



## First Flight Shrine

### Colonel Joe Kittinger

1928 -

**First To Fly Solo Across The Atlantic Ocean In A Helium Balloon, 1984**

Inducted in 1998

Joe Kittinger, a native of Orlando, Florida, and eventually a Colonel in the Air Force, began flying aircraft in 1949. Kittinger qualified in practically all types of flying machines including hang gliders, hot air and gas balloons, propeller driven aircraft, and jet aircraft.

On August 16, 1960, he set three world records: the highest parachute jump (102,800 feet), the longest parachute free fall (4 minutes 36 seconds), and the first person to exceed the speed of sound without an aircraft or space vehicle (714 mph during free fall). In September 1984, Kittinger set a world record for the longest distance flown in a 3,000 cubic meter helium balloon. This first solo transatlantic balloon flight from Caribou, Maine, to Montenotte, Italy, covered 3,543 miles in 86 hours.

Colonel Kittinger received the Distinguished Flying Cross on five occasions, two for his balloon experiments and three for his combat tours in Southeast Asia. During his last combat tour as Commander of the 555th Fighter Squadron, his aircraft was shot down and he was imprisoned in a North Vietnamese POW camp.

Source: [firstflight.org](http://firstflight.org)



*Kittinger after landing in Savona Italy on  
September 18, 1984  
Photo: Red Bull Stratos*