

AIR FORCE NEWS

BALLOONIST SOARS TO RECORD 19-MILE ALTITUDE

First official Air Force films of the highest balloon ascent ever. Near Crosby, Minnesota, an Air Force doctor - Major David Simons - has his gear adjusted for the ride.

Major Simons' main interest is not in setting a record, however - what he's after is the opportunity to check his own physiological and psychological reactions at an altitude 5 times higher than most commercial planes fly.

The plastic sphere - 200 feet in diameter - is on its way. Major Simons' aim is to spend a 32-hour period at 100,000 feet - or 19 miles. The previous balloon record is 2 hours at 96,000 feet set by Captain Joe Kittinger two months ago in testing Major Simons' equipment. Man's all time altitude record is 126,000 feet, set by Colonel John Strapp in a Bell X-2 rocket plane in 1956.

The 19-mile climb takes two hours. From the miniature space laboratory he is carrying with him, Major Simons keeps constant radio contact with the ground. What he learns aloft is expected to prove useful for rocket and satellite flights of the future.