BEN L. ABRUZZO

Inducted into the U. S. Ballooning Hall of Fame July 31, 2011

By the Balloon Federation of America at the National Balloon Museum, Indianola, Iowa



"Double Eagle" ready for lift off September 12, 1977 in first attempt to cross the Atlantic



Ben Abruzzo



"Double Eagle II" first balloon to cross the Atlantic. Inset is crew, Anderson, Abruzzo, and Newman



Ben flying in "The Union Gas" over the Sandia Mountains



"Double Eagle" aloft over the Atlantic



"Double Eagle" in the Atlantic awaiting rescue



Ben set to take off



Richard Abruzzo, Katie Eckert, Ben Abruzzo and Maxie Anderson



"Double Eagle II" over France



Ben and wife Pat



Ben with son Louis suspended in Sandia Peak Tram Hang Glider

Ben L. Abruzzo June 9, 1930 - February 11, 1985

Albuquerque, New Mexico

BIOGRAPHY

Ben Abruzzo was born in Rockford, Illinois on June 9,1930. He received his BS Degree in Business Administration in 1952 from the University of Illinois (see picture at right) and was commissioned a Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force assigned to Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Abruzzo served as squadron officer for a period of two years.





Upon discharge from the Air Force, he joined Sandia Corporation, a subsidiary of Bell Laboratories, as a staff assistant. Subsequently, he became associated with Sandia Peak Ski area in Albuquerque, New Mexico and served as Chairman and President of Alvarado Realty Company, a real estate conglomerate specializing in development and management of real estate, shopping centers and subdivisions. He was Chairman and President of Sandia Peak Ski Company, Sandia Peak Tram Company and Sandia Peak Utility Company. Mr. Abruzzo was the developer of Sandia Heights, a prestige subdivision of 1,500 acres at the base of Sandia Peak Tram in Albuquerque, New Mexico. (The picture is Ben flying "The Union Gas" at Sandia Peak.)

Ben Abruzzo and Maxie Anderson attempted a gas balloon flight in "**Double Eagle**" to Europe on September 12,1977. They departed from Marshfield, Massachusetts. They landed near Iceland after completing the longest balloon flight ever made. The journey covered 2,950 miles. They did not reach their goal, but instead touched down in the sea near Iceland. They were prevented from reaching continental Europe due to the fact that the winds took them in a 500 mile circle rather than a relatively straight route.

Ben Abruzzo and Maxie Anderson, with an additional crewmember, Larry Newman on August 11,1978, took off from Presque Isle, Maine in the gas balloon "**Double Eagle II**" to attempt another crossing of the Atlantic. The crossing took 137 hours 6 minutes and covered 3,120 miles landing in a barley field just outside of Evreux, France. The landing in France marked the first successful Transatlantic crossing by a manned balloon. The Double Eagle II crew has been featured in countless newspaper articles and on magazine covers throughout the world. There have been numerous TV documentaries made about the flight and its crew.



Maxie, Ben & Larry after landing

The "Double Eagle III", piloted by Abruzzo and Anderson was the winner of the 1979 International Gordon Bennett Race. "Double Eagle IV" piloted by Abruzzo and Larry Newman set a New World Endurance Record. The next year Mr. Abruzzo and Mr. Rocky Aoki set a new race and world record.

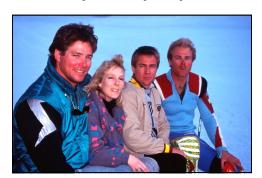


On November 12, 1981, Mr. Abruzzo, Flight Captain, along with teammates Larry Newman, Ron Clark and Rocky Aoki completed the first crossing of the Pacific Ocean in a manned balloon named "**Double Eagle V**" which was aloft for 84 hours and 31 minutes and traveled a straight-line distance of 5,768 miles setting a new Absolute World Record for balloons of all classes. (Double Eagle V pictured at left)

Books have been written about the Double Eagle flights. One of these is entitled <u>Double Eagle</u> which contains the stories of the Double Eagle I and Double Eagle II flights published by Little Brown and Company of New York. The book Flight of the Pacific Eagle, chronicles the record-breaking Double Eagle V flight.

Ben and his wife Patricia, and their four children were active in skiing, boating, sailing, tennis, flying and ballooning. Their 4 children are pictured at right: Benny, Mary Pat, Louis and Richard.

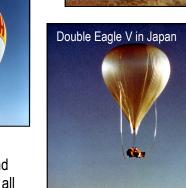
On February 11, 1985 Ben and his wife Pat and friends Marcia Martin, Cynthia Miller, Beverly Mullins and Barbara Quant lost their lives in a tragic small plane crash in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



TIME LINE OF BEN'S BALLOONING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

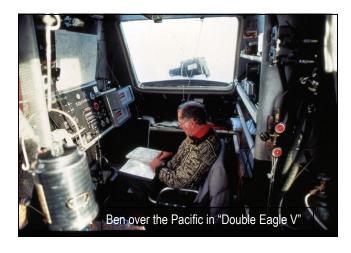
- Early 70's Owned and flew with Maxie Anderson and J.J. Monroe one of the 1st hot air balloons in New Mexico. They won several hot air balloon contests with "The Union Gas" balloon.
- 1977 First attempt to cross the Atlantic Ocean with "Double Eagle" which ended in the ocean near Iceland.
- 1978 First successful Atlantic Crossing with "Double Eagle II"
- 1979 First place with "Double Eagle III" from Long Beach, California to Dove Creek Colorado in the first Gordon Bennett Race held since before WWII.
- 1980 World Duration Record of 75 hours for AA-6 set with "Double Eagle IV"
- 1981 First place in the Gordon Bennett Balloon Race while flying the balloon "Benihana" from Fountain Valley, California to Montpelier, North Dakota. (See picture at right.)
- 1981 First Crossing of the Pacific Ocean occurred in "Double Eagle V" on November 12, 1981 Ben Abruzzo, Flight Captain, along with team mates Larry Newman, Ron Clark, and Rocky Aoki completed the first crossing of the Pacific Ocean in a manned balloon leaving Nagashima, Japan on November 9, 1981. The "Double Eagle V" was aloft for 84 hours and 31 minutes and traveled a distance of 5,768 miles setting a new Absolute World Record for balloons of all
- Mid 80's Several first place finishes in various gas balloon races





"The Union Gas" Ben's 1st hot air balloon













Ticker Tape Parade in Albuquerque, New Mexico in honor of the "Double Eagle II" Flight

AWARDS AND MEDALS

- A special gold medal struck by the United States of America and authorized by the Congress of the United States. This medal has previously been awarded on only three occasions for accomplishments in aviation. Prior recipients are the Wright Brothers, Charles Lindbergh and Neil Armstrong and Crew.
- The Congress also passed a resolution declaring the Double Eagle crew members as Modern Day Explorers; which is the highest aviation medal from the Federal Aviation Administration of the United States.
- France awarded Ben Abruzzo its highest civilian aviation medal, The Grande Medal for Accomplishment in Aviation.
- The John Oliver La Gorce gold medal was awarded by the National Geographic Society. This award has been presented only a few times in the history of the Society.
- The Montgolfier Diploma for "Best Performance in Gas Ballooning" was given to Abruzzo in 1978.
- The FAI (Federation Aeronautique Internationale) Gold Air Medal for the highest individual accomplishment in aviation.
- Absolute World records of Distance and Time Aloft and De La Vaulx medal for pilot in command of Absolute World Record flight.
- The French Sports Medal, highest award in France for sports.



The Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico is named after both Ben Abruzzo and his frequent ballooning companion, Maxie Anderson. After Maxie Anderson was killed in a gas balloon accident in Germany, and after Ben Abruzzo was killed in an airplane accident in Albuquerque, their families got together and decided to do something in their honor. They created a Foundation to receive donations for a museum and combined their efforts with the City of Albuquerque, which resulted in the building of the museum adjacent to the launch field of the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, "The World's Premier Balloon Event", held the first Saturday through the second Sunday of October. This year marks the 40th Balloon Fiesta which has been recognized as "The World's Most Photographed Event".



A view of the Fiesta