

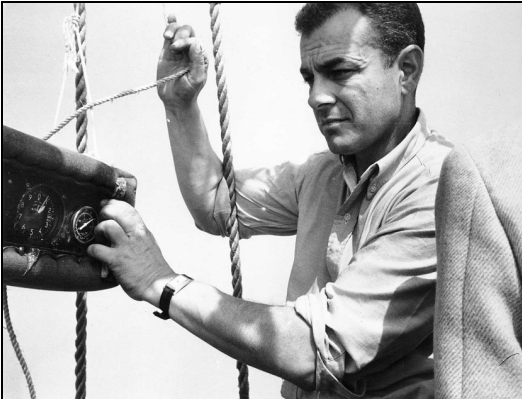
# **PETER PELLEGRINO**

## **UNITED STATES BALLOONING HALL OF FAME**

### **Balloon Federation of America**

### **National Balloon Museum, Indianola, Iowa**

### **INDUCTED INTO THE HALL OF FAME JULY 30, 2006**



Peter Pellegrino was a native of Manhattan and grew up on Long Island. Growing up in Manhattan, New York during the 1920's. Thus, at an early age he was captivated by Charles A. Lindbergh's solo flight to Paris. Growing up he haunted Roosevelt Field and thrilled to the sight of the Graf Zeppelin. As a result he became interested in flying and ended up devoting his life to aviation.

Pellegrino's mother, an Italian immigrant with Old World notions about careers, persuaded him to study business at New York University and get a job on Wall Street. But he soon left that career due to the increasingly troubled by unsavory practices he was directed to follow, and taking a 75 percent pay cut joined the Army Air Corps in the late 1930's.

Learning to fly fixed wing aircraft in a World War I Mr. Pellegrino earned his pilot's rating, but a ruptured eardrum kept him out of combat. He spent World War II training military air traffic controllers. After the war, he joined the forerunner of the Federal Aviation Administration, working as an air traffic controller in Philadelphia and eventually becoming tower chief at the North Philadelphia Airport. He also earned pilot ratings for numerous aircraft and even acquired his own small plane. But a newspaper article about ballooning led him into ballooning.

Mr. Pellegrino took his first balloon flight in 1952 and before long had become a mainstay of the Balloon Club of America, a group of Philadelphia enthusiasts who flew gas balloons. As president of the club, Mr. Pellegrino was in the thick of the sport's development. But his stint as a technical adviser for the balloon sequences in the 1956 movie "Around the World in 80 Days".

Mr. Pellegrino eventually became a balloon pilot examiner for the F.A.A. and validated ballooning records for the National Aeronautic Association, the American arm of the world governing body of the sport of aviation, the International Aeronautical Association, which is based in Paris, France.

When the American organization sought to form a balloon division, Mr. Pellegrino played a key role in creating the Balloon Federation of America in 1961. The Philadelphia group and the Balloon Flyers of Akron, the only other such club in the country, were the federation's initial members. Mr. Pellegrino was its first president. The balloon federation is now made up of about 100 clubs across the country and more than 4,000 individual members, almost none of whom fly gas balloons. That is partly because helium, is so expensive that a single flight can cost several thousand dollars, but mainly because of the development of the more inexpensive hot-air balloons fueled by propane. Pellegrino's work helped to establish hot air ballooning as the popular sport it is today.

When hot-air ballooning was perfected by Ed Yost in the 60's, gas-balloon purists turned up their noses. But largely through the efforts of Mr. Pellegrino, the International Aeronautical Association eventually recognized it as a legitimate competitive category. He became the first American delegate to the association's ballooning committee and, later, its first American president. Having to attend annual meetings in Paris gave him the opportunity to go ballooning in Europe, something he did with great regularity after becoming the first American to pilot a balloon across the Alps, in 1966.

Known mainly as a ballooning official, Mr. Pellegrino had his moments aloft, notably in 1959 when he and a friend, seeking a distance record, took off from Denver. High winds thwarted the record, and caused their balloon to knock out the power lines to Colorado Springs causing the city to go dark.

After retiring from the F.A.A. in 1976, Mr. Pellegrino gave up ballooning, studied art in New York and turned out abstract paintings while indulging a long-time subsidiary interest in fast cars. Mr. Pellegrino, who was divorced, is survived by a son, Peter Jr., of Fogelsville, PA.

Peter is a recipient of ballooning's highest award, the FAI Montgolfier Diplome, Spelterini Diploma (piloted a balloon over the Alps), the Balloon Federation of America Shields-Trauger Award, and the FAI Air Sports Medal.

If Peter were here and saw today's events around him, we imagine he would be a bit perplexed, probably a little mad for all of us making a fuss over him. In all the years we knew him, Peter always acknowledged his accomplishments - and those of others - but he never perceived himself as a pivotal contributor - he was always in it simply for the fun of it. It's just that when he saw things that needed to be done, he just very quietly went about and did them.

When hot air ballooning became practical with Ed Yost's invention of the modern hot air balloon in 1960 it needed a voice and a platform for development Pellegrino played a key role. He was uniquely suited to this task - he was a career FAA professional, rising to the post of manager of the North Philadelphia Airport. His greatest attribute was his ability to fit in with people from all walks of life, from line mechanics to the rich and famous, and get them all working together for a cause. He was honest to an extreme, always fair, always the diplomat; and his light, gentle handling of others and his credibility as a professional and as an excellent pilot, earned him the universal respect of his peers in the sport. As an FAA professional, he showed balloonists how to market themselves and present themselves to both the Feds and the public.

In his role as head of the BFA, Peter was often tapped to act as NAA Observer for record attempts such as the Stratolab V flight, and the ill-fated Free Life transatlantic attempt. He dissuaded others over the years from taking on similar projects which he perceived as ill-conceived, and at least one later returned to thank Peter for saving his life - Peter had talked him out of making a fatal TransAtlantic attempt with other balloonists. Peter mentored many, many balloonists over the early years, he was never too busy to take a budding pilot under his wings and teach them a thing or two about piloting.

Still, with all his accomplishments, we think Peter would most want to be remembered simply as a man who he loved to fly; the only title he ever really sought was Pilot In Command. It is an honor today to recognize him as just that. As a founder and first President of the BFA, he will always be remembered as our very first PIC.



Peter flying a gas balloon in Denver in 1959



Peter with other key leaders in ballooning. L to R: Bruce Comstock, Sid Cutter, Don Kersten and Peter



Peter at Brussels World's Fair in 1958



Peter flying in Switzerland