

# **My Worst Balloon Launch**

**By Elmer A. Erdei**

With smaller balloons these days and some people thinking balloons the size of store-bought birthday balloons, I have to explain the size of 500 gram balloons way back in the Old Days.

To blow one up with helium or hydrogen one needs a compartment about 12 FT by 12 FT at least with a high overhead. Also, a garage-size door to get the balloon outside. While blowing it up, the nozzle is touching the deck and when it is full it is about 7 FT high and about that size in the middle.

First two months of 1954 I attended C school in Lakehurst, NJ [as an AG2]. I helped launch a few balloons. That was my first experience with big balloons. In March I arrived in Corpus Christi and [was] assigned to upper air section. We normally launched off the roof of the hanger, but on stormy, windy days one could end up running or getting blown off the roof.

It was a stormy day that I got my worst launch. Not much experience in that type of weather. I held the balloon by the nozzle in one hand and the instrument in the other hand and ran from the lee side of the hangar. The gale force wind forced me to let go of the balloon. Otherwise the nozzle of the balloon would have stayed in my hand and the rest of the balloon would simply take off. I ran as fast as I could as the balloon was going horizontal to the ground. If I let go of the instrument it would have skidded along the concrete.

Ahead of me was a parked R4D plane, If the present situation did not change, I and the balloon and instrument would crash into the plane. I could see myself in big trouble for damaging the plane. My career as an Aerographer was at an end. Amazing what goes through one's mind in a panic.

I threw the instrument up and hoped it went over the plane. Hearing no noise I guessed I had not hit the plane. Looking under the plane I saw the instrument hit the concrete and skid along and finally the balloon took it aloft. I went back to the hangar where we had an office on the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck. It was the Blue Angels Hangar. Except for our office, everything was painted blue or highly waxed and shining. I thought no signal from the instrument, but the other 2 guys in my section said, "Good signal." However, it only lasted a short time, but we did get high enough to be considered a legal, if short, upper air sounding.

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## **Aerographer Launching Balloons with Civilians**

**By Elmer A. Erdei**

Aerographer launching balloons with civilians, how did I get into that? Back in 1955 at Corpus Christi, TX I drove to San Antonio to pick up our son at the airport. I had time and looked for the Weather Bureau office. They were just getting ready to take an upper air sounding. I asked the balloon filler if he needed help and he said would I carry the instrument while he carried the balloon. We made the release and he was appreciative of the help. On the way to the plane I thought, "Well if I leave the Navy I can get a job with the Weather Bureau".

In early 1966 I was in the Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula, MS. I was in the nucleus crew of the USS Tripoli, LPH 10. One morning we headed out to sea with the ship manned by the shipyard crew. We Navy guys were strictly observers. The civilian crew were to test all the equipment, showing us it all worked. As

a LT at the time, I watched 3 men fill a 500 GM balloon. They were going to test the SMQ recorder they had installed.

They had no experience at this, only going by the instruction manual. They never got the balloon out the door – It Burst! They looked upset, disillusioned, etc. I thought about saying nothing, but asked if I could help. We filled another balloon and I took the balloon and instrument out the door to the small platform, which was over the ship's single screw. I got the balloon and instrument into the air and yelled to start the recorder. They asked me if the recorder was working correctly. I watched it for a couple minutes and told them "Perfect". All 3 of them had big smiles. There was a lot of hand shaking and big thanks.

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## **My Best Forecast**

**By Elmer A. Erdei**

Fifty years ago I was on Guam {as a LTJG}. I had been in Joint Typhoon Warning Center since my arrival in April 1960. We had no satellite data or computers. On 7 Nov. 1962 Typhoon Karen was moving north-northeast near the Truk Islands. I told LTCOL Hutchinson and CAPT Kotsch that Karen would turn to the west and head for our area. They told me to go ahead with my forecast. I plotted her path to hit [the] northern tip of Guam in about 3 days.

As soon as Offut AFB got the warning they called us. They said we were crazy as Karen was moving NNE. They were in control of movements of B52s on Guam. Karen turned to the west soon after and the B52s were sent elsewhere.

At 2215 HRS on 11 Nov. the eye of Karen was over the southern part of Guam. I was at home with my family. The wind had gotten over 100 KTS sustained before the eye and after; it really blew. It sounded like my guns being fired at our house. The pounding of debris was very loud. I put our furniture against the front door. It was a good thing that Karen was moving at near 20 KTS. Otherwise, damage worse. Just prior to hitting Guam a plane's dropsonde showed central pressure about 890 MB. Recorded pressures at various sites during the eye passage ranged from 907 to 938 MB. Sustained winds of 150 KTs with gusts above 200 KTS [were measured]. Except for generators in important locations, we had no power for 3 weeks. No water came out of our faucets at home, but we had a trickle from the outside faucet. We did not have a barbeque, so I used one of the many GI cans to make a fire. They had all blown into the gully below our house. The wooden Navy housing near us was demolished, so I used the wood for our fire. Mary Jane would put her iron on the grill and iron my uniforms. I was the only one at work not wearing a wrinkled uniform.

*Submitted by CDR Elmer A. Erdei, USN RET*