

2024 U. S. BALLOONING HALL OF FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY



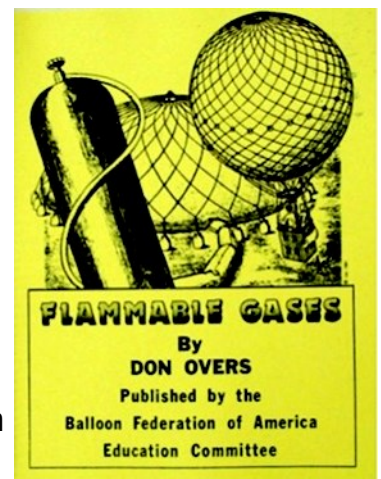
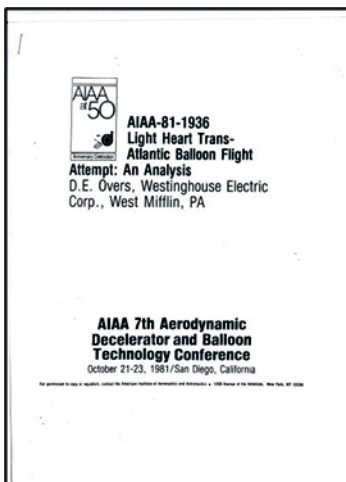
Donald E. Overs (February 1928 – August 2009)

As an active member of one of the nation's two balloon clubs, Donald E. Overs gave the Balloon Federation of America its name during the first organizational meeting in 1961 in Pittsburgh. He earned his gas balloon certificate under instruction from legendary figures such as Ward T. Van Orman, Augie O'Neil, and Goodyear blimp pilots.

Don held a master's degree in engineering from the University of Akron and was a licensed Professional Engineer. He brought intense scholarship, hands-on hard work, and practical knowledge to a career dedicated to safe conduct of the science and sport of gas ballooning from the 1950s to the 1990s.

His scholarship included several important works of value to the LTA community: His seminal work on the use of various lifting agents used in balloons, entitled, "Flammable Balloon Gases: The Concerns, Experiences, Characteristics" written for the Balloon Federation of America and published in 1980, is still sold by the BFA. This book derived directly from his analysis and practical experience flying under coke gas, natural gas, hydrogen and helium. He made a formal presentation to the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics 7th Aerodynamic Decelerator and Balloon Technology Conference, on Oct 22, 1981, entitled, "**Light Heart Trans-Atlantic Balloon Flight Attempt: An Analysis**".

His highly documented paper, "The Hindenburg Fire: Hydrogen or Incendiary Paint?", widely published in 2005, debunked a popular theory about the cause of the Hindenburg crash.



His pre-flight and post-flight analyses of the Light Heart Trans-Atlantic attempt (1974) and the Earthwinds Trans-Global attempt (1992-1995) are recounted in the book *Just Wind* by Bill Armstrong.

A thorough compendium of his aeronautical contributions is detailed in the book *Hands Off! Epic Adventures of the Balloon Flyers of Akron* by Mike Emich and Bill Armstrong.

He piloted the helium gas balloon for the opening sequence of the National Air and Space Museum's highly acclaimed IMAX movie, *TO FLY!* in 1975. The movie has been seen by millions of viewers worldwide and chosen by the Library of Congress for preservation as one of the most important films of the 20th century.

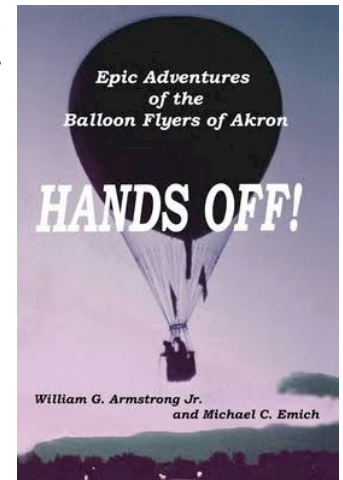
He conducted numerous scientific research flights on behalf of the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, and other federal agencies.

He trained at least five persons in gas ballooning and instructed colleagues in the art of net-building, pre-flight inspection and post-flight maintenance.

Along with Roger Wolcott and Augie O'Neil, he was one of three Akron delegates to the historic 1961 meeting called by NAA executive director Ralph Whitener to create the NAA balloon division. (The Philadelphia-based Balloon Club of America in Philadelphia sent Peter Pellegrino and Francis Shields.) The first brainstorming meeting was followed a month later by the official meeting at the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport. Hosting an evening session for the group at his home that night, Don Overs was the man who came up with the name for the new organization, the Balloon Federation of America.

His early professional life at Goodyear in Akron was spent with the U.S. Navy airship construction program. In the early 1960s, he moved to Pittsburgh where he worked as a naval nuclear propulsion engineer for the Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory. His responsibilities there included overseeing installation of an advanced submarine power unit into the original USS Nautilus reactor vessel, the preparation of the reactor vessel for the Navy's NIMITZ-class carrier prototype power unit, and the installations of nuclear reactors into the aircraft carriers, USS NIMITZ (CVN 68), USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (CVN 69) and USS CARL VINSON (CVN 70).

During the Korean conflict in the early 1950s, Don served with the U.S. Army in Germany. He made good use of his time while stationed there: he met with Dr. Hugo Eckener, the famous commander of the *Graf Zeppelin* who survived World War II despite his disagreements with the Nazis. Don learned a great deal about the lessons of the *Graf Zeppelin* and of the *Hindenburg*. A lifelong aviator, Don earned his fixed-wing rating at age 21 and owned several aircraft.



The following is from Don Overs 2009 Obituary in the Pittsburgh Tribune Review

Don Overs was a graduate of the University of Akron with a Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering. He was associated with U.S. Naval Airship Construction with Goodyear during periods from World War II through the early 1960s and had a lifelong interest and association with lighter-than-air flight. He became a licensed gas balloon pilot in the 1950s, joining only a dozen or so others then licensed in the world.

Don provided gas balloon pilot training for German Rocket scientist Kurt R. Stehling, who launched Vanguard I, the oldest manmade satellite still in orbit. Overs with Stehling manned several science supported gas balloon flights over a couple of decades. They displayed one of their balloons in the Smithsonian for two years, hanging next to the Wright Original Flyer and Spirit of St. Louis, illustrating even earlier flight. Also, more prominent, was their making of the world's first IMAX movie, the National Air and Space Museum premiere movie, *TO FLY*, in 1975. Don Overs supplied and piloted the gas balloon featured in the opening scenes of *TO FLY*. The movie has been seen by hundreds of millions at IMAX theaters worldwide and continues its 34th year continuous run at one location, the NASM, the record for any film produced. *TO FLY* has been selected by the Library of Congress for preservation as one of the most important films of the 20th century.



**Don Overs and Kurt Stehling
Endurance Flight**



1975 "To Fly" Movie with Kurt Stehling

Don Overs, as one of the few licensed balloon pilots in the 1960s, easily gravitated into the new developing category of modern hot-air balloons but maintained his primary interest in gas balloons and powered lighter-than-air vehicles. Don had visited Dr. Hugo Eckener at his home in Germany and remained as one among the very few still living in the world who had ever met the famed commander of the airships Graf Zeppelin and Hindenburg. Don recently conducted and jointly published important research results reestablishing the role of hydrogen in the Hindenburg fire. A current still popular theory had erroneously attributed the rapid burning of the airship to another substance. Don was an original cofounder of the Balloon Federation of America, the Balloon Flyers of Akron, an early member of the Lighter-Than-Air-Society and also a licensed airplane pilot for nearly 60 years.

In mid-life, Don also completed a 28 year career as senior engineer at the Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory predominately in Nuclear Engineering. Among many other important tasks while working there, he was responsible for the design of equipment for shipment and installation of an advanced submarine power unit and oversaw its installation into the original prototype Nautilus reactor vessel, the preparation of the reactor vessel for the NIMITZ class carrier prototype power unit, and further participated in the installations of nuclear reactors into the first three NIMITZ class aircraft carriers, including special tool designs for installation and others for refueling the same reactors which have been used some 25 years later for the first USS NIMITZ refueling. Don was an Army Veteran serving in the occupation of Germany during the Korean War.



1964 - Fostoria, Ohio



1964 - Fostoria - Certification Flight with Tony Fairbanks, Art Swanson



1987 - Wright Patterson AFB-in flight with Mike Emich



Prep for "To Fly" Movie Flight



1984 Akron, OH assisting Bill Armstrong with inserting the valve before a Flight

Inputs from Others

From Michael E. Overs (Retired Strike Fighter Naval Aviator son):

As a father, he was the sole reason for my interest in aviation and career in Naval Aviation that has spanned over forty-one years. I enjoyed twenty years as a Naval Aviator piloting Light Attack and Strike-Fighter aircraft with numerous combat missions, and over twenty-one years as a Department of Navy (DON) Civil Servant. During my flying days, I deployed aboard numerous aircraft carriers to include the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-59), one of the aircraft carriers my father had responsibility for the nuclear power and propulsion systems through his professional engineering career at Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory in Pittsburgh, PA. I was proud knowing dad had a hand in the operations & safety of that vessel. He had a deep appreciation and love for the science and adventures of flight.

Growing up, I witnessed on countless occasions my dad's concrete integrity, keen analytical skills, and critical thinking approach to understand and communicate the inner workings of any technology or science. His dedication to precise analysis was also applied to his lighter than air work. More importantly, his priority was first and foremost safety. His expertise was specifically sought out for many of the historically significant ballooning research or sporting events, all very well documented in numerous publications. Many of his contributions and others not mentioned were personally witnessed and enjoyed by me. His personal attention and interest in ensuring others understood the science and approach to problem solving was of the utmost importance and a tribute to his mentoring skills. His keen understanding of the lighter than air science along with his gift to communicate associated risks and benefits, was direct contributor to the plethora of successful flights or attempts.

In all of my years enjoying his love and support, I never saw him look at any technological problem that he or others faced, as anything other than a challenge that he could and would solve. As a son, I'm immensely proud and appreciative of his contributions to aviation. The Hall of Fame Committee would be honoring my father, a true hero for his immense contributions to and for the BFA.



Don and Mike Overs on the flight deck of USS America (CV-66) March 86 prior to Mike's first deployment as an A-7E "Corsair" pilot.



Don welcoming Mike home from his first F/A-18 "Hornet" deployment supporting Operation Desert Storm August 8, 1991

From Rick Zitarosa (Historian-Navy Lakehurst Historical Society):

It is long-overdue that Balloon Federation of America fully and formally recognizes the Lighter-Than-Air contributions of the late Donald Overs.

For those of us who spoke, corresponded, and worked with this great man we got to know his methodical nature, careful attention detail and overall LOVE of the subject of LTA which stretched back to his boyhood and led him to Friedrichshafen and Konstanz to track down an aged, retired Hugo Eckener while Don was stationed in post-WWII Germany as a young GI.

Don subsequently was a founding "pillar" of The Wingfoot Lighter Than Air Society in Akron, as well as a driving force in their original subsidiary "Balloon Flyers of Akron, Inc." where he helped re-start the sport of GAS BALLOONING (with hydrogen mostly, in the early days!) in the 1950's.

For many years, I referred to Don as "The Godfather" because he would weigh in on and occasionally "create order" on important, often-controversial issues as a prolific contributor to internet Airship Forums such as the "Airship-List" particularly pertaining to anything regarding ballooning, airship flight characteristics, hydrogen gas or (perhaps one of his most well-stated and passionate arguments) the HINDENBURG "Inflammable Paint Theory."

I had the personal privilege of working with Don (along with Dr. Alex Dessler and Bill Appleby) in the 2005 SECONDS FROM DISASTER documentary regarding the HINDENBURG disaster. Always interested in uncovering details, Don never took *anything* for face-value and this was borne-out by his meticulous levels of preparation and research to everything he studied or investigated (right down to live tests with small "gas cell" models filled with hydrogen gas on that occasion!)

As a teacher and mentor Don shared his experiences, knowledge and insight freely; he did not GOAD. He did not HOARD. He SHARED. Always in an informative, patient and professional manner.

To sum it up, Don Overs was "the genuine article." What you saw was what you got. The man was unique and his memory is greatly deserving of recognition by his former colleagues, peers, "students" and friends.

It is an honor to be asked to offer these comments on behalf of a great friend and teacher.



Don Overs, Rick Zitarosa, and crew at NAS Lakehurst 205 during filming of Discovery Channel's, "Seconds from Disaster"



Don Overs, Nick Overs (Grandson), and Mike Overs at NAS Lakehurst 205 during filming of Discovery Channel's, "Seconds from Disaster"



US Naval Aviation 75 year Anniversary flight NAS Pensacola 1986



Movie ground shots filming of the "To Fly" movie (Not associated with actual flight scenes)



Don Overs last gas balloon landing, inadvertently, but perhaps symbolically, on discarded tires, in New Jersey (Mike Emich and Bill Armstrong).



Don Overs with Kurt Stehling before their aborted Centennial of Helium flight attempt from Palestine, Tx.