

# Flashback

## Stapp's "Eyes-Out" Sled Rides

US AF photo



Once Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier in 1947, a question arose: Could a pilot eject at supersonic speed and live? Somebody had to find out, and it was USAF Lt. Col. John Paul Stapp (shown here), a medical officer. In 1947, he began riding rocket-propelled sleds to higher and higher speeds. On Dec. 10, 1954, Stapp rode a rocket sled at Holloman AFB, N.M., to 632 mph and decelerated to zero in 1.4 seconds, as would happen in a true ejection. Stapp survived a force of 46.2Gs. The physical toll was sometimes high. During 29 high-speed sled rides, Stapp suffered retinal hemorrhages, cracked ribs, and broken wrists. What was a sudden stop like? "It felt as though my eyes were being pulled out of my head," said Stapp, who became famous as "the fastest man on Earth."