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BALLOONING TO JAIL IN RUSSIA.

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My friends think I am crazy and my business associates are sure of it. And yet, in spite of all the evidence, I maintain that balloon racing is the greatest sport that has ever been devised by man.

When I returned from taking part in the recent Gordon-Bennett contest from Stuttgart, Germahy, I was met at the pier by an old chum who had, until then, preserved his faith in me.

"Well," he said after greetings were over, "For the first time in a week, your wife is sure she isn't a widow."

I nodded.

"You have been a prisoner in Russia for six days and a half, haven't you?"

I admitted it.

And you have a broken rib?"

"Two of them."

"And a game leg?"

"Yes."

"You've been away from your business seven weeks and the profits have been practically stopped during your absence?"

"Unfortunately -- yes."

"You were frozen and nearly starved and it was only by luck that you were not killed when you landed in a hurricane?"

"Something like that."

He shook his head as though the puzzle were too much for him.

"Will you kindly tell me then where the sport comes in?" he asked.

I tried to think of an answer but for the life of me, I could not.

"No," I said, "I only know that it is sport and the greatest in the world."

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There was no thought of Russian bayonets waiting for us as we watched the twenty-~~three~~ TWO great bags slowly filling that cloudy Sunday in Stuttgart. Half a dozen nations were represented in the great classic of the air -- the pick of the aeronautic pilots of the world, men who had covered thousands of miles in their favorite sport and who could be depended upon to stick to the contest to the end to get the last foot possible of distance to their credit.

John Watts was pilot of the Kansas City and I was his aide. The balloon was filling at the far end of the pipe that poured gas into the bags and we were to be the last to start.

All about the field floundered the raw, ox-eyed peasant recruits of the German army, working like beavers on the sodden earth, still wet from several days of rain. Stupid and bovine in the extreme they seemed without the power to think for themselves yet their willingness to help was unvarying and the patience of their officers never once flagged. It was "Meine Kinder" this and ""Meine Kinder" that with the tone of fatherly affection unspoiled by the slightest edge of sarcasm or irritation.

Through all the hurry and excitement, Captain Fritz and Captain Cless, who had been assigned to help us with our balloon, remained calm and undisturbed, directing their men in the work of preparation as though the other twenty ~~two~~ ONE bags and the other hundreds of men did not exist.

"If you should happen to get into Russia and land at night," said Captain Fritz, himself a veteran balloonist, "your first enemies

will be the wolves. They will not be around in the daytime. But, at night, you will hear first a long-drawn baying like the howling of a dog but it will be different. It will have in it a note of mixed saveragy and cowardice that a dog's bay does not have. In five minutes, you will hear the sound taken up and echoed from all sides. Then you are in danger. It will be no use to try to fight. They will be too many for you. And you cannot flee. They will be too fast for you."

"Then what can we do?"

"Simply turn your balloon basket over and get under it. Hold it down tight and, with your revolvers and knives, you can easily dispose of those more impudent and daring than the others that sniff too close about you."

It was not a very cheering prelude to our farewell but we knew how valuable such advice might prove and we accepted it in the spirit in which it was given.

One by one, the big bags [illegible] to mushroom shape, then to spheres, then rose until the cars were attached and then, while the bands blared the national anthems of their pilots and the thousands of spectators cheered themselves hoarse, sailed majestically upward and to the northeast until they became mere blurred specks melting into the gray mists of the clouds.

Nothing that I know of is more inspiring than the start of a contest like this. Upward and still upward these men sail, away from the leaden feet of earth, until all [illegible] and all the great works of man dwindle into insignificence and nothing remains but the vastness of the scheme of Nature spread out below and the two lone voyagers are hushed into into awed silence and reverence by the sense of absolute infinity such as can never come to man upon the earth.

We waited our turn impatiently. The Kansas City II was filling at the far end of the pipe and as one after the other of the

balloons rounded to shape and the gas was turned off, the entire pressure from their individual feeds rushed into the main pipe and was suddenly poured full strength into the bag upon which we pinned all ourhopes.

We saw the danger at once. As quickly as we could, we rushed to turn off the flow but, with a roar and hiss that could be heard far away, the swelling side of the bag ripped at the base and was torn apart in a great rent that split it from appendix to valve. Like a giant dealt a death wound in the midst of its strength and power, it sank shudderingly into a helpless, hopeless, inert heap, pathetic in its drab unloveliness and tragic in its grim mockery of all the ambitions which had brought us on this journey of nearly ten thousand miles.

For the moment, we were too dazed to speak. Then, realizing that the good sportsman must never lose his temper, we set to work as calmly as possible to examine the wreckage.

"This," I said, "Gives me the world's record for losing Gordon-Bennetts. First, St Louis in 1907, then Indianapolis in 1910, Kansas City in 1911 and now Stuttgart."

But, even as I spoke, those German officers, quietly and without ostentation, gave an example of true sportsmanship which I have never seen excelled.

"It is too bad," they said. "But you must not be excluded from the race. We will get you another balloon."

And, in less than an hour, the Dusseldorf II, in which von Abercron had expected to compete, was spread upon the filling cloth, slowly swelling up as the gas was turned on. Von Abercron was an army officer and the military authorities, at the last moment, had forbidden any member of the staff to take part in the race because of the recent death of Von Gericke, winner of last year's race.

Three German balloons had started ahead of us to gain the cup which the aeronauts of each nation strive so hard to win, yet these

splendid men -- gentlemen in the truest sense of the word -- forgot all feeling of national selfishness and thought only of good sportsmanship and fair play.

We could not start until long after all of the others had left. It was after sunset when the filling of our bag was completed and more time was required for attaching the basket, seeing that all was in readiness and bidding good bye to our friends. Then, slowly and majestically the Dusseldorf II rose as she had risen in so many other contests and we drifted northeast, almost directly in the track of the balloons which had gone before us.

Slowly we left the myriad sounds of the city behind; we rose higher and higher until we were too far from the earth for the human voice to carry and only three ordinary sounds -- the crowing of cocks, the barking of dogs and the whistling of locomotives -- could reach us. Of those three, the last to be lost is the locomotive; its long-drawn signal will be heard by the earnest long after he is beyond the range of any other noise.

Gradually we settled to an elevation of about 2500 feet and, at that height, we sailed throughout the beautiful moonlight night. We needed no watch for below us the village clocks chimed out the hours and the sounds of their bells came to us faintly and musically.

Several times we saw blurred shadows in the distance that we knew to be other balloons and, shortly after midnight, we saw a great sphere descending far behind us. Later it ascended and, when morning came, had passed us in a swifter stratum of air above.

Daylight came to us many minutes before the first faint streaks of gray were visible to those on earth. We were so much higher that we could, as it were, look over the edge of the earth to the sun as it rose and soon it was up in all its glory.

First came breakfast. A cold meal? By no means. Piping hot.

We had tinned food with us and each tin was really a can within a can. The food was in the inner tin; between the outer and the inne r were water and lime. We simply punctured holes in the outer tin, all around it, allowing the water and the lime to mix. In two minutes it was beginning to steam; in fifteen minutes, it was too hot to eat. Of course the foods were already cooked before being put up. The slacking of the lime simply brought them ## up to the desired temperature.

It struck my sense of humor to read the German label on the can with everything foreign except the welcome words, in big type, "IRISH STEW".

All day we sailed steadily in a general north east direction add, late in the afternoon, we passed over Posen and entered what to us was an unknown land, for the maps furnished by Captain Fritz reach only to the borders of Germany. As the ##### daylight faded and night came on again, our gas cooled until we reached our normal level. About ten o'clock we passed over what we now believe was Warsaw and somewhat later, some sharp eyes in a little mining town made us out and the whistles blew a greeting to which we made answer by flashing our little electric light. By midnight, we were making splendid speed and, with eighteen bags of sand left out of the original thirty eight, it looked like certain victory and a new world's record.

The night was perfect until about two o'clock. Then, almost without warning, we found ourselves struck by a storm that developed in a few minutes into a hurricane. Back and forth we were pitched as we rose or fell from one stratum of air to another and I saw a phenomenon which all my previous experience had never presented to me. Our

four hundred foot drag rope, which should have hung straight down from the basket, was blown out at a sharp angle; the balloon was in one air stratum while the end of the rope was in another going in a different direction.

Soon the rain came in torrents and changed to snow and the moisture on the balloon began to freeze solid. The added weight of the thick coating of ice which formed and which was constantly increased by the piling snow was too much for the gas to sustain and we began to fall. Overboard went everything that we could tear loose. Bag after bag of sand was cut away, food followed it and even parts of our clothing was heaved overboard for we were now rushing at a sickening speed toward the earth.

It was just about daylight when we plunged through the veil of the lowest cloud and saw the white earth rushing up at us. We pulled the valve as we struck with a bang and then sprang for the rip chord to tear out the panel sewed loosely in the balloon ready to be ripped away and deflate almost instantly so as to prevent being dragged over the land by the wind driven balloon. But the ripping panel had been frozen solid and refused to give an inch.

With the great bag above us catching the full strength of the hurricane, we were dashed madly across stumps, rocks and roots, thrown violently first to one side and then to the other, Watts tumbling upon me and I tumbling upon Watts, expecting that each crash would mean the end for us yet unable to grip anything sufficiently long to enable us to escape.

Suddenly we bounced forty feet into the air and, as we plunged down again, the netting about the bag caught in the branches of a great tree and we stopped with a final jolt that piled us on top of each other in the bottowm of the basket.

For a moment, I lay stunned and unable to move. Then, when I

dragged myself slowly and painfully to my feet, each move revealing a new bruise, I found Watts feeling himself all over, trying to find one small place that had not suffered.

On all sides of us stretched the forest. So far as we could see, we had landed in an uninhabited country but, even as we looked about us, a strange figure came out of the shadows of the trees and stood looking at us half in fear and half in curiosity. He was clad in wooly skins from his head to his knees; his hair and beard were unshorn, birch bark shoes covered his feet and his legs were thickly wrapped in cloth of some kind bound around with leather straps. An axe in his red belt completed his equipment.

Spon he was joined by others all driving shaggy ponies to sledges and as their numbers grew, their confidence increased and we were surrounded. It was impossible to make ourselves understood. I pulled out my international aeronautic pilot's license, containing my photograph and my credentials printed in six languages including Russian, but they were unable to read.

Their first fear was not long in disappearing. Once convinced that we were really human beings, and seeing that I was not dangerous because ## one of my feet was so badly sprained that I could not bear my weight upon it, their awe was succeeded by insolence and they pushed us roughly away from the balloon and through the trees to as miserable a collection of dirty little huts as I have ever seen.

Inside one of them, we hung our clothes up to dry while one of the men shoveled some hot coals from the wood fire, poured them into the funnel of the samovar and, in a few minutes, had the tea steaming. Then he brought out two filthy glasses, wiped them out with a corner of his filthier skin coat and filled them for us. By twos and threes, more of the shaggy peasants crowded into the room, the windows of which had been closed for the winter with putty and tow filling all the chinks.

As the steam from their bodies seeped through and mingled with the steam from their unchanged clothes of hair and hide, the atmosphere in the room became first oppressive, then suifocating and then positively nauseating. To add to our unhappiness, a slatternly old woman brought forth a tin wash basin, set it on the floor before us, shredded into it a piece of goats meat with her unlovely fingers and then poured boiling water over it all, bidding us eat of the delectable mess to our hearts' content. But, hungry as we were, we could not.

Driven to desperation by such discomforts, we tried to make our way out of the door for a breath of fresh air and that, for the first time, showed us our true situation.

The doors were guarded. We were prisoners.

Later, we found that these poor ignorant fellows had dimly heard of the war in the Balkans and, believing that we were the advance aerial scouts of an enemy, had penned us up and sent to the nearest village for the police.

It was three o'clock in the morning when the officers arrived. Unable to understand a word we said to them either in English or German, there was nothing for them to do but bundle us into their sledges and so, with a soldier on each side, gleaming bayonet fixed formidibly in rifle, we drove away over the most abominable of roads. With the bumping, the hunger, the lack of sleep -- we had been 36 hours in the balloon with scarcely a wink and had slept little in the hut -- and with my sprained foot and an excrutiating pain in my side giving the first hint of what I afterward found were two broken ribs, I began to weaken under the ordeal and nausea compelled them to stop for me two or three times. Watts, too, was utterly worn out though he had been fortunate enough to escape with nothing sprained and no bones broken.

After four hours of this torture, we reached Mosolevo, a little village built up about a glass factory, where we were quartered in the

house of the manager, M. Gorenstein and his wife -- and, to my dying day, I shall bless their names. Mme. Gorenstein spoke German with which I had a more or less useful working knowledge, and so, at last, we were able to make ourselves understood.

For four days we were under guard while our trial board was on its way from Pskov, two hundred miles away. During all that time, M. and Mme. Gorenstein showed us every courtesy possible but, every where we went, the armed guard at the door fell into line behind us, and, with his bayonetted gun over his shoulder, saw to it that we did not attempt to run away. This in spite of the fact that my ankle had grown so bad that I was unable to use it for more than a few steps at a time.

Finally the trial board arrived -- four captains of cavalry and artillery and the Governor's secretary -- and then followed the richest farce it has ever been my privilege to live through. Not a word of English [illegible] a word of Russian [illegible]. The Governor's secretary spoke almost as bad German as I did and with that we had to wade through all the technicalities of the Russian code, to swear great oaths to long declarations, the import of which we understood to be that we were not enemies of Russia and had no designs upon her peace or prosperity.

Most of the trouble came about through the faults in our papers. We had, in the first place, neglected to have our passports vised by the Russian consul in Stuttgart but, worst of all, when we triumphantly produced our balloon passports to prove that we were all we claimed to be, we suddenly realized that the passports called for the balloon Kansas City II whereas the bag in which we had landed had, in great letters, the name Dusseldorf II spread around its equator.

Naturally this made our inquisitors suspicious -- that is,

they were officially suspicious but during the intermissions of the two days' trial, we laughed with them, joked with them in execrable German, smoked cigarettes with them, ate, played and slept with them and found them to be as fine a set of good fellows as I have ever met. They were simply the victims of an archaic system and they knew it but, during their time on duty, they maintained the discipline of the good soldier whether they liked it or not.

After struggling along as far as we could in this crude manner, the board decided that there was nothing to do but take us to Pskov and there let the Governor himself decide what should be done with us. Besides, my ankle and ribs were becoming so painful that it was necessary to get me to a surgeon in mere humanity.

Shall I ever forget that drosky ride to the nearest railroad? By some miracle, M. Gorenstein had managed to get our balloon to the station though practically all of our belongings had been stolen by the peasants. Much of the trip [illegible] over our own path through the forest; the snow was piled high over all the country and the going was heavy. As night began to fall, Watts seized my arm and whispered, "Listen! What was that?"

From far away I heard thesound.

"It's a dog barking," I said.

But the ponies pricked up their ears and snorted, the moujik cut them sharply with the whip and then I understood.

It was a wolf!

Neither man nor beast spared after that. We dashed like mad through the trees and out again to the open country, every jolt sending excruciating pains through my whole body

From all sides the mournful cry of the animal was taken up and re-echoed. The ponies, now in positive terror, leaped forward under the lash and soon we reached the more settled country and were safe.

We had little difficulty with the Governor at Pskov. His eleven year old son spoke very fair English so that we were able to communicate with considerable ease.

Had we any "pretencions" against Russia? We had not.

Had we money for travelling? Plenty.

There was a train to-night for Berlin. Had we thought of taking it? It was the only thing we had thought of.

Very well, then. His Excellency would send us an honorable military escort to take us from the ###### t hotel to the station. Our American gold pieces were no good and he did not care to cash them. But, when we showed him some express money orders, he soon converted them into coin of the Czar's realm.

To beat the honorable escort of soldiers to the station [illegible] equally a train for Berlin, it would have taken two honorable escorts of soldiers to keep us from it.

"Great trip, wasn't it?" asked Watts, hunting soft spots on the seat for his sore places as the train pulled out.

I upended my sprained ankle and rubbed the itches out of my broken ribs.

"Best I ever had," I replied. I hope we do as well next year."