

THE JOURNEY OF A BALLOON

Richard Conniff, writing in *National Geographic*, tells the story of two Swiss men, Bertrand Piccard and Wim Verstraeten, who set out on Jan. 12, 1997, to be the first to circle the earth in a balloon.

Their aircraft was called the *Breitling Orbiter*, and it was a high-tech masterpiece, complete with solar power panels and an airtight capsule for pressurized flight at high altitudes that would enable them to fly the jet stream at 200 miles an hour. The price tag: \$1.5 million.



Shortly after liftoff, however, calamity struck. With the cabin sealed tight and pressurized, the pilots suddenly noticed strong kerosene fumes. Soon they emailed their control center: “Kerosene’s coming through each pipe on both inside tanks and we cannot tighten them anymore. It is a nightmare ... Answer quick.”

They were advised to lower their altitude, open the capsule, and hold on until they could reach the coast of Algeria. The fumes proved overwhelming, however, and they were forced to ditch in the Mediterranean.

The cause of the kerosene leak? A clamp, like those used on an automobile radiator hose, had failed. Price tag: \$1.16.

It doesn’t take much to undermine a great enterprise.

Later, on March 21, 1999, Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones became the first to circumnavigate the earth in a Roziere balloon known as the *Breitling Orbiter 3* in a flight lasting 477 hours and 47 minutes.

God intends that the Christian life be a triumphant journey, but often we allow small things – like doubt or fear – to scuttle God’s grand plan for us.

When those things happen, notify your “mission control;” open the lines of communication with your Creator, and allow Him to advise you.

– Beecher Hunter