



Smithsonian
National Air and Space Museum

S.P.A.C.E., Inc. Project Strato-
Jump [Nick Piantanida] Collection

2016

National Air and Space Museum Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Air and Space Museum Archives
Title:	S.P.A.C.E., Inc. Project Strato-Jump [Nick Piantanida] Collection
Identifier:	NASM.2016.0031
Date:	(bulk 1960s - 2000s)
Extent:	1.38 Cubic feet ((4 boxes))
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Vern Piantanida, Gift, 2016

Preferred Citation

S.P.A.C.E., Inc. Project Strato-Jump [Nick Piantanida] Collection, Accession 2016-0031, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

No restrictions on access.

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Biographical / Historical

Nicholas John "Nick" Piantanida (1932-1966) was a truck driver, athlete, and sky diver who aspired to set a new world altitude record for balloons and to establish a new mark for the highest parachute jump. Piantanida and a backer established S.P.A.C.E. (Survival Programs Above a Common Environment), Inc. to handle the finances of the Strato-Jump program conceived by Piantanida. Piantanida made his first attempt in October 1965. Wind sheared the top off of his helium-filled polyethylene balloon at just 22,700 feet, but he was able to make a safe parachute landing. Raven Industries built the gondola and the balloons for the next two attempts. Paul Edward Yost, one of the founders of the company and the acknowledged father of the modern hot air balloon, would manage flight operations. In February 1966, Piantanida made Strato-Jump II and reached a world altitude of 123,500; however a flight mishap made the flight unqualified for a record. Piantanida had to disconnect his oxygen supply to make the jump and his ground controllers had no choice but to cut the gondola loose from the balloon, allowing Piantanida to return safely to earth still seated in the gondola, dangling beneath a large parachute. Strato-Jump III

was at 57,600 feet when ground controllers heard a sudden hissing sound and Piantanida started to say, "Emergency." Yost immediately ordered the gondola cut loose once again. It took twenty-six minutes to parachute back to earth, landing in a field near Worthington, MN, a little more than sixty miles from the take-off point. When the chase crew, who had been following the flight in a light plane, landed near the gondola, they found the pilot alive but unconscious. While the cause of the accident has never been completely resolved, Piantanida apparently depressurized his helmet accidentally and fell unconscious from hypoxia. He died on August 29, 1966, without regaining consciousness. Project Strato-Jump was documented in the book *Magnificent Failure: Free Fall from the Edge of Space* (2003) by Craig Ryan, and ESPN made a film about Nick Piantanida entitled "Angry Sky" (2015) directed by Jeff Tremaine.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of approximately 1.38 cubic feet of material relating to Nicholas John "Nick" Piantanida and Project Strato-Jump including correspondence; news clippings; photographs; motion picture film; video recordings; biographical information; flight reports; check lists; financial records; legal documents and contracts; technical information about Project Strato-Jump; information about Piantanida's David Clark pressure suit; and records pertaining to both the book *Magnificent Failure: Free Fall from the Edge of Space* (2003) by Craig Ryan and the ESPN film "Angry Sky" (2015) directed by Jeff Tremaine. Motion picture and video formats include 16mm film and VHS. Photographic formats include color and black and white prints of various sizes, the largest of which is 8 by 10 inches.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Astronautics
- Balloons
- Parachuting
- Strato-Jump Program

Types of Materials:

- Motion pictures (visual works)
- Newspaper clippings
- Photographic prints
- Reports

Names:

- Piantanida, Nicholas,, 1932-1966
- S.P.A.C.E., Inc.