

HONORABLE MENTION: LAWNCHAIR LARRY

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Larry Walters' boyhood dream was to fly. But fates conspired to keep him from his dream.

He joined the Air Force, but his poor eyesight disqualified him from pilot status. After he was discharged from the armed services, he sat miserably in his backyard watching jets fly overhead, and dreaming of what might have been.

It was there sitting outdoors in his extremely comfortable deckchair that .
Larry hatched his weather balloon scheme

First he bought 45 weather balloons from an Army-Navy surplus store.
Then he firmly tethered with ropes his deckchair to the ground.
Finally he filled the four foot diameter balloons with helium, and attached them to the chair.
Then he strapped himself into his deckchair with some sandwiches, some cans of beer, and a pellet gun.

Larry's plan was to release the tethering ropes, and lazily float up to a height of about fiftyfeet above his backyard, where he would enjoy a few hours of flight before coming back down.
He figured he would down a few beers, eat a few sandwiches and then when it was time to descend, pop a few of the forty five balloons. He would then gradually lose altitude, and float happily down to earth.
But things didn't work out quite as Larry planned.

When his friends cut the ropes anchoring the deckchair, Larry did not float lazily up to fifty feet.
Instead, pulled by the forty five helium balloons holding thirty-three cubic feet of helium each, he streaked into the sky as if shot from a cannon.
He didn't level off at a hundred feet, nor did he level off at a thousand feet.
After climbing & climbing, he levelled off at sixteen thousand feet.

At that height he felt he couldn't risk shooting any of the balloons, lest he unbalance the load and really find himself in trouble.
So he stayed there, drifting with his beer and sandwiches for several hours while he considered his options.
At one point he crossed the approach corridor of Los Angeles' LAX airspace.
Delta and Trans-World airline pilots radioed in incredulous reports of the strange sight.

Eventually Larry gathered the nerve to shoot a few balloons, and slowly descended through the night sky.
But it wasn't a accident free descent.
The tethering ropes were still hanging from the deckchair.

They got tangled and caught in an electric power line.
The result was the Long Beach neighbourhood was blacked out for twenty minutes.

Larry, himself was able to climb down to safety, only to be arrested by waiting members of the Los Angeles Police Department.

As he was led away in handcuffs, a newspaper reporter who had been sent to cover the daring rescue asked him why he had done it.
Larry replied nonchalantly, "Well...a man can't just sit around".