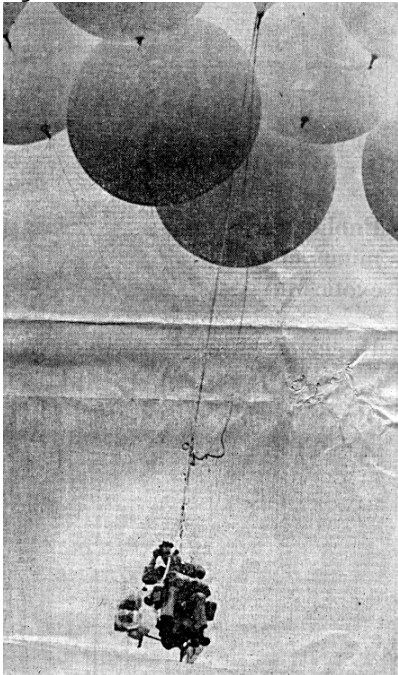


LAWN-CHAIR BALLOON FLIER TAKES HIS LIFE



Associated Press
Famed as the lawn-chair balloon man, truck driver Larry Walters, 44, recently shot himself to death in a remote canyon in the Angeles National Forest near Los Angeles. Relatives were unsure of the motive. In happier times, above and left, Walters startled pilots who spotted him soaring 3 miles high — almost 16,000 feet — sitting in a lawn chair attached to 42 helium-filled weather balloons. "I only did that because it was my lifelong dream of flight," he said.

From: frisbie@flying-disk.com
Newsgroups: alt.folklore.urban
Subject: Lawn chair balloonist (Balloonacy?)



Forty-five helium filled balloons send trucker Larry Walters aroft

Lawn-chair Lindbergh's scary flight
Balloons lofted man 16,000 feet

Mercury News Wire Services

LONG BEACH -- A truck driver rigged 45 weather balloons to a lawn chair and went on a 45-minute ride friday that carried him up to 16,000 feet before

he got cold, started shooting the balloons with a BB gun and crashed into a power line, officials said.

"I know it sounds strange, but it's true," Long Beach police Lt. Rod Mickelson said after he stopped laughing. "The guy just filled up the balloons with helium, strapped on a parachute, grabbed a BB gun and took off."

Police said they probably will drop the matter. "There probably won't be any action taken -- basically because there is nothing that covers something so unorthodox," Lt. Jim Reed said.

The Federal Aviation Administration was not amused. Regional safety inspector Neal Savoijl said the flying lawn chair was spotted by pilots from TWA and Delta jetliners at 16,000 feet above sea level.

We know he broke some part of the Federal Aviation Act and as soon as we decide which part it is, some type of charge will be filed. He was operating a balloon without a license. He created a hazard for those below him on the ground."

Police said Larry Walters, 33, of North Hollywood, went to his girlfriend's house in San Pedro on Thursday night, inflated 45 6-foot tall weather balloons with helium and attached them to an aluminum lawn chair tethered to the ground.

Friday morning with a half a dozen friends holding the tethers, Walters donned a parachute, strapped himself into the chair, and had his friends let him up slowly. Walters said he intended to go up 100 feet.

But as soon as the ropes were out of their hands, the last tether broke and I shot up," Walters said. Minutes later, he was calling for help over a CB radio that he had brought along for the ride. "At 16,000 feet it got too cold", and I knew I couldn't go much higher; he said. Lawn-Chair cruises by 2 jetliners

"This guy broke into our channel with a mayday," said Doug Dixon, an Orange County CB radio club member. "He said he had shot up like an elevator to 16,000 feet and was getting numb before he started shooting out some of the balloons. He sounded worried, but he wasn't panicked."

After he punctured several balloons, Walters said, his BB gun fell overboard and the chair drifted downward, controlled only by gallon jugs of water attached to the sides as ballast. In his hour-and-a-half flight Walters soared over San Pedro, the Pacific, Palos Verdes, Torrance I and the Long each airport.

As he was coming down over Long Beach roofs, he said. "I was saying prayers to God to please let me down in one piece." Walters said he was not particularly frightened on the way up, but his peace of mind vanished when he started to descend -- especially when he saw power lines directly below. "That's when I got scared" he said "Those can fry you!"

Walters' aluminum chair did not strike the power lines. The balloons draped themselves across the lines, and Walters was able to drop to the ground a few feet below his lawn chair.

The balloons caused a 20-minute blackout in a small area of Long Beach. Walters had a camera along, but he said, "I was so amazed by the view, I didn't even take one picture." He was uninjured.

"Since I was 13 years old, I've dreamed of going up unto the clear blue sky in a weather balloon. "By the grace of God; I fulfilled my dream But I wouldn't do this again for anything." "However" he said with a smile, I would be happy to endorse Sears lawn chairs."



Lawn-Chair pilot Larry Walters carts his contraption to waiting police car.

Balloonist Keeps souvenir

LOS ANGELES (AP) -- All Larry Walters has as a memento of his 3-mile-high flight in a balloon-propelled lawn chair is an empty plastic soda bottle. "I'm going to hold onto it. I'm going to have it bn>nzed," the 33-year-old truck driver said.

But it will be a long time before he forgets taking off Friday morning from the back yard of his fiancée's home in San Pedro, lashed to an aluminum lawn chair buoyed by 45 weather balloons and weighted with jugs of spring water for ballast.

During the 45-minute flight, he soared to 16,000 feet, was spotted by pilots of two jetliners, and so cold he became numb and had to shoot out some of the balloons with a BB gun to make his flying chair descend.

His journey ended unceremoniously with his contraption wrapped around a power line in Long Beach. Walters gave the trusty lawn chair away to some youngsters who helped pull his contraption off the power lines - police had turned off the electricity.

Sunday, July 4, 1982 San Jose Mercury News

Date: 24 Nov 93 10:00:46 PDT

Several months ago, there was a discussion here about the guy who flew a balloon-lofted lawn chair over Los Angeles. It is my sad duty to report the following.

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From The Los Angeles Times, Wednesday 24-Nov-93:

Larry Walters; Soared to Fame on Lawn Chair
by Myrna Oliver, Times Staff Writer

Larry Walters, who achieved dubious fame in 1982 when he piloted a lawn chair attached to helium balloons 16,000 feet above Long Beach, has committed suicide at the age of 44.

Walters died Oct. 6 after hiking to a remote spot in Angeles National Forest and shooting himself in the heart, his mother, Hazel Dunham, revealed Monday. She said relatives knew of no motive for the suicide. "It was something I had to do," Walters told The Times after his flight from San Pedro to Long Beach on July 2, 1982. "I had this dream for 20 years, and if I hadn't done it, I would have ended up in the funny farm."

Walters rigged 42 weather balloons to an aluminum lawn chair, pumped them full of helium and had two friends untether the craft, which he had dubbed "Inspiration I."

He took along a large bottle of soda, a parachute and a portable CB radio to alert air traffic to his presence. He also took a camera but later admitted, "I was so amazed by the view I didn't even take one picture."

Walters, a North Hollywood truck driver with no pilot or balloon training, spent about two hours aloft and soared up to 16,000 feet -- three miles -- startling at least two airline pilots and causing one to radio the Federal Aviation Administration.

Shivering in the high altitude, he used a pellet gun to pop balloons to come back to earth. On the way down, his balloons draped over power lines, blacking out a Long Beach neighborhood for 20 minutes.

The stunt earned Walters a \$1,500 fine from the FAA, the top prize from the Bonehead Club of Dallas, the altitude record for gas-filled clustered balloons (which could not be officially

recorded because he was unlicensed and unsanctioned) and international admiration. He appeared on "The Tonight Show" and was flown to New York to be on "Late Night With David Letterman," which he later described as "the most fun I've ever had."

"I didn't think that by fulfilling my goal in life -- my dream -- that would create such a stir," he later told The Times, "and make people laugh."

Walters abandoned his truck-driving job and went on the lecture circuit, remaining sporadically in demand at motivational seminars. But he said he never made much money from his innovative flight and was glad to keep his simple lifestyle.

He gave his "aircraft" -- the aluminum lawn chair -- to admiring neighborhood children after he landed, later regretting it.

In recent years, Walters hiked the San Gabriel Mountains and did volunteer work for the U.S. Forest Service.

"I love the peace and quiet," he told The Times in 1988. "Nature and I get along real well."

An Army veteran who served in Vietnam, Walters never married and had no children. He is survived by his mother and two sisters.