

# Bet Lives On Balloon

NAILA, West Germany — Four children and four adults bet their lives on a hot air balloon made of nylon and bedsheets and drifted through the darkness of East Germany, hitting the jackpot — freedom across the border in West Germany.

Peter Strelzek, an airplane mechanic who designed the escape craft, told reporters Sunday the 12-mile, 20-30 minute flight was his second attempt to escape by balloon from his communist-ruled homeland.

"It was no longer possible for

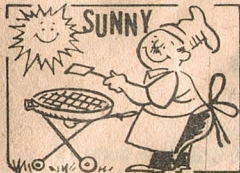
us to lie to our children and put up with the political conditions in East Germany," he said.

He, his wife and two children, along with stonemason Andreas Wetzel, his wife and their two children, got onto a gondola made of an iron plate. Gas burners were fired, filling the handsewn envelope with hot air at a field near Lobenstein and the balloon rose aloft.

Borne toward the south by a good breeze, the refugees flew over the "death strip" border and put down in this Bavarian

town, far from the border's electrified fences and minefields. It was believed to be the first time refugees had used a balloon to cross the border.

During the flight, the children rode in the middle of the 18-square-foot iron plate, and were huddled around bottles of gas used to fuel the fire that heated air in the 5,230-cubic-yard balloon. The adults rode on four iron rods projecting laterally from the plate, each grabbing onto inch-thick ropes attaching the gondola to the balloon.



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