



PRESS RELEASE
For 15 September 2024

Forty years since Kittinger became the first to fly a balloon solo across the Atlantic

Lausanne, Switzerland, 20 August 2024 – **Forty years ago, on 15 September 1984, Joseph Kittinger landed in Italy after crossing the Atlantic alone in an 11-storey-high helium balloon. Not only did he survive the perilous endeavour and fulfil a personal dream, but he also gained new FAI distance records.**

“I have been dreaming about this for 30 years,” stated retired US Air Force test pilot Colonel Joseph Kittinger before embarking on his solo adventure, *“It’s a great challenge because it’s something that’s never been accomplished before.”*

Whilst Abruzzo, Anderson and Newman became first to make the transatlantic crossing in a balloon - the Double Eagle II - in 1978, **Kittinger was the first to attempt it solo.**

“I like firsts” claimed Kittinger, who travelled from Caribou, Maine, USA to Montenotte in Northern Italy over three-and-a-half days to make FAI distance records in four categories with 5703.03km. Three of these records have **remained unbeaten to this day**, except the Category AA-13 = 12,000m³ - 16,000m³ gas record which stood for 31 years until 2015 (when beaten by Troy Bradley and Leonid Tyukhtyaev) .

The ‘Balloon of Peace’ contained **4200m³ of helium** and was built by famous balloonist Ed Yost (who also constructed the Double Eagle II). With its fibre glass gondola and neoprene covering, it was designed to help Kittinger survive, should he ditch in the ocean.

After crossing the western coast of France, Kittinger ran out of ballast and landed in a forest near Savona, Italy. The impact broke his ankle. He had endured **temperatures of -25°C**, and wore a special thermal suit, hat and boots, and an oxygen mask throughout. With his food and fresh water frozen, he used his body heat to thaw it out. Remaining almost constantly alert, he took only 10-minute naps during the 86-hour flight.

About Joseph Kittinger

- Born 27 July 1928 – died 9 December 2022
- Test Pilot for US Air Force, retired as Colonel
- Military decoration after Vietnam War, spent 11 months as a prisoner-of-war
- Highest altitude parachute jump in 1960 with Excelsior Project: 31,300m (not a record)
- Advisor and Capsule Communicator to Felix Baumgartner for Red Bull Stratos world record jump in 2012
- Awarded two FAI Montgolfier diplomas for ballooning achievements

Editor’s note

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- [Kittinger’s FAI Montgolfier diplomas](#)
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About FAI

FAI, the World Air Sports Federation, is the world governing body for air sports and for certifying world aviation and space records. The FAI was founded in 1905 and is a non-governmental and non-profit-making organisation recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

FAI activities include Aerobatics, Aeromodelling, Airships, Amateur-Built and Experimental Aircraft, Balloons, Drones, Gliding, Hang Gliding, Helicopters, Manpowered Flying, Microlights, Parachuting, Paragliding, Paramotors, Power Flying and all other Aeronautic activities and Space records.

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