

Leak Stops 'Solo' Balloon Flight

It was a short odyssey, and a surprising one for Robert Sparks of Pottersville, N.J., who wanted to make the first solo balloon flight across the Atlantic and lifted off from the New Seabury Country Club on Cape Cod at 1:05 A.M. yesterday. But he soon had company. His crew chief, G. Hadden Wood of Greenwich, Conn., intentionally hung on to a trailing nylon rope when the balloon lifted off and—passing over the heads of 3,000 startled spectators — began the journey dangling 12 feet below the gondola. An hour later, Mr. Sparks hauled his crew chief aboard with a winch.

By yesterday afternoon, the 95-foot red, white and blue balloon, named Odyssey, had developed a slow leak. By 6:30 P.M., when the pair touched down southeast of Nantucket, they had traveled less than 200 miles. Mr. Sparks was picked up immediately by a Coast Guard helicopter. The balloon, which was cut loose, quickly soared to about 7,000 feet.

Before the lift-off, the stowaway had put aboard extra oxygen and a parachute, a thermal suit and a survival suit identical to those of Mr. Sparks.

As the result of a two-hour visit in 1972 from E. Howard Hunt Jr., who was later convicted of conspiracy in the Watergate break-in, "I was for several months privy to details about Watergate that were not publicly known," William F. Buckley Jr. says in his new book, "Execution Eve:—And Other Contemporary Ballads," to be published next month by G. P. Putman's Sons.

Mr. Buckley, a conservative editor, columnist and television host who is the godfather of Mr. Hunt's three older children, said Mr. Hunt visited Mr. Buckley at his New York apartment on Dec. 18, 1972, 10 days after Mr. Hunt's wife, Dorothy, was killed in a plane crash in Chicago. Mr. Buckley said Mrs. Hunt's will named him as alternate executor of her estate, although he had not seen the Hunts "for several years."

Mr. Hunt "told me the story of Watergate—as far as he knew it," Mr. Buckley said. "He had no knowledge of any complicity by the President," the author added. This, Mr. Buckley noted, was before the White House began to worry that Mr. Hunt was threatening "blackmail." Citing the incident to explain "certain blurs" in what he wrote in early 1973, Mr. Buckley said he had been "greatly encumbered" at the time by confidential information that he could neither act on nor write about until it was "teased out of reluctant witnesses" or given to the Justice Department by bargaining co-conspirators.

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Laurie Johnston