

## **(A) THE OLD 80**

**THE BALLOON CLUB OF AMERICA BEGAN FLYING GAS BALLOONS IN 1952  
A INFLATION NUMBER WAS ASSIGNED TO THE EARLY FLIGHTS OF THE BCA**

**THE "OLD 80." 80,000 CU.FT. GAS BALLOON. REGISTERED N9071H. BUILT BY  
GOODYEAR IN JUNE 1926. MODEL S-30. OTHER PASSENGERS NOT LISTED.**

#4: January 9, 1954. Whitpain Township, four miles North of Conshohocken, Pennsylvania. An early morning lift-off. The balloon traveled 75 miles to Net Cong, New Jersey. Landed close-by the New York state border. Don Piccard the pilot. FIRST BALLOON FLIGHT for Eleanor and first flight for Kate Orensen. Francis Shields was a passenger. Argosy Magazine reported on this fight in a cover story of the April 1954 issue. The Philadelphia Daily News on Saturday, January 9, 1954 on page 17 ran an interesting story "Girls Sail Balloon: Mark 1793 flight."

#8: July 4, 1954. Valley Forge Airport to Devault, Pennsylvania. Tony Fairbanks, Pilot. Jerry Burns and Eleanor passengers. Also on this day the club's 35,000 (N9072H) cu.ft. balloon flew with Don Piccard as pilot and Connie Wolf a passenger. The two gas balloons flew together. Don landed in Lionville, PA.

#33: August 23, 1958. Inflation at Valley Forge Airport. Eleanor flew twice on this morning. (1) Peter Pellegrino and Eleanor Vadala. (2) Tony Fairbanks with Eleanor Vadala & Michael Fairbanks. This was the first balloon flight for Michael Fairbanks. Francis Shields was the crew chief for the inflation and flew the third flight of the morning.

#37: May 10, 1959. Two hops of which Eleanor Vadala flew on the second flight of the day. Valley Forge Airport. (1) Tony Fairbanks with Kate Orensen and Sherwood Harris of the Saturday Evening Post. See the great photo article in the Saturday Evening Post magazine of September 5, 1959. (2) Francis Shields and Eleanor Vadala with a landing in Great Meadows, New Jersey.

THE OLD 80,000 CU.FT. BALLOON WAS NOT FLOWN FOR SEVERAL YEARS AS THE BCA BEGAN FLYING THE GAS BALLOON CALLED "THE NEW 80."

November 6, 1971: Wings Fields Airport in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. Tony Fairbanks, pilot. Eleanor Vadala, Connie Wolf, Michael Fairbanks and Ted Stecher. Ted and Michael were friends having served in the US Army in Germany. A two hour flight with a windy landing in Milford, New Jersey.

### **HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE "OLD 80" BALLOON:**

Eleanor Vadala made six flights in the "Old 80" cooking gas filled balloon. Five inflations on five different dates. For the August 1958 inflation, Eleanor flew on two flights with two different pilots.

Kate Orensen and Jerry Burns were nominally involved in the activities of the Balloon Club of America. After a few short years they no longer participated.

The final flight of the Old 80, which was constructed in 1926, was on November 12, 1972. The balloon leaked as a result of dry rot which occurred along the folded seams from years of being in storage. Tony Fairbanks and Michael Fairbanks flew from Wings Field Airport, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania to a crash landing on a church rectory in Pennsauken, New Jersey. A four hour flight in light winds. No open landing spot was available. Once the balloon cleared the Delaware River, the balloon descended to contour flying in an effort to find a field. Flying in level flight, one hundred feet above carpet of houses without yards, the balloon ran out of ballast and landed on a roof. The passengers were Bud and Marie Egner.

## **(B) THE NEW 80**

**THE BALLOON CLUB OF AMERICA NEVER NAMED THE BALLOONS. THE BALLOON IN BETTER CONDITION OF THE TWO WAS REFERRED TO AS "THE NEW 80." AN 80,000 CU.FT. GAS BALLOON. REGISTERED N9073H. BUILT BY GOODYEAR IN MAY 1937. OTHER PASSENGERS NOT LISTED.**

June 4, 1960: A gathering of two balloon clubs. A three balloon race from Valley Forge Airport without a declared winner. The winner was to be the balloon which traveled the greater distance. Tony Fairbanks was the pilot of balloon #1 with a landing in Harlesville, PA. His passengers were Eleanor Vadala, Mike Fairbanks and Augie O'Neil of the Akron Balloon Club. Augie was a World War I Blimp pilot.

The balloons had signs with large numbers of one through three attached above the loading. Balloon #1: Tony Fairbanks flying a balloon filled with cooking gas. Balloon #2: LaCoquette, 19,000 cu.ft. balloon, inflated with hydrogen. Peter Pellegrino the pilot with passenger Ed Harvey from WCAU radio. Balloon #3: National Lighter-Than-Air Society of Akron, Ohio. 35,000 cu.ft. balloon filled with hydrogen. The Akron balloon was piloted by Jim Contos and Roger Wolcott. Francis Shields a member of the Balloon Club of America was a passenger in the Akron balloon.

November 12, 1960: Francis Shields and Eleanor Vadala. For the second hop of the day an exciting and difficult lift-off from the 69<sup>th</sup> Street trolley terminal. The balloon flew over the Delaware River to a landing in Red Lion, New Jersey. The first flight of the day was a dawn lift-off from Valley Forge Airport. Tony Fairbanks was the pilot. The passengers were two of his children, Michael Fairbanks and Lillian Jean Fairbanks. Tony attempted a safe landing on a golf course but the drag rope snagged without dropping to the ground and the waiting crew. The balloon then drifted into the trolley terminal and bounced along the top of two parked trolley cars before landing on a small road inside the trolley park. A metal gate had to be unlocked for the crew to gain entrance. A deflation inside the Trolley Park was impossible.

August 4, 1962: Tony Fairbanks the pilot. Eleanor Vadala and Nica Louise Fairbanks as passengers. Doylestown, Pennsylvania to Riegelsville, Pennsylvania. The aircraft log book showed a 90 minute flight.

July 13, 1963: Eleanor Vadala as the pilot. Doylestown Airport to Hilltown, Pennsylvania. This was the flight examination for Eleanor Vadala. Anthony “Tony” Fairbanks was on board as the designated lighter-than-air pilot examiner for the Federal Aviation Agency. (FAA) Because this balloon has too much lift with only two in the basket, Kurt Stehling and Michael Fairbanks were in the basket as observers. Eleanor passed her flight examination.

July 27, 1963: Tony Fairbanks. Passengers Eleanor Vadala, Kurt Stehling, Connie Wolf and Lillian Jean Fairbanks. Doylestown, Pennsylvania to Delanco, New Jersey. Kurt Stehling, in 1975, published a book on aviation titled BAGS UP. The publication was in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution, National Air & Space Museum. Kurt wrote a chapter about his experiences flying gas balloons with Tony Fairbanks. The title of chapter 2 is “Learning the Ropes.”

A quote from BAGS UP by Kurt R. Stehling. Page 18:

After a couple of Saturday visits to Philadelphia, I got to know Anthony “Tony” Fairbanks, a leader of the club. He was a gentle, amiable man in his early sixties when I first met him. He would think nothing of arising at 3 A.M., climbing into his ancient car parked outside his comfortable home in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania and driving off, dragging a dilapidated trailer with 500 pounds of balloon and gear.”

September 26, 1964: Tony Fairbanks. Passengers Eleanor Vadala, Francis Shields and Connie Wolf. Avertorpe Park in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania to Cream Ridge, New Jersey. The cooking gas was purchased by the township of Avertorpe to celebrate a town fair.

October 25, 1964: Francis Shields pilot. Eleanor Vadala and Nica Louise Fairbanks. Wings Field Airport, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania to Burlington, New Jersey.

July 17, 1965: Pete Pellegrino and Eleanor Vadala. Wings Field Airport, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania to Jamison, Pennsylvania.

November 7, 1965: Francis Shields pilot. Passengers Eleanor Vadala and Fred Dolder. Wings Field Airport to Lakewood, New Jersey.

Fred Dolder was a friend of Tony and Mary Louise Fairbanks. He was a well known gas balloon pilot from Switzerland. He made more than 579 gas balloon flights in eleven countries. He is best known for organizing the Fred Dolder High Alpine Ballooning Week which flew gas balloon with attempts to cross the Alpine Mountains of Switzerland to a safe landing in Italy from 1962 through 1986. Tony Fairbanks traveled to Switzerland to participate in this event seven times. Fred Dolder visited with Tony and Mary Louise Fairbanks at their home in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania in 1965 and again in 1966. Mr. Dolder died in 1988 at age 90 years old.

August 27, 1966: Francis Shields as pilot. Passengers: Eleanor Vadala, Lillian Jean Fairbanks and R. Block. Wings Field Airport to Chesnut Hill, Pennsylvania.

September 10, 1966: Tony Fairbanks and Eleanor Vadala. Wings Field Airport, with a flight across the Delaware River to Blackwood, New Jersey.

August 31, 1968: Peter Pellegrino and Eleanor Vadala. Wings Field Airport to Eureka, Pennsylvania.

## **HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE “NEW 80” BALLOON:**

Eleanor made twelve flights in the “New 80” cooking gas filled balloon. The men and women with whom she flew and from whom she learned ballooning and gained experience as a pilot is as interesting as the flights themselves.

The 80,000 cu.ft. balloon which was called “The New 80” was last seen leaving New Jersey and flying over the vast Atlantic Ocean. April 26, 1969. A windy launch from Wings Field Airport in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. Tony Fairbanks the pilot. Passengers: His brother Edmund Fairbanks and his sister-in-law Virginia Fairbanks. Other passengers Dorte Hviid and Harvey Smith. In 90 minutes of a windy flight the balloon landed without ballast in the tall trees of Red Lion, New Jersey. The push of the balloon through the trees on the windy morning resulted in the cotton net being shredded. The balloon envelope lifted high into the sky and flew over the waves and water of the Atlantic Ocean. The wicker basket with its five passengers rested safely between large trees limbs about twelve feet above the ground.

### **(C) GAS BALLOONING IN EUROPE IN HOLLAND WITH TONY AND MARY LOUISE FAIRBANKS 35,000 CU.FT. BALLOON**

September 12, 1963: Etten, Holland to a landing in Boom, Belgium. Anthony “Tony” Fairbanks the pilot. Mary Louise Fairbanks, Eleanor Vadala and a member of the Haag Balloon Club flew with Tony. This flight is of interest to the Fairbanks children as their mother rarely flew in a balloon. Large crowds of children greeted the balloon upon landing in Belgium.

The registration number is N4149A which is a United States registration number. This was one of the military surplus balloons obtained by the Balloon Club of America. Not built by Goodyear but by Aircruiser in June 1940. I believe this balloon was given as a gift to Fred Dolder and the balloonists from Switzerland who organize the Fred Dolder High Alpine Ballooning Week. Documentation has this balloon as “Destroyed in Europe.”

## (D) The LaCoquette

**THE LACOQUETTE. 19,000 CU.FT. BALLOON MANUFACTURED BY GOODYEAR IN JULY 1926. REGISTRATION: N9074H. THIS SMALL RUBBERIZED COTTON BALLOON WAS NAMED BY MOVIE PRODUCER MICHAEL TODD. THE LACOQUETTE WAS USED IN THE MOVIE "AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS" WHICH WON THE ACADEMY AWARD FOR BEST PICTURE OF 1956.**

**July 29, 1967:** It was a glorious day and a glorious event. The LaCoquette being flown from the Navy Yard in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the Navy Yard. The event is well documented with photographs taken by Anthony "Tony" Fairbanks who was the passenger. The pilot for this flight was Eleanor Vadala. The balloon flew for two hours over downtown Philadelphia with a soft landing inside the grounds of the Budd Manufacturing Plant.

The U.S. Navy Band traveled from Washington D.C. to give concerts at the Navy Yard on Saturday and Sunday. The press release which advertised the open house and the balloon launch is quoted below:

### Balloon Flight and Ham Radio Station

On one of the two days, depending on wind conditions, there will be a flight by what is probably the most famous balloon of all time LaCoquette – that was featured in the motion picture "Around the World in 80 days." Owned by the Balloon Club of America, headquartered at nearby Wings Field in Ambler, LaCoquette will be piloted by Miss. Eleanor Vadala, a materials research engineer at the Naval Air Engineering Center, and one of the two woman gas balloonists in the United States.

Another feature of the open house will be a radio station set up and operated by amateurs of the South Jersey area. It will be in operation during both days of the open house, talking to ships at sea and oversea bases.

## **(E) THE PRIVATE EYE**

**A 19,000 CU.FT. BALLOON BUILT BY GOODYEAR IN MAY 1936. REGISTRATION: N4150A. IN 1963 THE BALLOON BECAME THE PAXTON CIGARETTE BALLOON. PAXTON CIGARETTES WERE SOLD IN A UNIQUE PLASTIC SOFT PACK AND WERE AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC FOR A FEW SHORT YEARS. THE PAXTON CIGARETTE BALLOON WAS USED TO MAKE A SERIES OF MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS. THE BALLOON CLUB OF AMERICA LATER PAINTED OVER THE PACKS OF CIGARETTES WHICH WERE PAINTED ON TWO SIDES OF THE BALLOON ENVELOPE. NOT WANTING TO CONTINUE TO CALL THE BALLOON “THE PAXTON CIGARETTE BALLOON,” CLUB MEMBERS RENAMED THE BALLOON, “THE PRIVATE EYE.”**

**OCTOBER 20, 1962:** Eleanor flew two hops on this morning. Wings Field Airport, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. Tony Fairbanks was the pilot for the first flight with passengers Larry Ritter and Eleanor Vadala. The purpose of the inflation of the balloon on this morning was to solo Eleanor Vadala. A solo flight is a requirement to qualify for a flight examination to obtain a Lighter-Than-Air, Free Balloon pilot certificate. The balloon landed on an open field in light winds which allowed Eleanor to lift-off for her solo flight. This was one year before the balloon was painted with the Paxton Cigarette logo.

A fixed wing airplane with a photographer followed the balloon. A photograph was taken of the basket with the three occupants, Tony, Larry and Eleanor.

The airplane followed the balloon on the second flight of the morning . A unique and precious photograph was taken of Eleanor alone in the small wicker basket. Eleanor can be seen waving to the airplane. We can see and experience the joy that she felt.

Eleanor Vadala became a balloon pilot with the passing of her flight examination in the “New 80” gas balloon on June 13, 1963.



**June 1973:** Bob Sparks and Eleanor Vadala. A flight in “The Private Eye” from Allentown, Pennsylvania to a landing in New Jersey. Helium has slightly less lift than hydrogen and therefore only two persons were in the basket. Bob Sparks was able to obtain helium from the Cryogenic Company located on the grounds of the Allentown Airport. A beautiful flight with a crossing over the Delaware River. A proper ending to the gas ballooning career of Eleanor Vadala.

The Balloon Club of America had ceased to exist as a sport ballooning club. The “Old 80” was no longer airworthy. The “New 80” was lost over the ocean. The LaCoquette which was built in 1926 was in poor condition. The company which had been providing hydrogen to balloons would no longer sell gas for balloons. Francis Shields the strength and enthusiasm of the club had died in a balloon crash in 1968. Eleanor had said that ballooning for her was never the same after the death of Francis.

The netted gas balloons made from layers and layers of rubberized cotton were remarkable and exclusive. These balloons that were obtained by the Balloon Club of America were built to train blimp pilots. To quote from the United States Naval Institute Proceedings of February 1969

*“During World War II, some 1,400 naval aviators (lighter-than-air) were trained at NAS Moffett Field, California and NAS Lakehurst, New Jersey, for duty in the Navy’s antisubmarine blimp fleet. Operations with free balloons formed an essential part of the training.” (1)*

The era of the Balloon Club of America had ended. The netted balloon had vanished from the skies. Don Piccard, Tony Fairbanks, Peter Pellegrino, Francis Shields, Connie Wolf and Eleanor Vadala. Names of men and women who shared an adventure and contributed equally to keep these old balloons in the air for a brief period of time.

**(1)** Page 92. “They Sailed the Sky” United States Naval Institute Proceedings, February 1969. By Lt. J. Gordon Vaeth, USNR. A cover story with photographs of the gas balloons used to train blimp pilots during WWII.