

BALLOON CHAMPIONSHIP REPORT (Excerpt about Smoke Balloonist)
MONDAY, JULY 15, 1985
BATTLE CREEK ENQUIRER by Stan Kaufman

Smoke balloonist Peter Krieg and his ad hoc crew struggled with the wind for nearly an hour before the signal was given and he was swept into the air, hanging only by a rope. "I want to walk into the crowd like a hero if I am walking at that point," Krieg told the crew that had been gathered just to help him pull off the stunt. Krieg showed the crew how they would inflate the balloon and how to keep it under control. The most important rule is to avoid the ropes, he said. Otherwise someone might take a hot-air balloon ride totally without control.

A crewman was selected to wield the axe, which, at Krieg's command, would send the balloon on a wild ride thousands of feet in the air. "You may ask why we do it with an axe," he said, "rather than a release tradition!" Krieg is the last of a breed. Smoke-balloon ascensions were popular at the turn of the century as barnstorming aeronauts performed at fairs, carnivals and air shows. Tethered to the balloon, they shot into the air and then parachuted to earth. Krieg's windblown balloon oscillated drunkenly as the burner filled it with hot air.

"Watch for grass fires," he yelled. He successfully demonstrated the smoke-balloon stunt here during the 5th World Hot-Air Balloon Championship in 1981. But an attempt to repeat it during the North American Championship in 1983 ended in a bust after the grass caught fire and consumed the muslin balloon. Trying again Sunday, the wind-buffeted balloon started to collapse. "Take it easy," Krieg said.

"Keep the sides out as much as you can. Stay away from the ropes." The balloon re-inflated, but then the wind nearly threw it out of control. The balloon began to collapse again. "I think we need to wait," Krieg said. "We'll try it one more time."

The wind subsided and the balloon stabilized. Krieg was hooked to the line and the crew-cheered as he gave the axe man the signal. "See ya later," he said as he was whisked into the sky. The balloon knifed into the air and Krieg cut loose when he judged he was near enough to land near the thousands of spectators. As his 'chute opened, the balloon slowly turned over, expelled black smoke and fell limply to earth.