

Monday, April 5, 1926

At last we have started on our great adventure. *Chantier* left the Brooklyn Navy Yard today at 3:15 PM, 15 minutes after schedule, with one of the most remarkable send-offs I have ever seen. I cannot get over my astonishment that there is so much public interest in our expedition. I have never seen such kindly feeling as was shown by every one.

The outstanding incident of the departure was an extemporaneous and spontaneous talk made by Mr. Rockefeller during lunch on Vincent Astor's yacht. It was a wonderful talk. He referred to my great interest in [the] Pole. I know no man who is more interested in the progress of mankind than Mr. Rockefeller. I am very proud to have him backing me. Edsel Ford could not come due to his very early departure for Europe. Vincent Astor also was absent on account of the death of his uncle in law. There are no higher type men than these three who are backing me and [that] is in keeping with my original premise—that I must keep the expedition on a high plane in every particular.

It was good to have Tom and Harry see us off. It was with a feeling of unutterable relief that we left the dock. Our struggle to get ready to leave today has been terrific. The officers and crew of this ship have all put super human effort into their work and to them all goes the credit for getting off on schedule time.

I have had no peace for two months. Telegrams, phone

calls, letters. It is a curious feeling now to be able to relax. We are lying off Fort Hamilton [Brooklyn], correcting compasses and stowing the ship for sea and generally shaking down. I feel a deep gratitude to the men with me who have so willingly sacrificed themselves for the success of the expedition.

The ship is in an entirely disorganized condition and there are a lot of green men in the crew. But they are a high type all around and I predict that it won't take long to get fairly well organized.

I also feel a deep gratitude for our backers and the business firms who have helped us so generously. There are not enough words in the dictionary with which to adequately thank these people. I feel very inarticulate and unworthy of all this. I think of the expedition not as mine but as "ours," the boys with me and America's.

This day has proved that there is a lot of romance and spirit of adventure in this great country. I have received hundreds of telegrams and letters from all over the country. I have simply been overwhelmed.

The responsibility is terrific. The chance of some accident of fate that would prevent our getting started is terrible to consider. The hardest part of an expedition of this kind is the worry one causes those nearest and dearest. What one goes through on that score isn't ever to be written in a diary.

Next hardest thing is the preparation. The actual flights are easy in comparison. Almost every explorer has had great difficulty financing his expedition. Then the details of preparation are infinite. There are no gasoline stations in the Arctic and there are no aircraft factories to wire back to for spare parts.

I received today the following telegraph from my shipmates in the Bureau of Aeronautics.²² It has been surprising the number of people who have connected this trip up with providence.

Tuesday, April 6, 1926

The captain [Michael Brennan] has corrected his compasses and when we got underway the ship was three quarters ready for sea. The captain and I were most anxious to get going. "If I get underway," he said, "there won't be any questions about those stores being stored. The boys will have to work late into the night on the deck to straighten out the jumble of stores. That would be very serious in case of a heavy sea."

The spirit of the men on board is wonderful. When [George] Noville asked for volunteers today, the Doctor, Daniel O'Brien (from John Hopkins), the movie men, Donahue and Van der Veer and William Haines, the ex-

22. This appears to have been a telegram wishing Byrd and the expedition well. See Byrd to Admiral W. A. Moffett, April 10, 1926. BP folder 4319.

pedition meteorologist sent by the Department of Agriculture volunteered without a moment's hesitation. Every one was utterly worn out last night but feel better today.

We have stored our great 63 foot wing in the forward hold and have exercised exquisite care to prevent anything from falling on it. One's sensations are not the pleasantest when tons of weight are hanging over that wing. [A. A.] Touchette was lowering a big pyrene²³ today into the hold. The line got away from him and ran through his fingers so fast it burnt his hand. But he clamped down on it and stopped it, taking the skin off his finger rather than let the wing be injured.

Received a great many radio messages: Secretary of Navy, Edsel Ford, American Legion, [Vilhjalmur] Stefansson, the explorer, Admiral Peary's family, and many others. It is fortunate we have smooth weather for we are not entirely secured for sea.

Because we anchored off Fort Hamilton the newspapers heard that our wing was injured and sent a reporter to get the story.

Wednesday, April 7, 1926

Last night after supper I was making for my state room on the upper deck when a man furtively passed me. I

23. Pyrene is a yellow, crystalline hydrocarbon derived from coal tar and used to extinguish fires.

thought he looked familiar. I flashed my flashlight in his face and there was [Malcolm P.] Hanson, the radio engineer from the Naval radio research laboratory. I was greatly surprised.

“I confess to being a stow-away,” said Hanson. Now the expedition owes a very great deal to Hanson. He has worked day and night for weeks on high frequency radio sets for ship and plane. It seems that he had three or four more days work to do and deliberately stowed away and so sacrificing himself for the good of the expedition. He did not want me to know he was aboard when we left and so have the responsibility for his act. My only concern is to help him out of his scrape.

Thursday, April 8, 1926

We continue to get everything ship-shape. This morning shortly before seven o'clock the ship began rolling considerably—30 degrees rol[l]. I learned later and soon thereafter I heard the captain bellow “all hands on deck. There is something loose in the forehold.” This was an interesting moment for me. It meant that if the captain were right our wing would be smashed and the expedition ended ignominiously—failure with a capital “F.”

I did not wait to dress, reached the bridge in a moment. “Do you think it very bad, captain?” I said. He didn't know. We reached the hatch in a jiffy and with the help of the first mate got the hatch covering off. The gasoline

barrels and other gear were all intact. I was greatly relieved. One heavy gasoline barrel rolling around in that hold would have smashed the wing so that it could not be repaired. I have given orders to put double lashings on everything. There was a hole in the wing caused by a piece of timber from one of the beams. That can be repaired.

Friday, April 9, 1926

We have received the following message from the commander and Dr. Taylor of the Naval Research Laboratory (See Radio Log). So Hanson is saved if we can get him back to the States in time. We will let Hanson off at sea after his job is completed if we pass another ship homeward bound and if it is smooth enough.

Saturday, April 10, 1926

We are gradually getting well shaken down. There are mashed fingers, sea sickness, men tired out, etc[.], but all are happy and I believe I can say we have a happy ship. It looks as if we may reach Spitzbergen May 1st if all goes well.

Sunday, April 11, 1926

I am spending most of my time pondering the problems ahead, laying down my courses, etc. and leave most of the details of regulating things to [Lieutenant C. O.]

Noville and [Lieutenant R. E.] Oertel. Both of whom have a spirit and willingness beyond reproach. We let all hands, except those who have had to stand watch or check in the engine room take a day off. Very much needed rest. I found last night that our primus stove had not be[en] sent by Aberc[r]ombie and Fitch. I was much disappointed. Will take every possible means to procure one for our trip.

Monday, April 12, 1926

There is a wonderful spirit on board. [Charles F.] Gould the ship's carpenter is one of the best men on board. Works twelve or fifteen hours every day. While the ship was rolling last night one of the seamen slipped and fell on his face, waking him up, "Hello, up there. How are you?" he says and turns over and goes to sleep.

There is a great deal of hard work for everyone and it is this routine daily grind that tests a man. We are passing in the vicinity of ice.

Tuesday, April 13, 1926

[W. W.] Ehrgott, one of the West Pointers, has been in the mess room. Hates it and has broken over twenty dishes. Put him on deck and tried him out at the wheel. He did very well until the captain came on the bridge when he was 80 degrees off the course. I bet his bawling out beat anything he ever got at West Point.