



K2TQN

VINTAGE RADIO

The CQD and Rescue

This month I present the final episode of Jack Irwin's adventure on the Airship *USS America*. Last month we left Jack and the *America* lost in the fog over the Atlantic with only one engine running, operating his rig only on batteries. Jack's report continues:

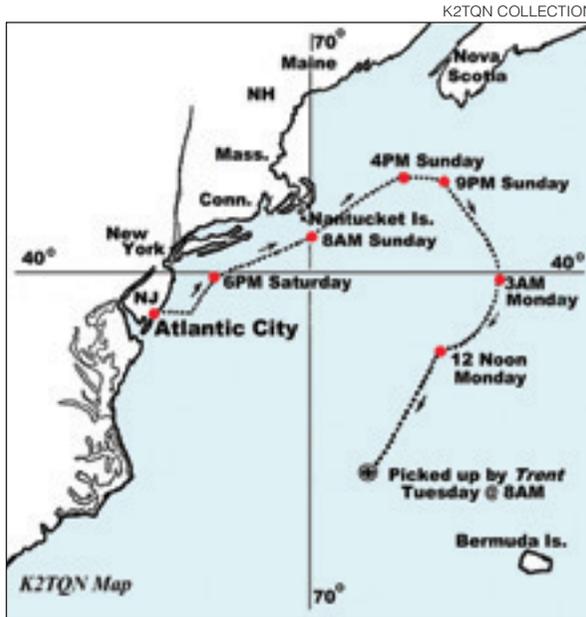
"At 5:05 AM on the 16th, my log shows that the engines had stopped and that I was listening to all stations talking about us and calling W. I heard the Sagaponack (Long Island) station inform Siasconset that we were 60 miles South of Scotland Light at 6:50 PM the previous night when we had been sighted by a steamer and reported by radio. All this time the wind was steadily increasing but was in our favor and we made such good time that we decided to allow our remaining engine to cool off. I waited until Siasconset station was very strong before I attempted to communicate. At 10:35 AM I established communication with SC (Siasconset, Nantucket Island) sending him several messages. We were very close to that island during the day, so close, indeed, and so strong our signals, that I afterwards learned that the boys at the stations ran outdoors to try to sight us.

"Our expedition had been financed by several newspapers and Mr. Wellman, a newspaperman himself, commenced to file voluminous messages to them. I sent the short ones, but as they became lengthier I protested that the batteries were running down and that we should conserve our power in case we needed help. He promptly agreed with me.

"The wind now increased to a gale and began to bear us southeast. When night fell we again experienced trouble in remaining in the air. We were compelled constantly to throw supplies overboard."

C Q D

"That night I attempted to obtain assistance, calling C Q D, which at that time



The flight of the *America* from its liftoff from Atlantic City, New Jersey to the crew's rescue at sea by the *SS Trent*.



Louis Ginsberg, wireless operator on the Royal Mail Steampacket Line's *SS Trent* who received the "CQD" from Jack Irwin, operator of Walter Wellman's airship *America* on October 18, 1910.

was the signal of distress. Our engines were now useless. The voyage had failed and our one concern was to get away with our lives. I early realized that there was no hope of assistance while we were in the air and that we would have to take to the lifeboat. However, with the sea then running and the gale blowing, we simply had

to stay in the air. Engineers Loud and Aubert commenced to take the large motor apart and throw it overboard, to lighten the ship. At daybreak on Monday, the third day out, I find I made a note reading, '7 AM All ready during the night to leave in the boat, but the breeze too strong for launching. Listened-in and heard the *SS Main* (German) very strong. Now hear Cape Sable sending a message to some ship for us. Copy it. It is from the *New York Times* and is about the weather.'

"At 7:20 that morning our navigator took his first sight for position and made us in Longitude 65.51 West. This was 210 miles east of Nantucket. We were steadily drifting south in a beautiful sunny morning.

"From that time on, we drifted in a southeasterly direction. From my log I find that I listened in all day and into the evening. The last note made in the air in the radio log reads: '7 PM Hear wireless stations working from Cape Sable to the Southern States.' In that early day, that meant that I heard just about every station in North America.

"The following, taken from my log, tells the remainder of the story:

'October 18th, 1910. Notes made after arrival on board the Royal Mail *SS Trent*, made from memory and the log of the *Trent's* wireless operator.

'Remained on watch until 3 AM, 18th, listening to various stations working, static very bad. Unable to read Cape Cod but hear him working. I turned in at 3 AM, but was awakened about an hour later by calls of a ship in sight. Descended into the lifeboat and called C Q D. Nothing doing. Then got an electric torch and commenced calling in Morse lamp fashion. Was eventually answered by the *Trent* and signaled him that we were in trouble and required help. Also conveyed to him that we were equipped with wireless. The *Trent's* operator was awakened, and he called us.'

When Wireless Stepped in to Rescue

"As I had my head phones on all this time, I answered him and instant radio communication was established. I am indebted to Mr. Louis Ginsberg (the *Trent's* operator) for copies of the following messages which were copied and sent by him; I did not do so, merely reading out his messages to Mr. Wellman as he sent them.

"*Trent*: Do you want our assistance?"

"*America*: Yes. Come at once, in distress, we are drifting, not under control.

"*Trent*: What do you want us to do?"

"*America*: Come ahead full speed, but keep astern, we have a heavy tail dragging.

"*Trent*: OK. Am standing by wireless in case of trouble.

"*America*: You will pick us up at daybreak, you will be better able to see us then.

"*Trent*: OK.

"*America*: Come in close and put your bow under us, we will drop you a line but do not stop your ship as you will capsize us.

"*Trent*: OK.

"*America*: Who are you and where bound?"

"*Trent*: SS *Trent* bound for New York.

"*America*: Have one of your boats ready to launch, as we will probably capsize when we launch our boat.

"*Trent*: OK boat manned.

"*America*: We are going to launch the boat, stand by to pick us up.

"Wireless communication then ceased. I cut the antenna and ground wires, put the water-tight doors on the wireless cupboard, and stood by. The boat was successfully launched, a most hazardous operation. We were drifting fifteen miles an hour, with the boat swinging beam on to the sea and behind us the ton-and-a-half trailer. At the signal to 'let go' both clutches holding the boat to the car were jerked. The boat fell into the water, lurched gunwale under, then righted. The trailing equilibrator hit us, stove a hole in the boat above the water line, and bruised



America's crew after dropping the lifeboat into the sea.



America drifting away after crew drops lifeboat.



Wellman tipping his hat upon arrival at New York, surrounded by his wife and daughters. A smiling Jack Irwin is seen on the extreme left.

Loud and myself. The *Trent*, ploughing along at 16 knots, almost ran us down. We fell astern and waited for the steamer to come about and pick us up. After considerable maneuvering she came alongside, and with her derricks, lifted the lifeboat aboard. Thus was I able to save the entire wireless equipment.

"The *America*, with the weight of the lifeboat and crew released from it, shot up in the air several thousand feet and soon drifted out of sight. Before leaving her we opened the gas valves so that, eventually she would come down on the sea and not cause damage by landing or dragging over a city. We never heard of her again.

"Nobody but those who have experienced it, can imagine the feeling we had upon arriving on the *Trent*. We were overwhelmed with kindness. Two days later we arrived in New York where we found that our attempt to reach Europe in an airship had attracted extraordinary interest. We had occupied the front pages of the press of the world for several days. We failed, but in later years I had the gratification of knowing that other Americans accomplished what we had attempted."

First Radio Distress Call from Aircraft

In a 1950 letter, early flight and wireless pioneer Elmo N. Pickerill, said, "Louis Ginsberg of 218 Main Street, Hackensack, NJ, who was the retired operator on the Royal Mail Steampacket Line's SS *Trent* and received the 'CQD' from Jack Irwin, operator of Walter Wellman's airship *America* on October 18, 1910. He sent the story of the rescue of the six-man crew to me at the 'WA' Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York for the Associated Press and the United Press. The *Trent* picked them up and brought them back to New York. The airship travelled 1008 miles after taking off from Atlantic City enroute to Europe and was caught in a tropical hurricane off the coast of Nova Scotia and

blown down to a point midway between New York and Bermuda when they were sighted and rescued. No doubt that was the first radio distress call ever handled from any type of aircraft and one which proved successful."

More photos posted at www.k2tqn.com. — K2TQN