches had been part of these LB kits during World War II. The discovery happened quite unexpectedly. “I got a call in 2010 from a collector of military artifacts who asked me if I was aware that there was a Milus watch inside some Life Barter kits he had recently acquired,” remembers Milus USA’s president and CEO Doron Basha. “I had never heard

this term, but I began to learn about the kits, and then quickly purchased the two kits in his possession and requested his help in finding others.”

Basha’s efforts to recapture a previously unknown part of his brand’s history were successful. Conducting an exhaustive worldwide search, the collector located one more kit, for a total of three. Remarkably, each of the old Milus watches was still in work-

“THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT FOR THE BRAND SINCE ITS INCEPTION.”

—DORON BASHA

Hellcat crash



G.H.W. Bush's Navy photo

ing condition—after 70 years. “We are not sure how many Milus watches were used by the US Navy, since the company archives were destroyed in a fire in the 1950s,” Basha continues. “What we could piece together from conversations with various members of the Junod family, which owned the company until 2002, is that the Navy most likely purchased 50 or so Milus Snow Star watches directly from one of the brand’s authorized dealers in the US. The in-

tended use by the Navy was confidential and was never disclosed at the time.”

PRIDE OF PLACE

Despite the fact that the use of the Milus Snow Star remained a well-kept secret until very recently, Milus is especially proud that its products were chosen for inclusion in the LB kits, because the choice represents a genuine expression of confidence. The old LB kits were

assembled to have high inherent value, and any watch chosen for the kits had to be of recognizable quality in order to be effective as a bartering tool. So, the choice is a confirmation of high regard for Milus watches in that era.

The Milus Snow Star watches used in the kits were stainless steel. They were paired with other precious metal items such as gold coins and jewelry. Because the items they contained were so valuable, the kits were carefully secured by the Navy and signed out for every mission. When a pilot came back safely from his sortie, he returned the kit, and it was kept under lock and key until the next time it was needed.

Former US president George H. W. Bush served as a naval aviator during World War II. When he encountered enemy fire during a 1944 mission in the Pacific, he was shot down and later rescued by an American submarine. In Bush’s honor, Milus has donated an original LB kit to his presidential library on the Texas A&M University campus, where it will be put on display.

HISTORICALLY ACCURATE

The most significant commemorative project for Milus, however, has been the



Group photo, US Navy pilots

development of the newly launched Snow Star Heritage Collection. The hero of the collection is a limited edition, 40-mm, 18-karat red gold watch with a genuine, refurbished and updated 1940s manual-winding ETA movement inside. The classically styled exterior features a sun-brushed silver dial with faceted red gold hour markers and a sapphire crystal with magnifying lens above the date display at 3. The watch's black alligator strap is interchangeable with a black NATO nylon strap.

The attractive watch is part of a package that recreates a historical LB kit. The Snow Star Heritage Kit includes a red gold compass, propeller-themed cuff links and two steel dog tags, one marked with the limited edition details and another that can be customized according to the customer's request. Milus will produce just 99 sets that

include the red gold Snow Star Heritage watch. A stainless steel version of the watch will be used to produce an additional 1,940 sets.

Because the Snow Star Heritage project highlights history in a way no other Milus model has, this is an extraordinarily special release for the brand. In fact, Milus is producing a documentary about its LB kit journey of discovery, which is expected to be ready for release later this year.

"This is the most important development for the brand since its inception," says Basha. "It is one that enhances Milus' relevance and its historical DNA." With the release of the Snow Star Heritage

Collection, Basha hopes to raise Milus' profile among historical Swiss brands. "The establishment of the brand's position through the prism of historical context is priceless. It is something that no marketing budget, regardless of how large, can buy," he says. "Our role in the major conflicts of the 20th century was one that helped save the lives of American Navy airmen, which is truly an honorable endeavor and a remarkable story."

Basha concludes with a forecast for Milus' future: "With the introduction of the Snow Star Heritage watch and the strength of our existing TriRetrograde collections such as the Tirion for men, the Merea for women and other new models, I can happily say that our future looks and feels very bright."

milus.com

Milus Tirion Répétition
Minutes TriRetrograde



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Milus has been in business since 1919, founded in Bienne, Switzerland, by Paul William Junod. From the beginning, finding artistic ways to track the time has been the company's goal, and the numerous awards the maker has garnered throughout the years are a testament to its success, particularly design prizes and awards for its flamboyant 1970s jewelry watches. Over the decades, three generations of the Junod family continued the legacy of the founder. And then, in 2003,

**"EVERY OBJECT
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—PAUL WILLIAM JUNOD

the company became Milus International SA. In the past 10 years, the company has introduced several distinctive mechanical wonders featuring its TriRetrograde concept, which indicates the seconds via three 20-second retrograde sectors, producing a mesmerizing spectacle on the dial. The Tirion Répétition Minutes TriRetrograde, introduced in 2010, is the brand's standout complicated piece.

The limited edition Milus
Snow Star Heritage Kit,
inspired by the Navy's LB kits

