Wellman is Sure He Can Fly to the North Pole.

Arranges for a Larger Balloon, More Provisions and Better Facilities for Dog Sledging.

IN the plan of campaign for this year's operations of the Record-Herald polar expedition there are some features of importance which were not in the plan of last year. With some of these new features we propose to deal in the present letter.

By enlarging the gas reservoir, or balloon part of the airship America, we secured a much larger lifting force, and are, therefore, able to carry a larger cargo. By a certain economical disposition of the guide-rope weights (which must be explained in a future article) we are glad to be able to announce that when the America starts northward from our headquarters in Spitzbergen, as we hope and believe she will start late next July or in the early part of August, the grand total weight carried, in the air or dragging over the surface of the earth, gliding on the ice or swimming in the water, will be upward of 10½ tons, or more than 21,000 pounds.

The greater part of this weight, it may be easily imagined, is devoted to the machinery and the fuel appliances with which we hope to reach the north pole. To reach the pole is our first objective. To that end everything is shaped, all our energies directed. But we have at the same time been compelled to think and think very seriously, as to the means of getting back again. We are willing to take all the risks naturally involved in such an undertaking, be they great or small. But it is our duty to make them as small as possible, to reduce them to the lowest possible minimum. We have no desire to pose as martyrs in the cause of science, to leave our bones bleaching amid the eternal ice fields of the remote north.

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One of the most striking, and possibly most valuable, of the new features of the project of which we have spoken has to do directly with this question of the return voyage. Last year, had we been able to start from Spitzbergen, we should have carried with us only enough food to sustain the crew during 75 days. This was upon the theory that if the America could not make her way to the pole and back again as a true ship of the air, or, after her fuel was exhausted or her motor broken down, as a drifting balloon taking advantage of the winds for working southward, then we could, in default of everything else, take to the ice with our sledges and make our way back to our headquarters or to other place of safety during the autumn, and within the period for which we carried provisions.

But now we have enlarged that idea. Instead of provisions for only 75 days we carry with us in the America enough for 300 days. In other words, if necessary, the crew of four men can remain out the entire winter, without securing a pound of game or reaching depots of supplies of any sort, and still maintain themselves till the following summer on the resources carried with them.

Perhaps it will give the reader a clearer idea of the sum total and all the values of our plan if we state, in their proper order, the various possibilities for which we go provided, and upon one or the other of which we depend for success, at least for safety.

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The first of these is the America itself, considered as a true airship, as an aerial cruiser, fitted for a long voyage, both in time and distance. We believe we have built such a ship. We believe she will prove herself able to steam, so to speak, a distance of more than 2,000 knots, or nearly double the distance from our base to the pole and return, of her own force and fuel. She is not a mere raft, as was Andree's balloon, drifting with the winds. She is not even a sailing vessel, wholly dependent upon the winds for her progress. She is better than that—a steamship of the air able to go against the current and able to keep going a long time. In future letters I shall revert to this branch of the subject—the reasons why we think we have a fair chance of reaching the pole. It returning in safety from our most northerly point that we are now immediately concerned.

We believe we have reason to hope, without, of course, being sure, that this aerial cruiser will carry us to the pole and then south again to our base or to land where we shall be safe, moving with her engines and screws and the supply of fuel carried in her bunkers. But suppose from one cause or another she fails us. The fuel might be exhausted at or in the vicinity of the pole. The motor gearing might break down. The gas reservoir or steel car might be disrupted in the straining due to the pull of the retarder or drag anchor in a high wind. Something else—the unforeseen—might happen; it is an unpleasant little way the unforeseen has of obtruding itself. Then what?

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Circumstances would determine which of our various alternatives was first to come into play. Suppose the best we can do with the airship is to get within 50, or 100, or 150 miles of the pole. Then it breaks down, or the fuel supply is exhausted. If we are carried that near to the pole before the end of August (as we should be if at all) we do not propose to come back without the prize, if it be possible to get it by another means. In such case we should bring the airship down to the surface of the ice. The gas would be let go. Her career would come to a sudden end. But not her usefulness. Having carried us and our provisions, sledges, dogs, boats, instruments and all equipment so near the pole, she would now render us the further service of becoming a base of operations. Planting everything on the thickest, firmest ice we could find, we should use the thousands of square yards of fabric of which the gas bag is composed, and the steel frame of the big car, for the improvisation of a very comfortable hut. Snow and ice blocks could form the walls, and the fabric the roof and carpet and walls. A few days for this work—or for starting it—and then we should set out for the pole while the light yet remained.

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At the north pole the sun reaches the horizon on the 23rd of September, disappears that day or the next, and is not seen again at that particular spot for exactly six months. But for several weeks there is at the pole itself twilight sufficient to travel by, and the farther south one goes the darker the nights and the brighter the days—at the pole noon and midnigt being exactly alike. Were it necessary, we could remain out upon the ice, going to the pole and returning to our base, till the middle of October, with light enough to move by. In case of last resort we could remain out still longer, traveling by moonlight. But it is not probable that would be necessary. If the voyage of the America comes to an end in that region it will surely be earlier than the 1st of September; and during the month of September, all light, night as well as day, we should have ample time to go to and from our airship base within such distances as we have named.

There would be one risk in this plan—the risk that, having left the base created by the descent of the airship upon the ice, in a journey by dog sledges to the pole, we should not be able to find the base again on our return. Of course, that would be awkward—because failure to find the base would mean starvation out on the ice pack. This would be the case for the reason that the America is to carry nearly 3,000 pounds of food for men and dogs, and would have the most of it left when she came down upon the ice. But we should carry only a small part of this store with us on the sledge journey, just enough for 30 days or whatever time we estimated would be required to go to the pole and back again, with a margin. To carry the entire supply, or enough to last us through the winter in case of need, would be to burden ourselves with such heavy weights that we should never get anywhere.

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Naturally we should adopt every precaution for finding the base again. One is usually cautious when it is a matter of life and death—his own life or death—that he is playing with. If the ice fields that cover the Arctic ocean were stable, stationary, we should have no trouble. But if they were stable and stationary it would not be necessary to employ an airship for reaching the pole; that much-sought spot would have been attained long ago by use of the obvious method of throwing out post after post, each in advance of the other, and maintaining communication between them as links in a chain, till the outermost link is at the pole. This is the method which almost every man in the world has devised in his own mind for reaching the pole, and he cannot understand why poleseekers have not adopted it. The reason is plain. The ice will not stand still. It drifts to and fro, first in one direction and then in another, and you can ever tell in advance which one. If an expedition were to establish depots or stations out on the sea ice the chances are it could never find them again.

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In our case were the circumstances such as we have described it would be absolutely necessary to find the base, the airship camp, where the bulk of the food would have to be left. In so short a time as 20 or 30 days it is improbable the base would drift very far out of position. The movement of the ice is rarely more than a mile or so per 24 hours during any considerable period, and generally it does not amount to half a mile in any given direction. The one steady movement, speaking of weeks, not merely of hours or days, is southward. East or west drifts are not sharp, and one is quite likely to offset another. By carefully watching the winds during absence we could gain a fair idea of the direction the drift had taken our precious base. Before leaving the base we should take care to mark it by means of the steel framing of the car with a flagstaff as high as we could push it—certainly 50 feet, and perhaps 100. This would enable us to see the mark in clear weather a distance of from eight to 12 miles. We have under consideration the employment of a small balloon (such as we use at our headquarters in Spitzbergen for weather and wind observations) to leave flying hundreds of feet in the air above the base, held captive by a wire, and with ballast arranged to diminish about as rapidly as the loss of ascensional force due to the leakage of gas.

This is of doubtful utility, and it is probable we should rely upon the flagstaff anchored in firm ice. At any rate, on returning to the region where the base was believed to be, it would be necessary to zig-zag our course and throw out flankers on snowshoes till the mark was picked up. It is obvious that the practicability and prudence of this method, this leaving of the base which it would be not easy to find again, but which must be found—depends entirely upon the distance the base happens to be from the pole and consequently the length of the journey to be undertaken. If the distance is too great and the time to be away too long it would be a hazardous undertaking.

To come to the second alternative, suppose the America takes us to the pole, or very near to it—so near that it would be a matter of but a few days' travel by sledge to reach it. In that case we might sledge to the pole and still have time to attempt the return journey over the ice in autumn. It will all depend upon circumstances—the date and place at which the airship voyage comes to an end, the condition of the ice, the condition of the men and equipment. The important thing is that we should have our choice: We could elect to make a dash for the nearest land, or stay over winter where we were, in either case having everything we needed to do with.

From the pole to North Greenland the distance is 390 sea miles, which we should be able to travel in from 30 to 40 days. Whatever drift there was in the ice would help us on the way, instead of being so much against us, as Commander Peary found was the case in his northward journey from Grand Land. At Greenland or Grand Land we should be safe. Game can always be found there—polar oxen, bears, seal, hares, even deer in some parts. With an early start from Spitzbergen and rapid movement thereafter, we might even be able to reach Greenland in time to permit us to work south to communicate with the Eskimos at Etah. Perhaps we should find Mr. Peary somewhere in that region, and we are sure he would give us hospitable welcome.

From the pole back to our own base in Spitzbergen the distance is 618 miles—rather a long journey. Still, it might be done in 50 or 60 days. There would be two things in our favor should we attempt it. One, the drift of the ice, which in the autumn should average perhaps two miles per day, as we would be traveling directly toward the only outlet of the Arctic ocean, that which runs between Greenland and Spitzbergen, and from those islands, where we shall have a depot of supplies, and where game may be found, work our way along the coast to our base at Dane's island. By this route the distance from the pole to land is 550 miles, and we believe we could cover it in the months of September and October.

There is also the possibility that we might make for Franz Josef Land, where the land is still nearer—495 miles—and where there are depots of supplies and many bears and other animals.

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Suppose the America were to take us to the pole, and there, or in that vicinity, after we had made our objective, were to break down as a true cruiser through failure of the fuel supply or accident to the machinery, though still retaining the gas? In such case the first alternative before us would be to use the ship as a drifting balloon. All the machinery would be broken up and thrown overboard, piecemeal, as ballast. A large part of the steel car and the tank for gasoline would go the same way. By this means, with the rate of leakage of gas remaining normal, the ship could be kept afloat a total of 25 to 35 days, and in that time the chance that the winds would drift us southward to Greenland, or the northern part of the American continent, or Alaska, or Siberia, or Russia, or Norway or Spitzbergen, or Franz Josef Land, would be very great. The pole is surrounded by land, excepting only 300 miles between Greenland and Spitzbergen, where there is an opening into the Atlantic ocean. The minimum distance of land from the pole is 390 miles, the maximum 1,320 miles, and the mean 860 miles. Considering the thing purely as a matter of chance, like the whirl of a wheel of fortune, and 860 miles is the distance the balloon would have to drift to find land, and a fresh breeze of 15 miles per hour could do that in less than three days. At any rate, the winds might easily carry us so far south that we could without great difficulty make the remainder of the journey by sledge.

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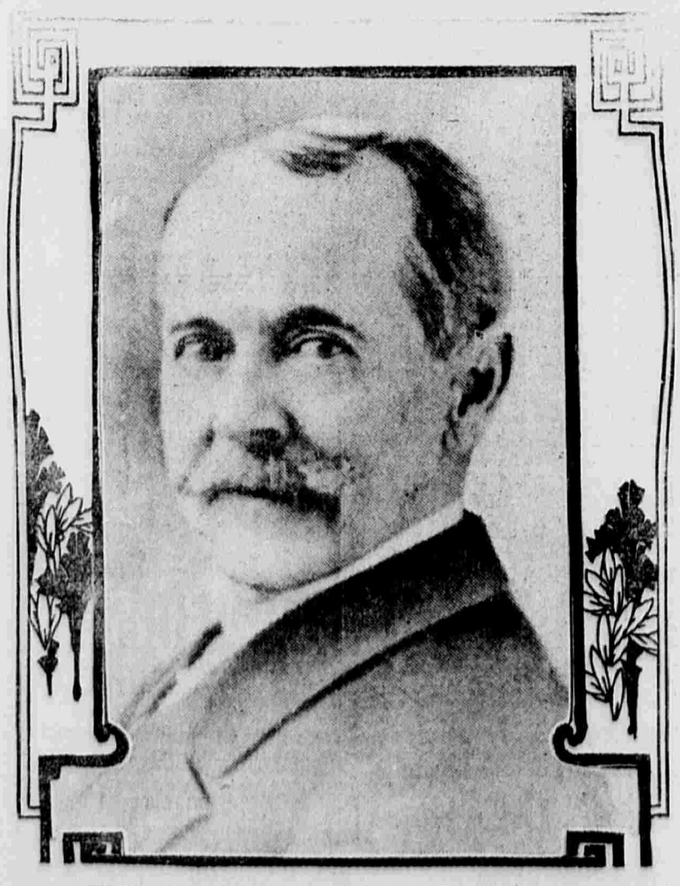
There are so many possibilities that it is scarcely worth while pointing them all out. The main point is that we go prepared to meet all of them. If we wish, we could winter at the pole itself, with the food we carry taking us through till the return of the light, and then sufficing for a sledge journey southward to land in the spring, when the sledging is better than in the autumn because the ice is firmer, the snow harder, due to the lower temperature. No matter where the America were to descend—excepting, of course, in the sea—we could, if we thought it wise, winter there. If we could get game—and game is to be found almost everywhere—so much the better. But without game we should be in no danger of starvation. We can make our base on the pack ice, as near the pole as the airship carries us, and go after the pole by sledge during the autumn. Or, we can do the same thing and wait till the following spring for the sledging. We can make a dash for home during the fall, or wait for the return of the light next year. Whatever the circumstances, we go prepared to meet them, to take advantage of the line of least resistance, to do that or take that direction which seems easiest and most promising and safest.

Naturally, we hope that none of these alternatives will have to be resorted to. We hope, and believe there is fair and reasonable ground for the hope, that the America, moving from her own forces, her engine and screw and fuel, will carry us to the pole and back again to some part of the circle of land surrounding the Polar sea. If we are fortunate enough once to reach the pole, after that we become opportunists—we go with the winds, to Alaska, Siberia, Greenland, whitnersoever they blow. And as to all the lands surrounding the pole, we carry with us the latest and most authoritative information and maps and charts—data as to the location of tribes, outposts, game, trails, water courses, timber, distances. This valuable information has been furnished us through the kindness of various governments and geographical societies. Whether we come back with our engines and screws, with the America as a mere drifting balloon, this year by sledging, or next year by sleding and drifting with the ice, we hope to return. If we should not be heard from this year there will be no need for anxiety on the part of our friends. The next year may see us emerging from some part of the great unknown area lying to the northward of civilization.



TYPEWRITER INVENTOR PRONOUNCED INSANE.

J. B. Hammond, who invented one of the first commercial typewriters, has been by a New York court declared insane and has been sent to an asylum. He is said to have squandered a fortune and to be in a mental condition where he cannot take care of himself. He still has a large estate, however, and is in no danger of want. Mr. Hammond has always been in close touch with his employes and is a true friend of the workingman. He was born in Boston in 1839 and is a graduate of the University of Vermont, class of '61. His first typewriter patent was taken out in 1880.