



J. W. Byrd

Notable – Accomplishments/Contributions

The following By Kim Vesley is from the 2007 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta program, *In Memoriam*.

Flip through Balloon Fiesta programs going back to the event's earliest days, and in almost all of them, you'll find the name of J.W. Byrd - truly an Albuquerque ballooning pioneer and original. J.W. was one of Albuquerque's first-generation balloon pilots (1973}, and his balloon, Byrd of Paradise, was a familiar sight in Albuquerque's skies for two decades. But above all, J.W. will be remembered for his service to his fellow balloonist's.

He was one of the earliest members of the Albuquerque Aerostat Ascension Association {AAAA), and served on its board of directors for 11 years, two of them as president. In seven years as an FAA Designated Examiner, he checked out and licensed dozens of new balloon pilots with an uncompromising eye to safety.

Later, J.W. became known for his role in promoting local and national balloon competition. As the Balloon Federation of America's Sanction Director, he sanctioned more than 500 competition events around the county. He was a champion for the observers and debriefers who score balloon competitions around the country, and trained dozens of them. He was also Chief Scoring Officer for Albuquerque Top Gun and New Mexico State Championships, and in gas ballooning served as Chief Scoring Officer for a World Championship, two Coupe Gordon Bennett races, and nine Americas Challenge races.

His honors include the AAAA Sid Cutter Award, the Annie Pryne Memorial Award, and membership in the Balloon Fiesta Hall of Fame. J.W.'s Balloon Fiesta resume goes back to 1977 when he was the Balloon Fiestas safety officer, but that's only part of the story. He did just about everything, quietly and without credit, from the unglamorous labor of stretching out miles of flagging during field set up to downloading and interpreting gas balloon trackers.

Ballooning with the Byrd's was truly a family affair: wife Evelyn is loved and respected for her many years of service and support to ballooning in Albuquerque, and son Jim and daughter Niki are both balloonists and involved with the Balloon Fiesta. J.W. was one of those guys with a sometimes gruff exterior and a heart of gold. He was a mentor and friend to hundreds of balloonists, balloon crew members, and balloon enthusiasts.

With J.W.'s death in late August, the ballooning community has lost not only his commitment and knowledge, but also a piece of its heart and soul.

In addition the following was provided by J. W. son, Jim.

Dad Joined the Army Air Core in WWII hoping to become a pilot, but due to his vision being just slightly less than perfect, he ended up as a bombardier on a B24. He was the only

member of his crew to survive a head on collision with another B24 over Germany and spent the last 10 months of the war in a German prison camp.

Dad's interest in flying wasn't diminished by the experience and he often mentioned that "someday" he would like to learn to fly. In February, 1973 we heard an announcement on the local radio station asking for volunteers to help with the 1st World Balloon Championship which would be starting in about a week. He called the number and 30 minutes later we were at the Fair Grounds getting our 1st assignment. We were handed a set of keys to a brand new truck and sent to the airport to pick up an actual hot air balloon that had been shipped in for the event. When we returned to the Fair Grounds with the balloon they didn't have any place to store it so they asked if we could keep it in our garage for the rest of the week which we did.

We spent that week crewing for pilots that came in early to practice. We delivered the balloon in the garage to the owner at the end of the week, and crewed for him during the event. In March we joined the balloon club. Dad got his pilot's license and bought a balloon by summer, which he flew in the first of many Fiestas in February, 1974.

As you can see by Kim's article, Dad's involvement in ballooning and competition grew and included helping organize many events around New Mexico and several across the country. In spite of significant health issues in his last years, he remained active scoring gas balloon competitions including the Gordon Bennett and many America's Challenge events until shortly before his death.

Additional biographical information for J. W. Byrd

2007 Albuquerque international Balloon Fiesta Program

JW Byrd •

J.W. Byrd was an exceptional volunteer who was intensely involved with assuring the success of the Balloon Fiesta. He served in official capacities when needed, but could be counted on to do whatever was needed, quietly and without credit, from the unglamorous labor of stretching out miles of flagging, to downloading and interpreting gas balloon trackers. He was a mentor and friend to hundreds of balloonists (many of whom he taught to fly), crew members and enthusiasts. J.W. passed away in 2007.

Albuquerque international Balloon Fiesta Hall of Fame

In 1983 the Hall of Fame was created to honor those who have made substantial contributions to the success of the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta or have made important contributions to AIBF and/or the sport of ballooning. The past presidents of the Board of Directors accept nominations and vote on possible inductees in late summer with any induction taking place during the Awards Ceremony held the last Saturday of Balloon Fiesta.

J.W. Byrd Inducted 2004

As one of Albuquerque's early balloon pilots (he earned his license in 1973), J.W. Byrd is the founding father of a three-generation ballooning family (his son, daughter, and granddaughter are all pilots), and one of the Balloon Fiesta's first volunteers. J.W. was one of the event's early Chief Safety Officers, and is perhaps best known as a scoring officer for both the Balloon Fiesta's hot air competitions and the America's Challenge gas balloon race. But if there was a job to be done, no matter how unglamorous, J.W. did it, even stretching out miles of flagging to mark out the confines of the early Balloon Fiesta launch sites. J.W. was a mentor and friend to hundreds of balloonists (many of whom he taught to fly), crew members and enthusiasts in the 30 years. J.W. passed away in 2007.



Director's Award

YEAR	RECIPIENT	REGION	BFA DIRECTOR
2004	J. W. Byrd	At Large	Ray Bair

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JW attended the first World Balloon Championships in February 1973 in Albuquerque, NM as balloon crew. Right after that he joined the Roadrunner flying membership to learn how to fly and got his commercial balloon license in July, 1973, becoming the proud owner of Wandering Star. a Raven AX6 in October, 1973. The Byrd of Paradise AX7 balloon came later. In 1990 he was the only original member still active in the AAAA Roadrunner balloon group. He was a continuous member of Albuquerque Aerostat Ascension Association since 1973 until his passing in 2007. He was on teh board of director from 1974-1988, President of AAAA 1977-1978, instructor, organizer and member of virtually all of the committees of AAAA. He helped organized the first AAAA rally July 4, 1973, as well as the first Valentine's rally in February 1976. He wrote the bulk of the bylaws for the club during the 1970s decade, coordinated and instructed in multiple education committee seminars over the years, and organized and taught in 3 observer seminars one year. He helped develop and present the AAAA slide show in promoting community relations and enhancing antidrug programs.

He served 7 years as FAA designated examiner 1978-1985, was head launch officer at the Nationals in Iowa in 1977, was the safety officer for Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta 1977 and 1981, observer at Nationals in Baton Rouge, 1989. chief observer and computer operator for the NM championships, May 1990, member of Top Gun starting 1988 serving as scorer, chief scorer, data keeper, one of the organizers of the first Chama, NM snowmobile balloon rally in March, 1977 which was the FIRST time in the country that snowmobiles were used in such an event, and was known for always being the last to leave the west mesa launch site, accounting for every balloon and finding lost souls when someone's chase crew couldn't locate them.