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Jamie Swiggart: Flying, Sailing, Service to His Country and His Community

Author : David Gurliacci

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Former Darien resident Jamie Swiggart, whose life was cut short in a plane crash on Thursday, Dec. 17, loved to fly, loved to sail and loved to serve others, his mother, Carolyn, recalled on Wednesday.

"He loved people," she said in an email. "Look at what he did during his life: Boy Scouts, Post 53, Navy — it was all about service to his country and to his community."

James H. Swiggart, 31, was flying a two-seater in Florida, his 18-year-old cousin, Maitland Harvey, in the passenger seat, when the plane went down in low-visibility conditions, according to news reports.

The two died instantly in the crash, according to Madison County Sheriff Benjamin Stewart, said a report on [the website of WCTV](#), a Florida television station.

See also:

- [Former Darien High Student, Post 53 Member, Killed in Florida Plane Crash](#)
 - [Obituary: James H. Swiggart, U.S. Navy Pilot, 31, Former Darien Resident](#)
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A U.S. Navy flight instructor, Swiggart was most recently at the Naval Air Station in Meridien, Miss., part of a Navy career that started with a scholarship to a pre-college school and continued through graduation at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis and a nine-month assignment on the U.S.S. Nimitz aircraft carrier.

An obituary and funeral information have not yet been released by Swiggart's family. His mother, Carolyn Swiggart, is a lawyer with offices in Greenwich and a former member of the Darien Representative Town Meeting.

Grew up in Darien

[The information for this article came from Swiggart's family and his LinkedIn and Facebook pages.]

In high school, Jamie Swiggart was a member of the Indian Harbor Yacht Club junior sailing program in Greenwich and competed in local regattas.

A member of Boy Scout Troop 53 in Darien, he became an Eagle Scout, a program in which a boy scout has to demonstrate leadership in serving his community. In 1999, Swiggart joined the Darien EMS-Post 53 ambulance service. "This was a natural step for him to continue serving the community," his mother said.

There he served as an emergency medical technician, ambulance driver and crew chief. As an ambulance driver, he received safety training with other Post 53 teenagers at the Skip Barber Driving School in Lyme Rock. (According to his LinkedIn account, Swiggart remained associated with Post 53 for about 10 years, until August 2010.)

Swiggart lettered in pole vaulting and track at Darien High School. His love of sailing and fascination with flying started in Darien. He wanted to be a Navy flyer after his mother brought home a video of the movie "Top Gun," she said.

"He learned to sail Optimist at Tokeneke [Club], and then learned to race at Indian Harbor Yacht Club," she wrote. He sailed the junior regattas during high school summers, then for the Naval Academy's sailing team.

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"They sailed a lot of places and many regattas. For Navy, he did the Newport-Bermuda race, New York Yacht Club Race weeks, the Marblehead-Halifax Race, Key West race weeks and a lot of others."

Swiggart continually chose sports and activities where a key feature was the joy of going from one place to another — track, sailing, ambulance driving, flying. When his Naval career took him to southern California, he took up surfing.

With the U.S. Navy

Carolyn Swiggart's uncle, Richard Rudisill, a retired Navy commander who graduated with the Naval Academy Class of 1944 (and who passed away in 2006), saw combat in the Pacific during World War II. He was a mentor who influenced Jamie in applying to the academy, she said.

After graduating from Darien High School in 2002, Swiggart attended the Hill School in Pottstown, Pa. for a year on a United States Naval Academy Foundation scholarship. There he again lettered in pole vaulting. In 2003, he was appointed to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis.

He majored in political science and French, and was commissioned an ensign in the Navy upon graduation in 2007.

He'd won an award for French studies at college and spent three months in the summer after graduation as an intern in the office of the naval attache in the U.S. Embassy in Paris. He returned there in June and July 2009.

Flying and teaching flying

In January 2010, he was designated a "naval aviator" (a pilot), and qualified on the E2-C "Hawkeye," the largest aircraft that can land on a U.S. Navy carrier.

He loved flying, just as he imagined he would when he saw the movie "Top Gun," his mother said. "He just loved it. He loved the freedom. He loved the beauty of the skies and clouds. He loved the acrobatics of flying."

He worked in 2011 and 2012 as a public affairs officer, based at the Naval Air Station in Point Mugu, Calif., writing articles for navy publications, handling social media and getting information to news reporters.

From 2012 to 2014, as an aircraft division officer based mostly at Point Mugu, he supervised Navy squadron maintenance shops in addition to flying.

For almost nine months in 2013, he was deployed aboard USS Nimitz and was named one of the top

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five pilots during that deployment, in which the ship went along the West Coast, through the Pacific to Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. He had over 160 arrested landings on 5 different aircraft carriers.

In March 2014, he became an advanced jet pilot instructor at Meridian Naval Air Station in Meridian, Miss., the job he had when he died. He had over 1,600 hours of civilian and military flight experience, according to his LinkedIn profile.

In July 2014, [a Washington Post article](#) about the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 in eastern Ukraine quoted him extensively, and a number of other publications then quoted that article.

"He loved teaching flying," his mother wrote. "Nothing made him happier than giving others the skills they sought as new pilots."