



PRESS RELEASE

Shoot Balloon Photos, Not Balloons!

The Balloon Federation of America strongly suggests calling local authorities if you are unsure of what you are seeing in the skies above.

For Immediate Release

Indianola, February 23, 2023: Regarding the recent US military downing of assorted balloons across North America, the Balloon Federation of America urges all Americans to let authorities determine the status of any object they might see floating overhead.

“We’re friendly - don’t shoot!” says Pat Cannon, president of the Balloon Federation of America which promotes the sport of ballooning for thousands of pilots who fly hundreds of thousands of passengers in gas and hot air balloons.

“Most modern manned gas balloons are white to minimize daytime thermal gains and strongly resemble the round downed Chinese balloon when observed from the ground” says Cannon. “Unfortunately, both gas and hot air balloons most often fly below 10,000 feet and well within the range of most high caliber rifles.” All four balloons shot down by the US military were unmanned.

Balloons fly year-round but warming spring weather increases the number of flights. Because of the current fixation on shooting down spy balloons, balloonists from across the nation are expressing concern that they may be mistaken for an unmanned or hostile balloon and shot at.

“Shooting at ANY aircraft is a federal crime – period,” says Cannon. “You don’t own the airspace over your house. Your shots will backfire – you’re endangering the public, you can’t claim self-defense, and you will certainly face federal and civil charges,” he continues. “Don’t do it!” Contact your local non-emergency 911/311 to report anything of concern and keep shooting photos/video until you get a stable image/video zoomed in as close as possible.

Sport gas balloons are flown frequently in the US. The Gordon Bennett Gas Balloon Race has been an annual global tradition held almost uninterrupted since 1906. Gas balloons annually launch and race from Albuquerque, NM attempting to fly the longest distance and duration. While distances and directions vary yearly, winds generally take these balloons easterly over many states and even well into Canada’s northern provinces.

Hot air balloons by contrast are better distinguished as multi-colored, more elongated in shape, and heated a few times per minute with propane burners.

Manned sports balloons have been hit by rifle fire in the past, so far without injury. However in 1995, two American pilots manning a hydrogen-filled gas sport balloon participating in the Gordon Bennett Race in Europe were shot down by a helicopter after entering Belarus airspace. Both pilots perished.

Gas balloons are filled with either helium or hydrogen, the latter being highly explosive if not handled correctly. Gravity, however, is indifferent to a balloon’s manned or unmanned status.

Photo Credit (left to right): China, unknown. Middle, Alyssa Sullivan. Right, Gordon Schwontkowski. Viewed from the ground, the Chinese spy balloon closely resembles US manned sport gas balloons and, to some degree, manned hot air balloons which fly much more frequently and at lower altitudes throughout the US.

To learn more about Lighter than Air travel, please visit the Balloon Federation of America’s website at <https://bfa.net>

