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U. S. BALLOONING HALL OF FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY



Mark Semich: Self-taught balloonist and First Type Certificated Balloon Manufacturer (AE12)

Mark Semich began his fascination with flight early in life at the age of 14; building a hang glider with his best friend in 1939, launching from Best Hill in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The experiment ended with a crash landing in the field below with no reported injuries.

Mark enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1943 at the age of 17 and began basic training at Farragut Naval Training Station in Bayview, Idaho. After basic training, Mark went on to bomber training in San Diego, California before being shipped out to serve in the Pacific Arena during WWII. Mark received his second Bronze Star accompanied by a Presidential Unit Citation for the successful bombing campaign in the Battle of Los Negros in 1944. Mark continued to serve in the Pacific Campaign until he was injured and returned home, sailing into San Francisco Harbor on a Navy ship upon a stretcher in 1949.

The recuperating sailors were sent to Santa Cruz for physical therapy in the salt-water swimming pool located at the Boardwalk. As Mark continued to improve he worked as a "Barker" for the mechanical horse races on the Boardwalk. As luck would have it, he met his future bride on the Boardwalk, and he married Barbara the following year.

Mark and Barbara moved to Southern California where Mark began working on the *Robon* Yacht, sailing out of Lido Isle, Yacht Club, where he sailed to

Hawaii twice in competition. When Mark came to the attention of Captain Bert Minshall, of the *Wild Goose*, owned by John Wayne, he was hired as a carpenter to help remodel the yacht and continued to work on the Wild Goose. He went on to earn his Master Skipper License, often sailing John Wayne and his friends out to Catalina Island.

Always an inventor at heart, when Mark read about the Navy being interested in using hot air balloons for observation he decided he wanted to learn to make one. As WWII interfered with his high school education, Mark decided to take science and math classes at the local college in the evenings. Armed with his idea, some basic knowledge and his wife's Singer sewing machine he went to work in the family's garage in the evenings, while still working on the Wild Goose.

The first One-man balloon Mark built was ready for test-flights. These flights generally took place in the evenings and weekends in local school yards or parks. By this time the children, Brad and Laurie, were old enough to load up in the family station wagon with Barbara at the wheel and on the chase. The second chase began when the envelope was released from the chair with Mark at the wheel and the chair in the back of the car. The deflating envelope was sometimes reported as a UFO, prompting a quick pack up and get-away.



Mark's first balloon



This is an example of the "dumping" method of deflation whereby the entire envelope separated from the gondola and inverted. It could only be accomplished with the suspension cables slack and usually meant a hard landing with the envelope landing some distance away. This landing approach was eventually abandoned.

This first balloon of Mark's was sold before long and the construction of the next hot air balloon began. The household sewing machine, which was pretty much ruined, was replaced by a commercial machine. In the beginning Mark was the only person working on the manufacturing side and Barbara on the administrative side with the kids engaged as ground crew; Semco Balloon was born. 2

The family and business moved to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and new manufacturing shop was built on Fernan Hill, where Mark received the first Type-Certificate from the FAA in 1967. Mark built several different models and received Five Type-Certificates during his building career.

Mark participated in numerous festivals and balloon shows, including Albuquerque, where he earned two Second-Place cups and various prizes for specific contests.

Some of his creations were the *John Goldfarb* balloon, as well as balloons for Lark Cigarettes, Pepsi, Budweiser, ReMax and 7-11 Hot-to-Go, among others. Mark had some interesting moments in flight, as so many balloonists do.

Mark once flew over a turkey farm which caused the turkeys to panic when they saw the shadow of the balloon flying over; there were numerous turkey fatalities and one mad farmer! Mark touched down on water, flew from Long Beach to Catalina, landed on hillsides, in a cactus patch and in a swamp, with the most exciting rescue by air-boat in Louisiana in 1974 during the Crawfish Festival.

Semco Balloon also drew many interesting people that came to purchase balloons, to learn to fly and to become certified licensed pilots. Many clients came from distant places and sometimes stayed at the family home, or enjoyed a wonderful dinner of Barb's making.



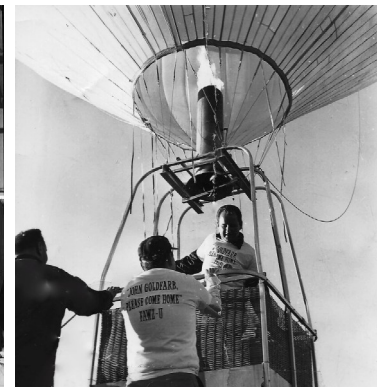
FAA inspectors viewing envelope.
1st type certificate.



FAA Inspectors viewing basket.
1st type certificate.



Mark Semich receiving first type
certificate.



John Goldfarb Movie TC-4
inverted dump Semco



SEMCO "DUMPERS"

Mark was famous for inventing the “Pop-Top” deflation system, which was featured in Popular Science Magazine. Mark designed a unique “pop top” deflation system. The top was made with a series of rings equally sewn around an opening in the top of the balloon. To close the top the rings were pulled together and slid over a pin. A safety block held the rings on the pin. A line was pulled by the pilot to release the safety block. The top immediately opened, and the balloon immediately deflated. **This deflation action was not reversible.**

Mark had other articles published about him and his many successes in Life Magazine, National Geographic and Popular Mechanics.

Mark had the privilege of having Gladys Buroker as a client, a student and friend. Gladys was one of the first female hot-air balloon pilots in the Pacific Northwest and flew during the opening ceremonies of Expo '74, along with a few other Semco balloons, on opening day ceremonies which hosted President Richard Nixon.

In 1973 Semco Balloon had a new manufacturing plant and Aerodrome in Griffin, Georgia. It was during this time that then Governor Jimmy Carter came for a tour and a ride!

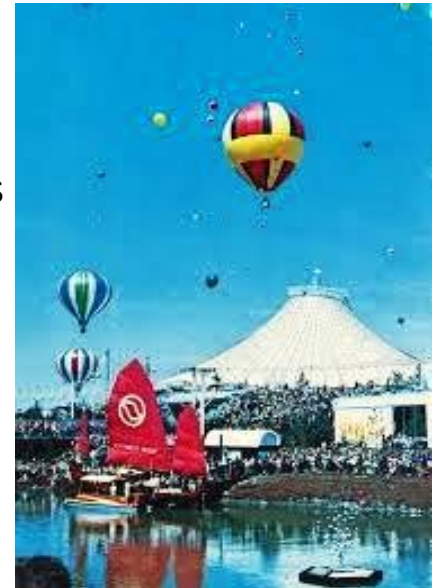
Jim Crawford was an annual visitor to the Semich household during the late 60's, and a client who purchased a balloon which he flew in Nicaragua in search of ancient forgotten cities in the jungles, known as the Nicaragua Expedition.

Mark also designed and built gas balloons, three of which were built attempting to be the first to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

Free Life - September 20, 1970: The first gas balloon built for an Atlantic attempt was for pilot Malcolm Brighton, Rodney Anderson, and Pamela Brown. The Free Life attempt was the first use of a Rozière style balloon for an Atlantic attempt, built by Mark Semich. After 30 hours the balloon ditched at sea and rescue efforts were unsuccessful for the crew.



Pop Top



EXPO 74



THE FREE LIFE TEST FLIGHT

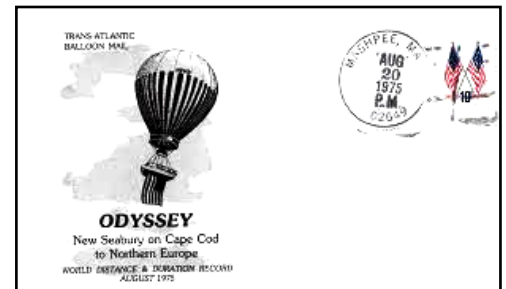
Yankee Zephyr - August 7, 1973: The second gas balloon, built for Bob Sparks. The balloon was caught in a 9.5-hour violent overnight storm and forced down. Bob had to be rescued.

Odyssey - August 21, 1975: The third gas balloon, Odyssey, was built for Bob Sparks. On the night take-off, one of his crew secretly attached himself on a rope under the balloon which Bob did not notice until hours later. Bob was trying to make a solo attempt with a stowaway on board, Bob decided to ditch the balloon and be rescued at sea.

Mark and Barbara divorced in 1975, and Mark continued manufacturing balloons until 1978 when he sold to Eagle Balloons and retired to Dominican Republic. Mark passed away in 2007 at the age of 79; Barbara passed away in 2008 and Brad passed in 2014. Laurie is the last remaining Original Family Crew Member, and lives in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.



YANKEE ZEPHYR (BOB SPARKS)



BALLOON MAIL



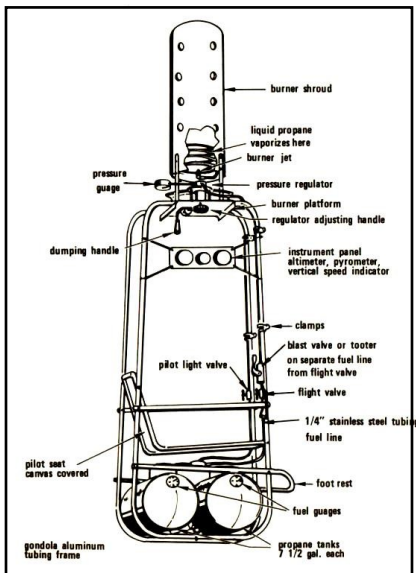
FIRST CHAIR



Family photo, Laurie, Barbara, Brad, Mark. Taken at the start of SEMCO.



70 Gore Semco balloon. Co-pilot: Russ McLaine, Pilot Bob Sparks, Crew: Steve Shean.



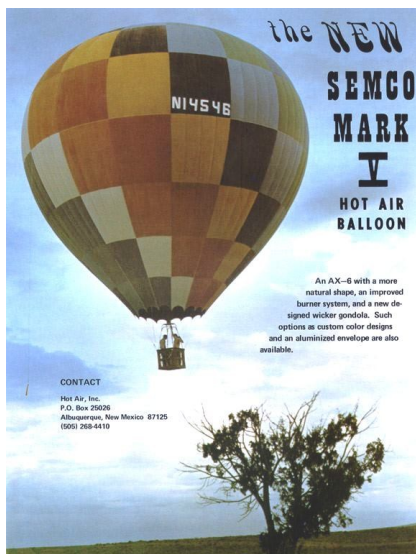
1 PASSENGER SEAT



PEPSI BALLOON



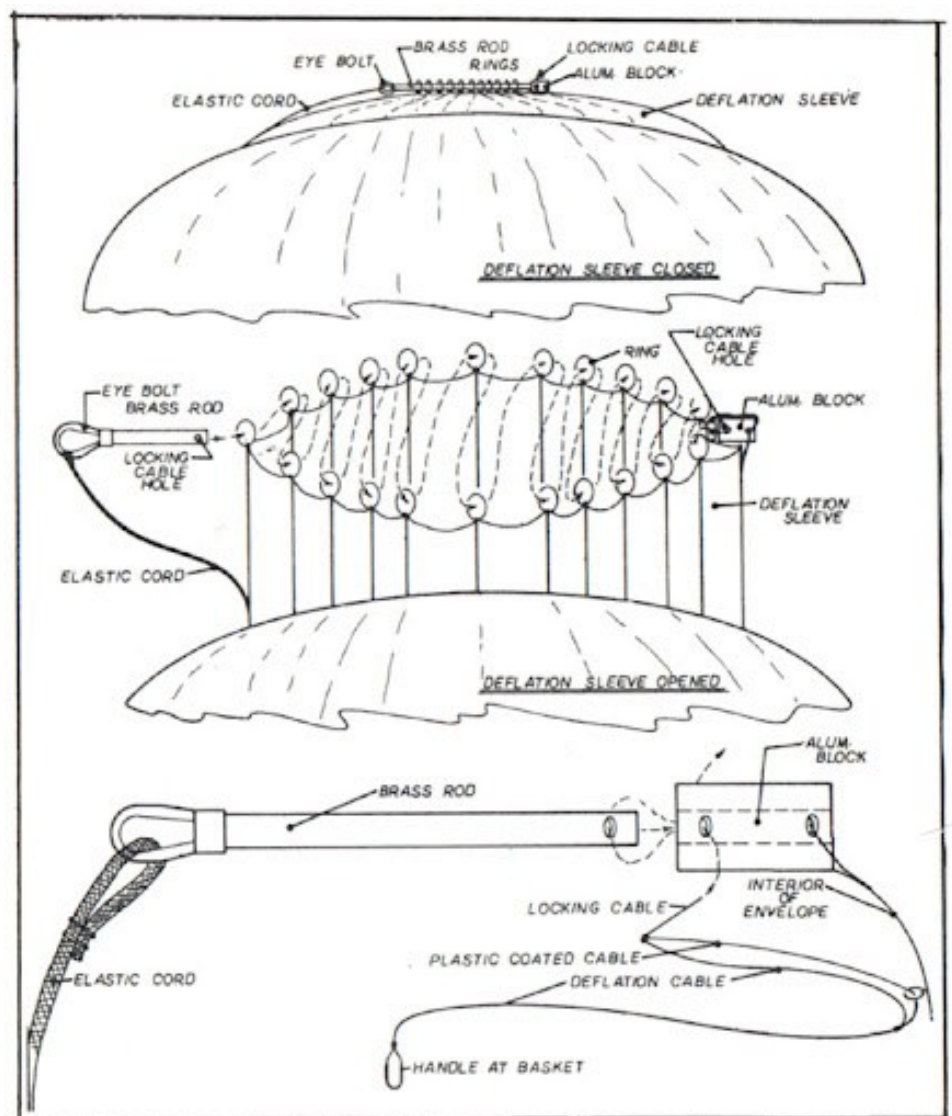
SEMCO TC-4



SEMCO MARK 5 BROCHURE



CHAIR ASSEMBLY THAT INCLUDED AN INFLATION FAN.



SEMCO POP TOP DESCRIPTION