



## **Ted Wirch**

### **Notable: Accomplishments/Contributions**

Ted was born October 27, 1937 in Wirch, North Dakota. He has lived in most cities of the world, including Japan, Saudi Arabia and many States. He served in the U.S. Navy aboard the USS Jason. MR2. He claims two purple hearts for action in the bars of Sasebo, Japan, which is also a sister city to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

He claims that he was kicked out of the third grade because he wouldn't shave. Although that may be true, he attended the University of North Dakota, among others, and graduated from Treasure Valley, Community college with a degree in Commercial Aviation. He has three children, two boys, Teddy and Justin and one girl, Alexis.

Ted was never afraid to try new things, or change careers and had several business ventures during his lifetime. Always fascinated with aviation, he became a pilot and began his career crop dusting in Texas and Idaho. He ultimately joined a commercial airline as a pilot, retiring after 26 years. During his airline career, he had a unique opportunity to fly for the airline's operation in Saudi Arabia. ...

Ted retired from the airlines. Ted owned and operated Captain Ted's Flying Service. He owned a Cessna 205 and was a contract pilot for the Office of Aircraft Services. Most of his flying was between 500 and 200 feet, tracking some animal, counting some animal, or surveying the land.

Ted got into ballooning by helping a balloon land in Phoenix, Arizona. As Ted tells it, "He threw a line down and told me to grab it. I am an idiot. I grabbed. Got him down and went to look inside the basket and decided I needed to do this." That did it. Ted bought his balloon, Windpacer from Mike Adams and earned his private balloon pilot license in the Spring of 1982.

He continued on and got his commercial balloon pilots license in the Fall of 1982. He quickly built a network of friends and colleagues in the ballooning community and became an instructor and mentor to young pilots. He participated in many balloon festivals and events across the Pacific Northwest, and all over the country, most notably flying his balloon in the world famous Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta for many years.

Ted had no crew. Before you start to feel sorry for him, listen to what he has to say about help getting the balloon inflated. He says "Mostly I use someone in the crowd, mainly women, mostly endowed women." As to crew names, he says "I ain't got none."

Ted organized the Battle Ground Fiesta Balloon Meet and organized the Safety Seminar for the Northwest Ballooning Society. He has won the BFA President's award, the BFA Director's award and was named NBA Aeronaut of the Year.

**The article on the following pages was published in *Aerostats* the June 2020 issue of The Monthly Newsletter of the Willamette Aerostat Society**

# **Ted, You Flew High and Well**

## **Memories of our friend and fellow balloonist, Ted Wirsch**

It is with great sadness I must report on the passing of one of the Pacific Northwest's most colorful balloonists, Ted Wirsch color passed away on Tuesday, May 12th.

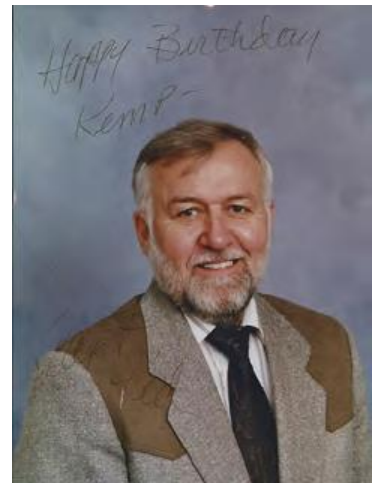
Ted had a long and storied career in hot air ballooning. (The emphasis in this sentence is the word "storied.") According to Kelly Carlson, "In 1989 Ted and three other pilots held the first unofficial Great Prosser Balloon Rally. Ted got together with a couple of Prosser residents and talked them into having an "official" rally the next year. Ted helped with the organizing, recruited pilots, drew up advertising flyers and posted them around town in places like the local laundromat and bars. Thanks to Ted and the folks he recruited there were 11 balloons in the air for the first official Great Prosser Balloon Rally." Ted was not the first balloonmeister, but held the duties for at least five years.

He loved taking his balloon, Wind Pacer, to schools for presentations. "It was a lot of fun to watch him interact with the kids as he patiently answered their questions," said Kelly.

She also mentioned, "Ted was a generous guy. There were a couple of years that the Prosser Rally was struggling financially. I was chairman and Ted was the Balloonmeister. For two years in a row Ted donated back his Balloonmeister pay to the rally. One year I saw him buying a stack of rally shirts and then watched as he inconspicuously dropped those shirts back onto the table to be sold again. I caught his eye as he was leaving the table. He just held his finger to his lips and winked."

Ted earned several nicknames during his balloon career. One was the "What Me Worry Pilot." Like the time Cheryl Isaacs watched Ted drive off from the Prosser Hotel without disconnecting his tank heaters. He drove all the way to the launch field with the electrical cord dangling behind him. Of course, no damage was done to his system or the motel outlet. He just gave his extension cord an extra ride to the field.

In truth, Ted took flying very seriously. He flew for several airlines in "real" life. He told me once that he made more decisions during the course of a balloon flight than he ever did flying a Boeing 727. He said flying a balloon was real flying. Flying a passenger jet was just a glorified bus driving job. Kemp and Georgia Lindsey recently met some people who flew with Ted during his air transport career. Kemp said, "While we were in Pender Harbour in Canada. "We met three people who knew Ted from his airline days. We were telling Ted stories. One of the ex-pilots did not seem too enthused about Ted. I asked if they had a problem, and he told me 'Never take tax advice from Ted.' Apparently, you can't just declare yourself to be a Church with the IRS."



*Ted gave this photo to Kemp Lindsey several years ago. On the back he wrote, "Happy Birthday, Kemp. Place this picture in a convenient spot to remind you of my assistance for any questions you may have about the art of hot air ballooning." It wasn't actually Kemp's birthday. Not even close. That didn't matter to Ted. Kemp has always treasured this photo along with Ted's friendship. Photo courtesy Kemp Lindsey*



*Ted loved to demonstrate the Windpacer's pop top.*

Stories always followed in Ted's wake. I vividly remember when he wanted to demonstrate how fast his Adams envelope could deflate. It turned out to be the most memorable deflation I've ever witnessed. It happened during the Fly Inside at the blimp hanger in Tillamook, Oregon back in 1996. Ted popped the top and all the hot air just gushed out. The stream of air hit the rafters of the hanger where several owls happily lived year-round. The stream of air dislodged a vast collection of old feathers, regurgitated owl pellets, along with a lot of dirt. It all drifted down to the hanger floor, except for the bits and pieces that landed in Gifford Hawn's cup of Pepsi. He suddenly decided he was not so thirsty after all.

Ted was not constricted by popular inflation techniques. Cheryl Isaacs mentioned "a group of local balloonists went to Maupin, Oregon one time with Denny Wright and Ted to fly in a new area. One night they were going to do a night glow at the golf course so we volunteered to help Ted. We had never helped him before so we asked what we could do. He had us pulling out fabric and one person did the crown line. I asked him if he wanted anyone on the throat but he said no he would use his stick. (????) So he went back to his van and pulled out a very large, thick stick and placed it in the middle of the throat to keep it open during inflation. I had never seen that before, but he assured us that was what he would use when he was flying alone and it allowed him to inflate the balloon on his own. He was quite a guy and a real pioneer in flying."

Besides advocating for Adams balloons and unique inflation techniques, Ted was always willing to mentor new pilots. Kelly Haverkate wrote: "Ted along with Jack and Carol Whitney took me under their wing when I needed time and instruction to get ready for my commercial check ride about 23 years ago! Ted was the D.E. who gave me the oral and practical commercial tests. He was the best! He spent much of the time 'instructing.' I learned a lot from Ted and will always have great memories of him."



*The sparkle in his eye and that radiant smile were Ted's trademark.*



*Photo taken at a Halloween party in 1997. Ted dug out his Arab headgear for the occasion. Ted's flying career included a span of time flying for Saudi Arabian Airlines.*

Carmen Blakely proudly recalls when she pulled one over on Ted during her check ride.



***Ted Wirch organized a balloon rally in Battleground, Washington for a few years. He kept it low-key. That was his style. He was also the force behind The Great Prosser Balloon Rally which celebrated its 30th year in 2019.***

She was flying Outer Limits, an Aurora 54K, at the time. Ted told her to descend fast and pull out at the last minute. Carmen knew very well that Outer Limits was a very responsive balloon, so she dropped like a rock and kept dropping. She watched Ted bend his knees expecting a very hard landing, only to pull up at the last moment. She was just a foot or so off the ground when she leveled out. Ted was amazed.

The very best story I ever heard came from Ted himself. He told of flying a man and his five or six-year old son during the Albuquerque Fiesta. They were flying low over town when the little boy told his dad he really, really needed to pee. The dad told his son to “hold it until we land.” Ted thought, he can just pee through the step hole in the basket instead of waiting. He did not think a little kid like that could possibly have much volume. Ted said when that kid started to pee it was like a fire hose had been turned on. When he noticed that cars down below him had turned on their windshield wipers Ted decided he’d better gain some altitude and not land until he was far outside the city limits.

I’m sure that was a pilot decision he never had to make while flying a Boeing 727.

Ballooning wasn’t his only passion. Ted also loved raising bees and making honey. He gifted more than one jar of honey to his ballooning friends and to landowners. He, also, taught bee keeping to school kids in the Vancouver area. He was just that kind of guy.

He will be greatly missed. Fly high and well, Ted.

## **Ted Wirch, Loved By So Many**

*I asked Jerry and Mary Gobet if they had any photos of Ted that I could use in the newsletter. Mary used them originally for Ted’s retirement party. These photos capture the true essence of Ted’s personality.*







**Lt to Rt: Steve Hays, Carman Blakely, Cheryl and Michale Isaacs, Carol and Ted Wirch in Galup, NM**



**Denny Wright (right) joined Ted and Carol for an after flight cigar.**



***Ted enjoyed a tiny bit of attention when it came his way.***



***Saluting the ballooning community from the heavens these days***