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Come Up and Get Me: An Autobiography of Colonel Joe Kittinger

Joe Kittinger, Craig Ryan

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A few years after his release from a North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camp in 1973, Colonel Joseph Kittinger retired from the Air Force. Restless and unchallenged, he turned to ballooning, a lifelong passion as well as a constant diversion for his imagination during his imprisonment. His primary goal was a solitary circumnavigation of the globe, and in its pursuit he set several ballooning distance records, including the first solo crossing of the Atlantic in 1984. But the aeronautical feats that first made him an American hero had occurred a quarter of a century earlier.

By the time Kittinger was shot down in Vietnam in 1972, his Air Force career was already legendary. He had made a name for himself at Holloman Air Force Base near Alamogordo, New Mexico, as a test pilot who helped demonstrate that egress survival for pilots at high altitudes was possible in emergency situations. Ironically, Kittinger and his pre-astronaut colleagues would help propel Americans into space using the world's oldest flying machine--the balloon. Kittinger's work on Project Excelsior--which involved daring high-altitude bailout tests--earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross long before he earned a collection of medals in Vietnam. Despite the many accolades, Kittinger's proudest moment remains his free fall from 102,800 feet during which he achieved a speed of 614 miles per hour.

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In this long-awaited autobiography, Kittinger joins author Craig Ryan to document an astonishing career.

Selected by *Popular Mechanics* as a Top Book of 2010

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