Gas Division Newsletter

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Superstition

by Jonathan Mason

There is a sort of unspoken ritual that happens before a long distance gas race that takes place in the pregnant pause between the end of the inflation and the beginning of the race, when many of the pilots wander, as casually as possible, around the field to size up the opposition. If you stand back and watch to see who has the most people around their basket, it gives you a great insight into who is considered to be the main contender (crew, extended family and friends don't count by the way, mentioning no names, Andy Cayton).

David and I first came to Albuquerque to fly gas balloons in 2005, which already seems like a lifetime ago. We barely made it to the launch field with the balloon on that occasion, let alone the take off podium, at one stage having to stop the truck to pick up the balloon from the middle of the road because we had forgotten to close the tailgate. We took off with one GPS, a hand-held ICOM aircraft radio, a few spare batteries, no rain cover and no crew. We flew into Canada and landed (soaked to the skin) on the last road available using a McNally's road atlas for navigation, and relied on the kindness of strangers to help us get home. Not many pilots came to check out our rig before we took off that year.

The second time we came to Albuquerque was for the Gordon Bennett in 2008, and to be completely honest this time we meant business. Proper maps? Check. Crew? Check. Spare pencil? Check. We were really trying, but the sight of Bert (our only visitor) walking slowly away from our basket muttering, amongst other things, the word 'shambolic' spoke volumes on the size of the task ahead. No-one was surprised when we were still over the launch field 24 hours later, still searching in vain for various odds and ends in our basket that had gone missing in the cavernous pockets of the stupid basket organizer. Somehow we pulled ourselves together, and fluked our way to a win.

This year, we completely smashed our previous record for basket visitors. Bert came over out of sympathy to check that we had at least managed to pack the basics, but then through the evening gloom appeared – surely it couldn't be? - another gas pilot to *casually* see if we had anything in our basket worth looking at. They didn't stay long.

Inside this issue:

Jonathan Mason and David Hempleman-Adams at Saturday's briefing.
photo by Barbara Fricke

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Editors' Column

The Gordon Bennett and the America's Challenge competitions are both covered in this issue. Jonathon Mason gives us an interesting perspective on their flight. Angel Aguirre tells of how he and Arnulfo Gonzalez came to the competition. Jeanne Taylor provides prospective on chasing and Ralph Keyser lets us in on what it take for the Command Center to back us up during the competition.

Sebastien Rolland and Vincent Leys provide us with the details of their Gordon Bennett win.

It is interesting to note that the winner in both of these major gas events flew into the night and did night landings. Prior to these competitions, the Germans had forwarded a proposal to the CIA that would have penalized night landings in competitions. That proposal was not acted upon by the CIA.

Our historical article this issue by Van Orman covers his Gordon Bennett shipboard landing as well as his landing in lightning at night.

Finally, we will miss our gas balloon pilots who have moved on to new horizons.

Peter & Barbara

Basket and balloon for Jonathan and David ready for inflation. Spanish team's balloon inflated.
photo by Kim Vesely

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We had hoped to have an i-pad to show off, but we couldn't get it working so it was back in the hotel. Same with the long range radio and the new GPS. Damn!

To be honest though, this was a bit strategic on our part. We weren't trying to dupe the competition – we had decided on a low tech approach to save weight, much as we had (albeit inadvertently) done six years before. You see, there is something that David and I have never shared with any of our fellow pilots, something that we both secretly believe lies at the heart of our luck, and that is that we are incredibly superstitious. How else can you explain the luck and success of two relative novices? We arrived on the same day of the week as we did in 2008, on the same flights with the same retrieve crew. If you look at the photographs of us before takeoff in 2008, you will see us wearing exactly the same clothes as this year. We ate the same food (from the same diner) the night before the race, took the same radios, the same old, power-hungry and outdated GPS, the same maps and even the same kind of notebook and in our pockets were the same lucky charms.

The early signs were worrying. Some unexpected false lift off of the podium saw us narrowly miss the ground, and whilst everyone else adopted a strategy that involved crossing the mountains at some point in the first night, we trundled slowly up the valley towards Santa Fe. At least I *thought* it was Santa Fe – I was sort of disoriented by quite an early stage in the race, having forgotten the compass. Damn! The frustration continued until the end of the next day and, and having at one point gone in a perfect circle around a hill which apparently had it own physics-defying weather system, we finally broke out of the valley and picked up a low level wind that ultimately carried us over the mountains at the expense of almost no ballast. John Kugler explained it to me using meteorology in the bar a few days later, but to be honest I think it was the beads that did it.

Our spirits and ground speed restored, we started up a conversation that then lasted for several days, revolving around the following two key themes: 1) How much ballast do you think Peter and Barbara have? 2) How much money would have to be on the table before you would fly in a

basket with sides as low as Andy Cayton's? The race drew on and other teams began to land, their fortunes badly affected by a mixture of high level mountain crossings and low level thermals. Colorado became Nebraska, and by early hours of the 3rd night we were contouring over the South Dakota Badlands at the minimum safe altitude. This always seems to happen in a race – flying at night, tired, at low level and high speed, and its always a point that I dread. Our low tech approach meant that it has to be done with a map, a pencil and a GPS giving no more than our position, and it leads to a mysterious mixture of extreme fatigue and adrenalin.

By lunchtime on the last day, we had dealt with conversation topic number two, deciding that no amount of money could persuade us into Andy's low-sided basket, and now focused solely and intensely on a variation of question number one, How much longer can *we* fly for? We had ballasted almost all of our water, and had been sharing a litre to drink between us for 24 hours. We couldn't see Peter and Barbara, but our regular conversations with Clive Bailey back in the UK told us that they were very close. In the end, as the sun started to set and the Canadian border rushed up, we decided to commit to another night; we had just enough ballast, but would have to land soon after sunrise.

Did I say commit? No such thing when you're tired, dehydrated and desperate. Clive called us to say that Peter and Barbara had landed, and 60 minutes later, in the pitch black, we were on the ground. We were expecting the wind to drop out as we got underneath the inversion, but by the time we got down there it had broken down completely and our speed actually increased to 35 knots. Dave and I got down into the bottom of the basket, pulled as hard as could on the rip lines, and yelled a lot. Dave rubbed his lucky beads, and I pulled my lucky hat down over my eyes, and when everything stopped moving the wind was so loud that we had to stay in the basket to hear each other speak. We pulled the balloon up two miles short of the Canadian border, having been dragged for about a 1,000 yards across roughly ploughed North Dakota fields.

Fields and small town in North Dakota.
photo by Barbara Fricke

You need every piece of luck you can conceivably marshal to win a long distance gas balloon flight. Every single team in the competition this year was, in my view, capable of winning it and although you always single some out as being more dangerous than others you just never know for sure how things are going to turn out.

That doesn't stop me from sneaking a quick look into other people's basket's at balloon races though. Its amazing what you find out. Apparently some pilots take loads of *sand* with them! Seems a bit frivolous and childish to me. Still, I'll add it to the list for next time…■

2011 American's Challenge winners are: (from left) 1st place David Hempleman-Adams and Jonathan Mason; 2nd place Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke; 3rd place Bill Manuel and Andy Cayton.
photo by Kim Vesely

The Chase!

by Jeanne Taylor

It was a starry night and the winds calmed down enough for a perfect launch. The Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta America's Challenge Gas race was underway. All eight balloons took off from AIBF field and headed slightly north. It was going to be a slow race per the meteorologists. There was very little wind because of the huge high pressure system sitting on top of New Mexico. So as seasoned chase crew we (Scott Taylor and I) went back to our pilots' (Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke) house and slept for the night. Words of wisdom: When you are chasing a gas balloon, sleep when you can cause you never know when the winds will take your pilots to a destination far, far away.

Jeanne and Scott Taylor
photo by Kim Vesely

We woke up Sunday morning praying that Peter and Barbara had caught a nice wind sometime in the night that the meteorologists hadn't seen. It wasn't to be as they had only traveled just outside of Santa Fe. The forecasters were right. It was going to be a slow race and probably end in a day or two. Sadness seeped in as the thought of another race taking us only to Colorado or Kansas. Not much of a challenge for us and I can only imagine what was going through Peter and Barbara's heads. We decided to relax and not rush out of the door till possibly late in the afternoon.

Around 2 pm Scott was getting anxious to get started with the chase and I was ready myself. By this time Peter and Barbara were now just crossing over Wagon Mound, NM. A very slight northeast track was developing. So we took I-40 east out of ABQ hoping our pilots would follow us. When we got to Tucumcari, NM they had made a sharp left turn and were now heading directly north paralleling I-25. So we zigzagged north on state highways reaching Burlington, CO around midnight.

They were now behind us somewhere between Pueblo, CO and La Junta, CO. It was a good time to get an hour of sleep before we needed to be on our way. It took until 6 am that morning for them to catch up with us. Our hour nap turned into six hours of resting and waiting for them to find some wind.

Things were not looking too good since it was now the second day and most all of the other pilots had landed or were landing shortly after sunrise. We decided to get a good breakfast in case they flew till sunset. We sent a text message to their meteorologist (Don Day) just to verify they were going to fly through the day and land at sunset. That was the plan he texted back. "Position yourselves around Ogallala, Nebraska." So we got a quick bite to eat and off we went.

After several miles and slow winds finally the chase started looking promising later that evening when they crossed into Nebraska. We even got a great view of them that evening. We were on Hwy 385 just on the outskirts of Sidney, Nebraska. We received the call that their speed had increased and they wanted to go through another night.

This would be their third night which usually means they land just after sunrise. Now this strategy is what usually happens but of course this is for the

typical pilots and Peter and Barbara are far from being typical. So we mapped a destination and off we went. We had been tracking them all night and keeping close by. Now they were just southeast of Faith, SD and Team #6 (David Hempleman-Adams & Jonathan Mason) was just southwest of Faith. We decided to have breakfast at a small cafe in Faith. As we were seated, there were three guys who kind of looked familiar just finishing eating breakfast. Well as it turns out, it was David and Jonathan's chase crew. They were all playing with their electronic devices showing the other patrons of the cafe the chase. And of course there was a lot of interest from the patrons. And as they proceeded to leave we politely introduced ourselves as the chase team for Peter and Barbara. "The winning team... and you are chasing the second place team." Stating that, we really peaked the attention of everyone in this little cafe and they all had questions for us since most individuals only think of balloons as those colorful objects that fly for just a couple of hours in the morning. As we departed the cafe, David and Jonathan just so happened to be flying overhead, so most of those customers and even our waitress got a good glimpse of a gas balloon as we all stood in the parking lot watching them go by.

Dropping sand on waiting crew in Detroit, 2010.
photo by Penny Bierman

As the chase began again around eight or nine o'clock we headed off north and waited for Don's call to tell us that they will fly through the day and land somewhere before sunset. We already assumed this but the confirming call always helps. He also told us to position ourselves around Bismarck, ND. We arrived in Bismarck around 1 or 2 pm. The surface winds were sustained from 20-25 mph with gusts over 30. Peter and Barbara's speed had increased to 30+ mph. They were to arrive in Bismarck around 3 pm and had decided to fly past Bismarck and land somewhere north closer to sunset, hoping the winds would calm down. As we positioned ourselves just north of Bismarck on Hwy 83 in Washburn, ND we looked down the Missouri river and spotted Peter and Barbara heading towards us. We continued to follow them keeping them in our sights as much as possible. When you are chasing a gas balloon in this race you almost never see your pilots again until they land. This year we were very pleased to see Peter and Barbara at least four times. As we neared Minot, ND we had tracked them along CR 41 so we made our way over to 41 from Hwy 83 and pulled over along side the road south of Velva, ND and watched their descent. It was fast and as they came in they hooked severely west and out of sight. We had no way of knowing where they landed and how far west they traveled. The road we were on did not have many east – west crossroads connecting them to Hwy 83 so we doubled back towards Minot to get back on Hwy 83. As we drove through Velva, ND Peter called. They had landed and had a local resident there to guide us to their landing spot. As we got directions from him we realized we should have driven south on 41 and we would have possibly spotted them actually landing. Oh well, we were only ten minutes away from them. I'm hoping that one of these times we see them land.

In years past we have been this close before but we've never seen them land because of obstacles like buildings, trees, or being held up in a line waiting at Canadian Customs. ■

America's Challenge 2011

by Angel Aguirre

All photos from Angel Aguirre

It was this past Spring when I received a call from Anulfo González, who explained to me that he had bought a used Warsteiner gas balloon in Germany and he was interested in learning gas flying with the objective to participate in a future Gordon Bennett, maybe in 2012. He also asked me if I'd be interested in being part of a team together with him.

I obviously did not have to think about the answer for one second even though I had only three gas flights experience at that moment.

Gas ballooning in Spain is nearly impossible due to the cost of gas and so there is very little local information available about this activity. So, we had to travel, to learn more about gas ballooning, to Germany. And, why not try to participate in this year's America's Challenge to take advantage of the support of an organization like AIBF to introduce ourselves into this world?

Despite the short time we had to prepare, our enthusiasm grew and we decided to try it. Once again, Anulfo's determination and also his friendship with Mark Sullivan were the keys. Mark made everything so easy and encouraged us so much that it was impossible for us to refuse this opportunity.

Anulfo travelled with his balloon to Burgkirchen, Germany to attend a gas ballooning course from Thomas Hora and I went to do at least one flight with what would be my team. It was an amazing experience.

Where I live in Catalonia, there is a popular saying "allò em feia trempar" which colloquially means "something that excites me, something that makes my blood boil"... if someone wants to know the real meaning, have a look at the Catalan language dictionary.

From the first moment we arrived in Albuquerque I felt very welcomed. We were what you call the "rookies" of the year and I suppose this produced some sympathy for us. which we appreciated very much.

Preparation, showtime, take off ... everything very "American" for us. We enjoyed!

The flight, what can I say about the flight? I add a couple of pictures that describe the flight better than I can do in writing. In one of them you can see Anulfo singing and playing air guitar to the rhythm of the I-pad's music (country, of course.) We had this at a high volume during one of the moments in flight. In another self photo here I am looking as an authentic "air cowboy" with my hat, taking the reins of our flying caravan while Anulfo has a short rest.

It was a great but hard flight for us. A long night fighting with the help of the GPS terrain alarm to cross

Gonzales/Aguirre ballooning team prior to launch.
photo by Kim Vesely

the mountains and after that a different fight with quite strong thermals. An interesting battle over an amazing far west scenery.

But it was too short for me. Still now we're analyzing what we did wrong, or better said, what we could do better to do a longer flight. After 20 hours flying we were out of ballast.

I can not hide that I felt a bit depressed, a little frustrated. It was a mix of sensations after a great flight with an early ending.

We had a meteo forecast to fly for three days and more than 1,000 km but we flew less than 400 km in 21 hours. Without a doubt this was a lesson that every pupil has to learn.

In summary, I have to say that despite the excitement of participating in a race like this, it really came as a test for myself about gas ballooning. I wanted to try it but I doubt if one long flight would be enough for the experience of gas ballooning. Now, and maybe thanks to that "frustration" of a short flight, I'm left with the feeling that I want more, I want more gas, more distance, more silent flight, more "trempera", more time not touching my feet on the ground!

I hope I can enter step by step into this interesting gas ballooning family.

Editors' Note: The González/Aguirre ballooning team might have flown less than a day and less than 400 km, but they took fifth place in the competition. See more photos at their web site: http://www.facebook.com/groups/154327061322105/?ref=ts

Fireworks behind /hydrogen gas balloons prior to launch at 2011 America's Challenge.
photo by Kim Vesely

AC's Command Center

by Ralph Keyser

Ralph Keyser

Tucked away off the edge of the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta's field, hidden behind the glitz and glamour of the VIP Corporate Villas, and nestled in between the safety officials and the launch directors, lies the trailer that forms the heart of the America's Challenge Command Center. It has an important role, but if everything goes well, its role is not very visible to the outside world.

This short article will try to give you a little "behind-the-scenes tour" of what it takes to pull the Command Center together every year and give you an inside peek at what goes on there during a typical America's Challenge race.

The work on the Command Center begins long before the actual race day, of course. There are a stack of logistics issues to work such as phone lines; Internet connections; office equipment (like computers, printers, and fax machines); and infrastructure (power, propane, and the trailer itself). The Balloon Fiesta's hard working staff helps pull most of these together. Then there is the coordination with various organizations around the continent including the FAA's Air Traffic Control system, the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC) that is responsible for inland search and rescue in North America, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the Canadian Border Services Agency that manages customs. Tim Baggett, who handles the web sites and tools that the staff uses during the race, works his software magic. Finally, charts and reference material are coordinated for the staff's use during the race.

The biggest asset of the Command Center, though, is its staff. Unlike most activities at the Fiesta, the Command Center is staffed 24 hours a day every day from the start of the race until the last team has called in to let the staff know that they have recovered their balloon and are safely on their way home. To provide continuous coverage over meals and other breaks, there are at least two people on staff at all times. Fortunately, the America's Challenge is blessed with a very energetic base of staff members, many of whom return year after year to the Command Center. These folks are a mix of experienced hot air and gas balloonists along with active and retired air traffic controllers. Five or more years is typical of the experience level of the staff, and some of the staff members have been with the Command Center for all 16 years that the America's Challenge has been running. This well-seasoned staff is the secret to the great support that the Command Center provides.

The action at the Command Center really cranks up around noon on the expected day of launch. The staff works with the tracker team to confirm that all of the trackers are transmitting as expected and that the data is reaching the web site correctly. The final submissions of the EAPIS (Electronic Advance Passenger Information System) data are completed to notify the U.S. Customs and Border Security of the potential for flight out of the country. As each team lifts off, the times are entered and the flight status is adjusted for each team, and the various ATC and SAR organizations are notified about the start of the race.

It's after the excitement of the launch that the work of the Command Center begins in earnest. While the field clears out for the night, the Command Center begins the task of keeping a close eye on each team in the sky. The Command Center isn't part of the race structure, so their job is to help support the teams and their crews as they tackle the sometimes complex and difficult job of flying the America's Challenge. The Com-

Carl Martin (right) and Guy Feltman taking calls in the Command Center. photo courtesy of Carl Martin

mand Center constantly projects the flight paths into the future and works to provide advance coordination with each of the ATC entities along the route whether that's an en-route control center or approach control at a major city. They monitor weather conditions and provide support to the America's Challenge media staff. And, of course, they answer the phone, along with text messages and e-mail – anytime, day or night. Whether it's the balloon with a question about airspace or a ground crew that needs information, the center's staff always does their best to help. When it comes time to land, the staff coordinates with local law enforcement to let them know about the balloon, and the center can act as a central point of contact to get pilots and crews back together again. The center itself doesn't close until the last balloon is down and safely on their way back home.

The other function of the Command Center that the staff fervently hopes they don't have to activate is that of emergency response. The center's staff can identify and coordinate with all the various agencies, provide information, and help support the pilots and crews to resolve the situation safely. Over the years, the Command Center has dealt with a wide variety of situations ranging from shooting incidents and accidents with injuries to (temporarily) lost balloons and traffic accidents. Safety of the pilots and ground crews is always the Command Center's top priority.

Ben Anello (left) and Jerry Brenden plotting positions.
photo courtesy of Tim Baggett

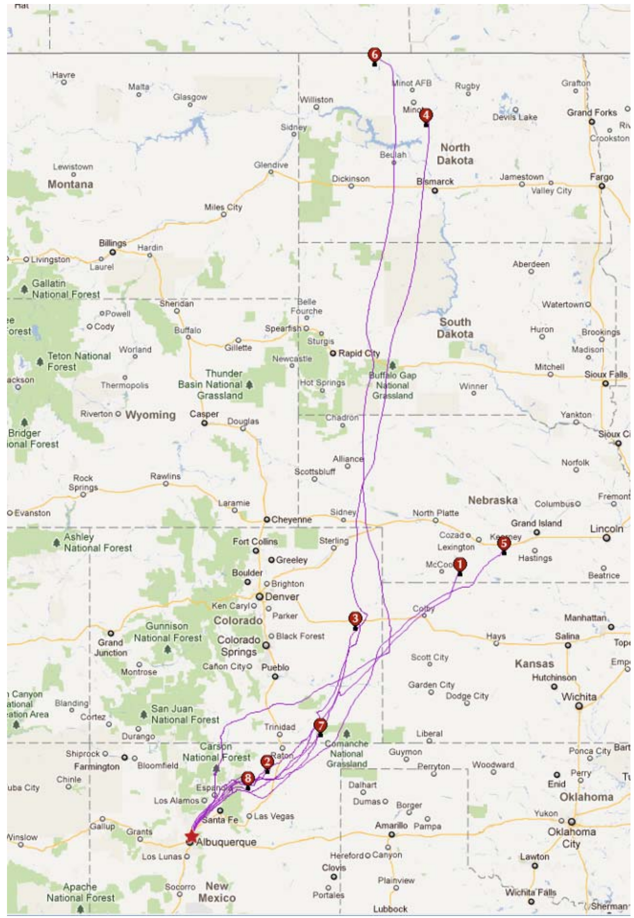
At the end of the Fiesta, the Command Center trailer is packed up and pulled off the field to patiently wait for next year's race. Hopefully, this has given you a quick peak at all the work it takes to provide the Command Center's support to the America's Challenge teams. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to let us know. We're always happy to help! ■

Editors' Note: And when every motel room within 100 miles of Minot, ND is filled with hunters, oil field workers or flooded-out locals, the Command Center can even act as an emergency travel agency.

Winners of the 2010 America's Challenge were presented their trophies at the award ceremony for this year's competition. From left are: 3rd place Mark Sullivan and Cheri White; 2nd place Danielle Francoeur and Linda Ellis; 1st place Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo. The 2010 race was almost certainly the first time in a major international gas ballooning competition that women have occupied all three spots on the podium, Barbara first, Danielle second, Cheri third. All of the pilots (including the guys!) wore pink scarves while receiving their trophies.
photos by Kim Vesely

2011 America's Challenge Results

The 16th America's Challenge competition launched on Saturday evening, October 1, 2011. The forecast was for slow flights to the north northeast on the deck and even slower winds at the higher altitudes. This made for frustrating flights crossing lots of mountains. It was hard to stay low in faster winds and yet clear the mountains. And northeast New Mexico offered plenty of afternoon thermals for those who did make it out of the mountains. Ballast usage was great and many balloons landed after only a one day flight. For those who went further, ballast management still played into their landing after a second day except for two teams (Hempleman-Adams/Mason and Cuneo/Fricke) who battled it out all the way to near the Canadian border in North Dakota. Both teams said they had the ballast to fly through the fourth night, but neither actually did. Cuneo and Fricke landed at sundown while Hempleman-Adams and Mason pulled off a night landing to win. Winds were forecasted to be fast in the landing area and they were fast a few hundred feet above the surface. A bit, slower at the surface, but not by much. All bodies and equipment were recovered safely as the chase for Cuneo/Fricke arrived within 15 minutes of their landing while Hempleman-Adams chase was a bit further away. ■



16th America's Challenge - 2011 - Final Results

Scoring Officer: James W. Byrd — **Event Director:** John Petrehn

Launch Coords [N lat. : W long.] 35 deg 11.735 min 106 deg 35.865 min

Final Rank	Team #	Pilot / CoPilot	Country	Launch Date/Time (M/D/Y) (UTC) / Landing Date/Time (M/D/Y) (UTC)		Landing Coordinates N. Latitude (deg/min)		W. Longitude (deg/min)		Distance (km) / Landing Location	Duration (hr : min)
1	6	HEMPLEMAN-ADAMS, D.	U K	10/2/2011	2:58:28	48	56.4495	102	12.4699	1,570.06 / 1,538.66[1]	71:31
		MASON, JONATHAN	AUSTRALIA	10/5/2011	2:32:58					Minot, ND	
2	4	CUNEO, PETER	U S	10/2/2011	2:50:34	47	58.4892	100	59.3877	1,494.54	69:24
		FRICKE, BARBARA	U S	10/5/2011	0:17:20					Velva, ND	
3	5	CAYTON, ANDY	U S	10/2/2011	2:55:10	40	39.8618	99	7.0551	893.89	40:04
		MANUEL, BILL	U S	10/3/2011	19:07:33					Kearney, NE	
4	3	SULLIVAN, MARK	U S	10/2/2011	2:43:27	39	16.8402	102	40.1324	571.96	36:28
		WHITE, CHERI	U S	10/3/2011	15:16:18					Stratton, CO	
5	7	GONZALEZ, ARNULFO	SPAIN	10/2/2011	3:04:52	37	16.8715	103	30.9246	360.79	22:10
		AGUIRRE, ANGEL	SPAIN	10/2/2011	23:18:09					Kim, CO	
6	2	FRANCOEUR, DANIELLE	CANADA	10/2/2011	2:38:31	36	34.724	104	47.359	224.03	22:01
		ELLIS, LINDA	U S	10/3/2011	0:40:00					Cimarron, NM	
7	8	VITANZA, LOUIS	U S	10/2/2011	3:08:52	36	16.3659	105	15.7019	169.96	13:51
		PADELT, BERT	U S	10/2/2011	17:01:53					Mora, NM	
8	1	BRYANT, PHILIP	U S	10/2/2011	2:33:08	40	17.32	100	10.55	799.29 / 0.0[2]	32:48
		EIMERS, WILHELM	GERMANY	10/3/2011	11:22:00					Cambridge, NE	

Notes:

1) Team #6 - Penalized 2% of maximum distance for violation of 16th America's Challenge Rule, Section 6.2 - Launch.

2) Team #1 - No result: Violation of 16th America's Challenge Rule, Section 6.1 - Flight Conditions.

Twice Across the Alps for One Victory!

by Sébastien Rolland and Vincent Leÿs

The launch of the 55th Gordon Bennett occurs a little before midnight on Saturday September 10, 2011 beside the runway of the Gap-Tallard aerodrome. Emotions run high as the competitors leave, one by one, to the sound of the national anthems, for this great adventure.

In the dark and in the middle of the mountains, we perceive other balloons very close, and we limit our rate of ascent to prevent any collision risk. A slow ascent also enables us to study the various air currents and to seize opportunities that we may find at lower altitude thus saving ballast because our strategy is not yet firmly determined. At this stage, the weather forecast on the other side of the Alps is complex and evolving. Some balloons ascend very quickly to very high altitudes and move to the front of the pack. It is always good to have some pilots in our line-of-sight.

Now beyond the lights of Gap, we fly over the Lake Serre-Ponçon in the moonlight. There is no horizon: the mountains dominate us and encircle us. They are silhouetted clearly against the starry sky. In the distance, we see the towns of Orcières, Briançon and the nearby mountain ridge, la Barre des Ecrins. We cross over the Italian border at night near Mount Viso (alt. 3,841 meters) and we can just make out the Po River valley through a blanket of ground fog. This layer will evolve into cumulus clouds very early the next morning, rising above the high summits of Mont Blanc, the Great Paradise, Large Combin, Cervin, the Mount-Rose and the Dom of Mischabel. Mountaineers are able to appreciate these sights, and now we can also. The forecasts of our ground strategy team prove to be exact: Behind us, near Milan, the weather is deteriorating and it is necessary for us to land or flee this plain and to undertake a second crossing of the Alps, to be protected from the bad weather by the mountains. Before thinking of the critical stage of this race which in our estimation will really start this Sunday evening, it is necessary for us to succeed in remaining in the lea of the active cold front in the north of the Alps until the next night. We know that our ground strategy team watches its evolution at every moment just like we take care of our trajectory according to their precise recommendations.

Sébastien Rolland and Vincent Leÿs over the Alps. photo from facebook

This second alpine crossing starts in an imposing way with the overflight of Lake Côme, then among the clouds, we see here and there glaciers, alpine lakes, villages and green valleys. It is our first flight over the Alps in gas balloon and it is very moving. We think of our Swiss and French pilot friends who have done similar flights many times. However, the flying conditions are testing enough because the mountains give us but little respite. The thermal currents are very marked and it is necessary to remain very vigilant in maintaining our height above ground. In the event of an error, the ground which would collect us is very hostile, with altitudes of 4,000 meters MSL. We of course expend several bags of ballast in these operations but this will not present a serious consequence for the continuation of the flight. Our strategy is refining itself hour after hour, and we plan to soon ascend to 5,500 or 6,000 meters MSL during the second half of the flight to avoid the coming storm front. This early ballasting will only assist our eventual ascent. Sunday evening, as we arrive at Innsbrück Valley in the middle of the Austrian Tyrol, we

know that the storm front is approaching us from behind. Now is the moment to make a great turn to the right. What evolves is at the same time impressive, worrying and beautiful. Many are the exchanges with our ground strategy team before making the great decision: to either land here before the arrival of the bad weather or to fly for the second night while remaining in front of it but having it chasing us.

The choice is to land now here or tomorrow in Poland or Lithuania. We should always have a few hours of clear skies for a landing if necessary, before the passage of the front, therefore to continue seems surer to us because we will avoid landing in an alpine valley with Foehn winds gusting up to 35 knots. We are unaware of the decision of the three balloons ahead of us. These are the only ones not to have expressed their intention to land. They all must certainly be short on ballast because they have flown to altitudes of more than 6,000 meters MSL during the first day. The verdict is revealed early in the night: all of the other balloons have decided to land. At dawn we expect to be in the area of Brno where the visibility and wind speeds should be good. We are sufficiently far away from the frontal line for us to maintain a safe distance from it all night. However as we exit the Alps, an inoffensive layer of stratocumulus suddenly slides under the balloon, calling into question our ability to descend. We are at more than 5,500m MSL altitude and the envelope of the balloon is cold. We fear that if it is necessary to descend to readjust our flight direction, the envelope would become covered with ice, possibly leading to an uncontrolled landing. In addition, flying under the layer would be more difficult psychologically because this would restrict our visibility of the evolution of the frontal activity which we have been closely observing throughout the flight. These visual observations have complemented the radar reports of our ground strategy team and helped to consolidate our strategy.

Sébastien Rolland and Vincent Leÿs with the Gordon Bennett trophy.

photo from facebook

This layer of clouds, although scattered and fine, will force us to remain high and thus to the left of our desired track. But we should still be able to maintain, throughout the night, a sufficient separation from the frontal line which we have been attentively observing from a distance. Two cloudy cells which are isolated from the front draw our attention because they are located on both sides of our path, still leaving us a wide window of passage between the two. But we considered it increasingly likely that we will have to go closer to these clouds if they continued to develop. An exit by ascending out the top does not seem to us reasonable either, as we estimate the cloud tops to be at 7,000 meters MSL.

Before making our decision to either continue flying or make a night landing, we call our ground strategy team to obtain their opinion on these two clouds, at the exact moment when a flash starts in the right hand cloud, then a second in the left hand cloud. The ground strategy team confirms the two echoes less than one minute afterwards and goes back to work to find a loophole. There will be three possible safe exits. However, on board these two flashes appear closer than they actually are and we made the decision immediately to land, having still all the tools at hand to do it under excellent conditions: much ballast, good visibility, the full moon at zenith, and a mental clearness not sullied by too much emotion. We calmly inform the air-traffic controller of our imminent landing, without declaring an emergency procedure although it would be a night landing. As a precaution we keep our emergency transponder beacon within reach, we leave the transponder on and keep the anti-collision lights deployed all the way to the ground. Several pulls on the valve line are necessary to maintain a constant speed of descent, guaranteeing that there will be no oscillating during the descent. As expected we turn to the right during the descent, which moves us smartly away from the cloud. We use the night vision glasses to search for high voltage power lines but we quickly note that we can see even better with our naked eyes thanks to the moonlight.

Some bags of ballast are enough to deaden the descent, whose speed may be compared to a cold descent in a hot air balloon. Just behind a hamlet, a field appears, pouf! Landed. The joy of finding the ground explodes on us and it is immense, and one more emotion: we have gained victory in this Gordon Bennett.■

55th. Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett

September 8 - 17, 2011

Gap-Tallard, France

Final Results

FAI WORLD LONG DISTANCE GAS BALLOON CHAMPIONSHIP

RANK	NATION	TEAM	PILOT # 1 / PILOT # 2	BALLOON Callsign	BALLOON Make	LAUNCH local	LAUNCH UTC	LAUNCH Sequence	LANDING Date / Time [UTC]	LANDING City / Country	LANDING Coordinates	FLIGHT TIME hours	RESULT [km] Distance	RESULT [km rounded]
1		FRA 1	**Sebastien ROLLAND** / Vincent LEYS	F-PPSE	Leys VL 1050	23:40	21:40	4	12.09.2011 00:22	Hadersdorf Austria	N 48.4200 E 14.4306	26:42	780,660	**780,7**
2		GER 2	**Matthias ZENGE** / Frank WILBERT	D-OWBA	Wörner NL-STU/1000	23:56	21:56	10	11.09.2011 17:50	Piding Germany	N 47.7750 E 12.9056	19:54	646,334	**646,3**
3		GER 1	**Wilhelm EIMERS** / Ullrich SEEL	D-OWBI	Wörner NL-STU/1000	00:05	22:05	12	11.09.2011 17:28	Unken Austria	N 47.6556 E 12.6528	19:23	623,205	**623,2**
4		GBR 1	**David HEMPLEMAN-ADAMS** / Simon CAREY	G-CGOZ	Cameron GB1000	23:37	21:37	2	11.09.2011 17:20	Itter / Kufstein Austria	N 47.4833 E 12.1583	19:43	581,549	**581,5**
5		USA 1	**Barbara FRICKE** / Peter CUNEO	D-OMFE	Wörner NL-STU/1000	23:53	21:53	9	11.09.2011 17:05	Mayerhofen Austria	N 47.1639 E 11.8611	21:12	543,570	**543,6**
6		FRA 2	**Benoit PELARD** / Benoit PETERLE	F-PALL	Lajoye LL-1000	23:50	21:50	8	11.09.2011 16:28	Innsbruck Austria	N 47.2528 E 11.3583	18:38	517,139	**517,1**
7		SUI 3	**Nicolas TIECHE** / Pierrick DUVOISIN	D-OWML	Wörner NL-STU/1000	23:47	21:47	7	11.09.2011 16:21	Kühtai Austria	N 47.2056 E 11.0056	18:34	492,406	**492,4**
8		AUT 1	**Gerald STUERZLINGER** / Josef SCHERZER	D-ORZL	Wörner NL-STU/1000	23:33	21:33	1	11.09.2011 15:30	Leins/Pitztal Austria	N 47.1722 E 10.7639	17:57	475,563	**475,6**
9		SUI 1	**Kurt FRIEDEN** / Pascal WITPRÄCHTIGER	HB-QKF	Wörner NL-STU/1000	23:59	21:59	11	11.09.2011 10:00	Cantu Italy	N 45.7556 E 09.1278	12:01	283,035	**283,0**
10		USA 2	**Cheryl WHITE** / Mark SULLIVAN	N-707GH	Wörner NL-STU/1000	23:42	21:42	5	11.09.2011 10:15	Asti Italy	N 45.0889 E 08.4889	12:33	206,554	**206,6**
11		GER 3	**Tobias ANZENEDER** / Peter KRAFCZYK	D-OWBM	Wörner NL-STU/1000	23:45	21:45	6	11.09.2011 08:00	Trino Italy	N 45.1889 E 08.3278	10:15	198,777	**198,8**
12		SUI 2	**Max KREBS** / Walter GSCHWENDTNER	HB-QHP	Wörner NL-STU/1000	no launch	no launch	3				00:00	0,000	**0,0**

Common Launch Coordinates:
Airport Reference Point, Gap-Tallard, LFNA
N 44° 27' 13.05" / E 006° 02' 11.66"
44.453625 / 6.036572

published 14.09.2011 @ 16:00 local

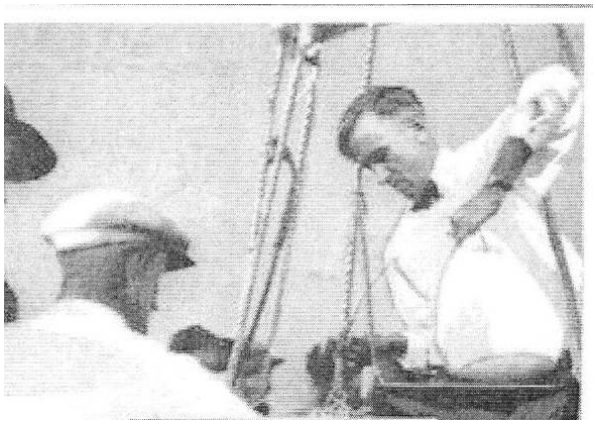
Markus Haggeney (Event Director)

Editors' Notes: A low pressure system was moving into Europe from the northwest on the day scheduled for the 55th Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett launch. This weather system was of concern to the participants and organizers. However, since the hydrogen trucks were available only through the weekend, a launch ahead of the storm was chosen to save the competition. The organizers obtained special permission for high altitude, night VFR flights over Italy.
The flight time for team USA 1 was incorrectly recorded. The correct time was 19:12.

R I D I N G the W I N D S

by Ward T. Van Orman

This article was in "Popular Mechanics" the year following Van Orman's win of the 1930 Gordon Bennett International Balloon Race.



Van Orman taking sand bags aboard before a race.

Out over the Atlantic Ocean, with the nearest land 3,300 miles ahead, in a balloon with enough ballast to travel 1,500 miles - that undoubtedly was one of the outstanding thrills I have experienced during years of free-balloon racing in America and Europe.

We - C.K. Wollam, my aide, and I - had started from Brussels, Belgium, the evening before in the Gordon Bennett International balloon race. Weather reports indicated that our best objective would be Brest, France. Shortly after noon, we passed over the Guernsey and Jersey Islands in the English Channel. Then something seemed to whisper in my ear, telling me that we had better check our course more carefully. We did this, and were surprised to find that our present direction would carry us to the north of Brest about five miles, missing land entirely, and straight into the open Atlantic.

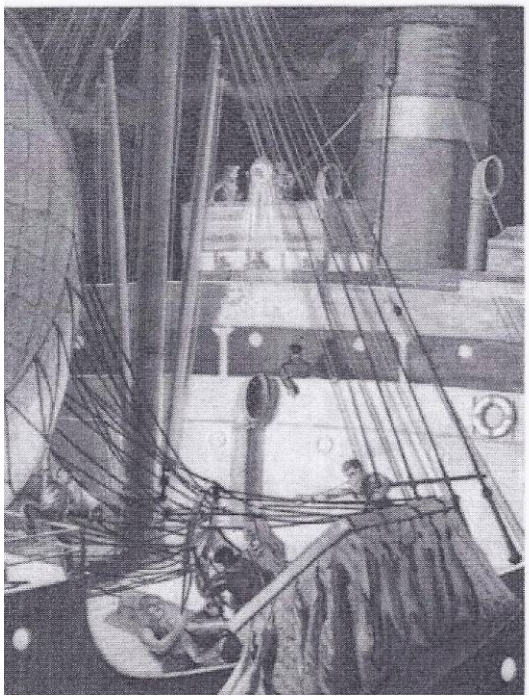
We tried all the air currents up to 25,000 feet altitude, but they were absolutely single tracked—all moving out over the open sea. After vainly trying to maneuver the balloon so we could land on shore, we decided to head for the island of Ouessant, about twenty miles to the west of Brest. But at 7:00 o'clock we passed six miles to the north of the little island - and realized that America was the next stop.

After deciding that winds probably would change after a while, and blow us back over France, we turned our radio to station 2LO, London, and picked up the disheartening information that the winds were going to blow toward the west for the next three days.

Then an idea, ridiculous at first, struck me. Why not try to land on the deck of a steamer? Foolish as it sounded, it seemed to be the only way out. We did not wish to descent on the open sea, for that would automatically disqualify us in the race.

Near midnight we sighted a little steamer, rolling in the twenty-foot waves. We were at 2,000 feet altitude. Grabbing a flashlight, I blinked it for several minutes in the direction of the steamer, then signaled, in Morse code: "We are going to land on board." To our great delight, the ship responded by flashing all its lights. So we swung down to thirty feet above the water, threw over our sea anchor to check our thirty-mile speed, and maneuvered until we struck the guardrail of the deck. A half-dozen sailors grabbed the basket, and, after the boat had swung round so that the bag would blow over the deck, I pulled the ripcord that released the gas.

It was the S. S. "Vaterland," bound for Rotterdam, Holland, upon which we had dropped. It was the first time in the history of ballooning that such a



Landing on the Vaterland in the 1930 Gordon Bennett.

landing had been made. We had made the greatest distance of any contesting balloon, but the Belgian Aero Club held that we were disqualified because we had descended on the sea. But the thing that hurt most was that the victory was awarded to a Belgian balloon crew that not only had come down into the sea, but nearly died of seven hours' exposure in the water near Spain.

Although I have flown hundreds of hours and thousands of miles in free balloons, I have yet to make a parachute jump in order to save my life. Not that I have never had occasion to jump, for I had, once. But I did not have time to do it. That was during the 1928 national race that started from Pittsburgh. With Walter Morton as aide, I was making good time over Pennsylvania when we encountered terrific thunderstorms in the vicinity of Greensburg. Efforts to get above the storm were futile, and our balloon was sucked into the swift currents. We reached 12,000 feet altitude, and encountered a severe hailstorm. Then we started downward at forty miles an hour. Morton and I threw out sand as fast as we could, but we might as well have tossed out a handful of issue paper. The basket struck the ground with such force that our instruments were shattered. Then up we went again, to 10,000 feet, and then started down once more. We struck the ground again so hard it knocked our hats off, and again bounced upward.

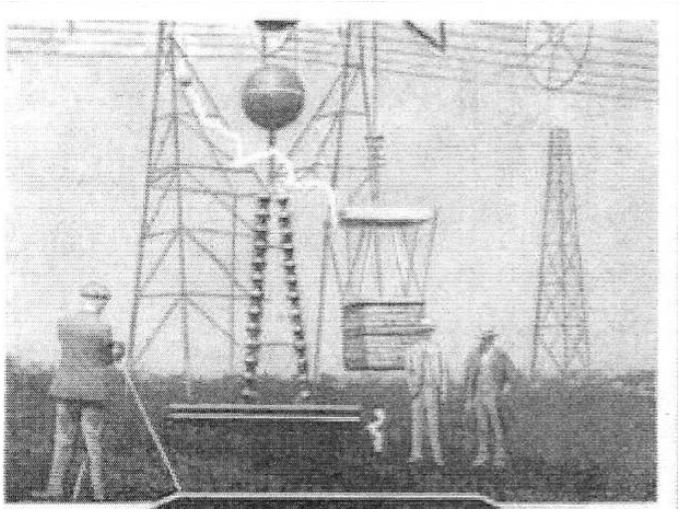
At about 2,000 feet, after shouting greetings to Captain Kepner and Lieutenant Erickson in an army balloon that dropped rapidly past us, I turned, and there was a blinding flash of lightning a short distance in front of my face. I looked up, saw the bottom of the balloon envelope clearly, and then everything went black. Five hours later I felt myself coming out of what seemed to be a very deep and peaceful sleep. The rain was beating down in my face. Then I realized that I was lying with my head on the ground and my feet and body in the upturned balloon basket. I called to Morton, but received no reply. After removing the equipment that held down my legs, and unfastening the wet parachute belt with considerable difficulty, I got up and discovered Morton at my side. I felt his wrist, and was stunned to find no evidence of pulse.

In the distance was a farmhouse. Starting to run toward it for aid, I fell flat on my face. Then it was that I found one of my legs was broken. After five minutes of shouting, I heard several farmers come running across the fields. A physician was summoned, and announced that Morton had been struck by lightning, passing away instantly.

I later found that the hydrogen gas in the balloon had been ignited by the lightning, and that the craft's fall had been checked somewhat by part of the bag forming a parachute.

That same thunderstorm claimed two other balloons. One was an army balloon, in which Lieut. Paul G. Everet was killed. J. F. Cooper, aide of a third balloon, was struck by lightning and severely burned, but recovered.

In spite of this awful experience, I do not consider ballooning extremely hazardous. The danger of lightning, one of the greatest that balloonists have been forced to face, has been largely overcome by means of a lightning shield which I developed, in cooperation with Arthur O. Austin, of Barberton, Ohio, following the Pittsburgh race.



Testing balloon basket protector that shields against lightning.

One of the most pleasant thrills I remember came to me one night, following a take-off in a national race from San Antonio, Tex. Wollam was my aide. We were drifting at 2,000 feet over central Texas, in absolute silence. We turned on the radio set and tuned in stations all over the country. At midnight, we picked up WTAM, at Cleveland. Then, with startling clearness, came the voice of Mrs. Van Orman, speaking from Cleveland, 1,100 miles away, wishing us Godspeed.

The radio receiver has become one of the most important pieces of equipment the balloonist carries. It enables him to pick up weather reports, to learn of

the progress of competing balloons, to detect and avoid thunderstorm centers, to enjoy music during dull hours in the air, and to locate his position with considerable exactness through the use of radio-compass equipment.

During the 1930 international race from Cleveland, my aide, Alan R. MacCracken, and I were able to receive constant weather reports from airways stations and from WTAM at the starting point. Perhaps the most exciting moments of this race were provided by thunderstorms that kept us company throughout much of the distance from Cleveland to Boston, where we landed.

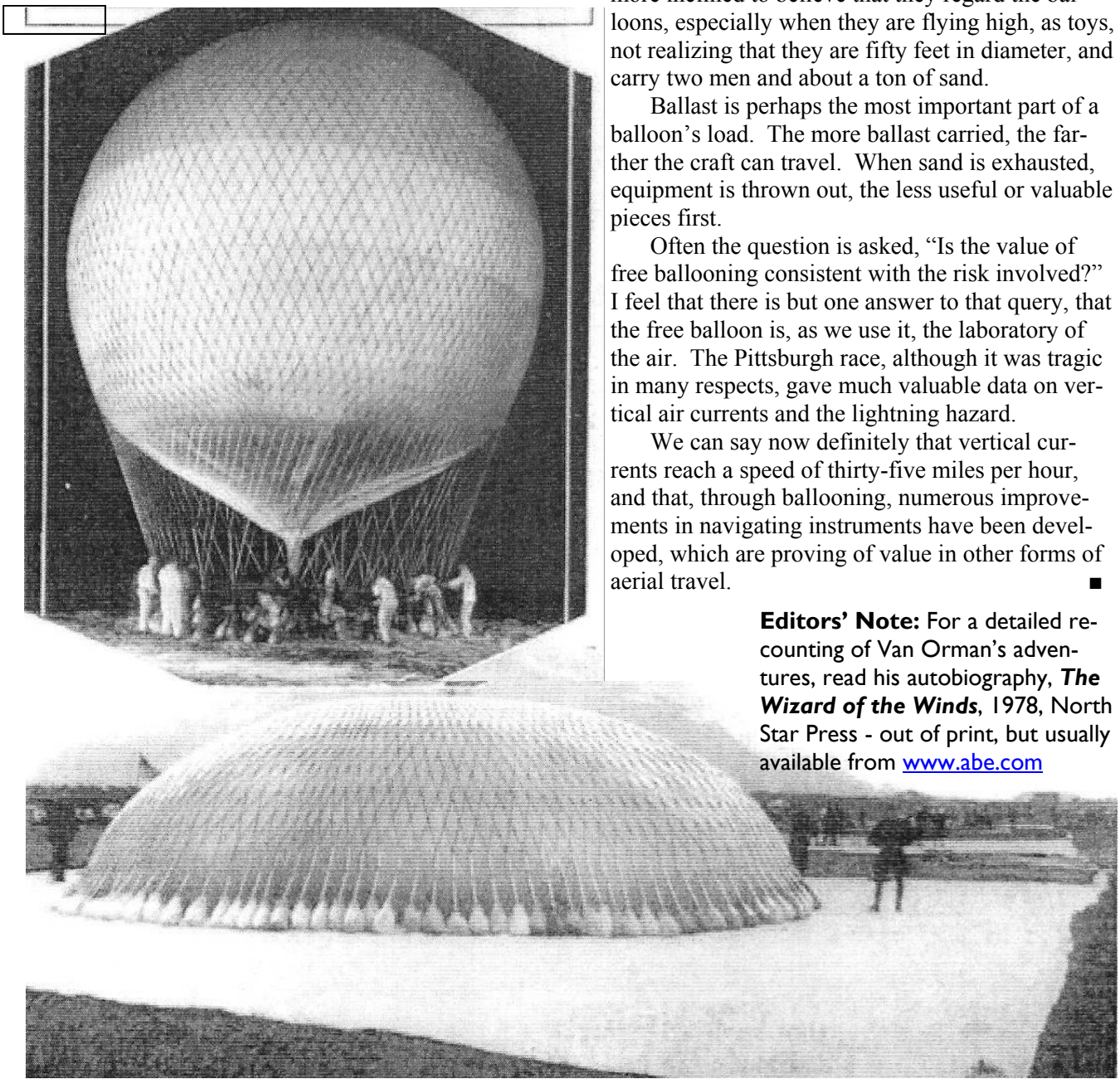
There is one state over which most balloonists have learned to fly at a high altitude. That is Kentucky. It seems that the mountaineers, from some reason not exactly known, are fond of taking pot-shots at passing balloons with their squirrel rifles. Many believe the mountaineers do this because they think the balloons carry revenue officers. I am more inclined to believe that they regard the balloons, especially when they are flying high, as toys, not realizing that they are fifty feet in diameter, and carry two men and about a ton of sand.

Ballast is perhaps the most important part of a balloon's load. The more ballast carried, the farther the craft can travel. When sand is exhausted, equipment is thrown out, the less useful or valuable pieces first.

Often the question is asked, "Is the value of free ballooning consistent with the risk involved?" I feel that there is but one answer to that query, that the free balloon is, as we use it, the laboratory of the air. The Pittsburgh race, although it was tragic in many respects, gave much valuable data on vertical air currents and the lightning hazard.

We can say now definitely that vertical currents reach a speed of thirty-five miles per hour, and that, through ballooning, numerous improvements in navigating instruments have been developed, which are proving of value in other forms of aerial travel. ■

Editors' Note: For a detailed recounting of Van Orman's adventures, read his autobiography, ***The Wizard of the Winds***, 1978, North Star Press - out of print, but usually available from www.abe.com



Inflating the "Goodyear VIII" for an International Gordon Bennett Race.

Padelt and Petrehn Receive Awards

Albert (Bert) F Padelt and John R Petrehn received the FAI's Montgolfier Ballooning Diplomas at the National Aeronautic Association's (NAA) Fall Awards Banquet, November 7, 2011 in Arlington, Virginia.

Bert Padelt was awarded the Montgolfier Diploma for his contributions to the sport of ballooning. Bert's diploma reads: For his major contributions to the development of the sport of ballooning as a designer and builder of gas and hot air balloons. His designs and systems have advanced the science of gas ballooning and his endless promotion of the sport has been instrumental in generating a revival of interest in gas ballooning.

Johnny Petrehn was awarded the Montgolfier Diploma for the best sporting performance in hot air ballooning. Johnny is a champion American balloonist. He has twice won the FAI World Hot Air Balloon Championships, 2006 and 2010. In addition, he finished second at the 2010 United States National Hot Air Balloon Championship and was the U.S. National Champion in 1998. Johnny is currently the #1 ranked pilot in the world per the FAI World Ranking List following his World Championship win.

Johnny Petrehn also received the NAA's Harmon Trophy. This trophy is awarded for the most outstanding international achievement in the art and/or science of aeronautics (ballooning) for the previous year. ■

Top: Bert and Johnny receiving their awards from NAA President.
Middle: Joanny and Bert Padelt with the Diploma.
Bottom: A group gathered for cocktails prior to the dinner.
photos by Barbara Fricke

Editors' Note: There were approximately 40 family members, friends and balloonists present for Bert and Johnny at the award's ceremony and dinner.

Gas on the Web

2011 Gordon Bennett Sites:
http://www.ballon.org/ very good, from the Eimers clan German and English

http://www.ClusterBalloon.com Jonathan Trappe's website

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/picturesoftheday/8764836/Pictures-of-the-day-15-September-2011.html?image=11 Cluster balloon launch

http://gordonbennettrace.wordpress.com/ Swiss G-B website

http://www.tt.com/csp/cms/sites/tt/Nachrichten/3364103-2/spektakul%C3%A4re-landungen-beim-gr%C3%B6%C3%9Ften-gasballon-rennen-der-welt.csp French II GB team landing and retrieval

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-14879216 BBC reports on the 2011 GB
https://picasaweb.google.com/116621444044559495693/GordonBennett2011GapTallardFrance# Alexandra Semenishina's Picasa album of 2011 GB photos

Other interesting sites:
http://www.facebook.com/#!/media/set/?set=a.1339633176097.2049980.1389205762&type=1 Civil War Balloon Corps at Edwards Ferry

http://www.sdpb.org/tv/shows.aspx?MediaID=58966&Parmtype=TV&ParmAccessLevel=sdpb-all Aerostar's unmanned reconnaissance balloons

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evBHYKg1X9I&feature=share&mid=518 2009 Gordon Bennett video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTB1s0WkUhw&NR=1 2011 America's Challenge Launch

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cH6jLJSoLuw&feature=related 2010 America's Challenge Launch

http://www.kearneyhub.com/news/local/article_51d800f6-ef76-11e0-82c6-001cc4c002e0.html America's Challenge Story of Bill Manuela and Andy Cayton's landing in Nebraska

http://www.ntsb.gov/aviationquery/brief2.aspx?ev_id=20101004X10735&ntsbno=ERA10LA511&akey=1
NTSB Probable Cause Report for Abruzzo-Davis Accident

Correction

It was incorrectly reported in the last newsletter "that the 2001 America's Challenge will be the U.S. qualifier for the 2012 Gordon Bennett". It should have read that the 2011 America's Challenge would be the qualifier for 2012.
With the correct America's Challenge used, the qualifiers for the 2012 Gordon Bennett are: Peter Cuneo, Andy Cayton, and Mark Sullivan. Louis Vitanza is the first alternate.

Cluster balloon launch at 2011 Gordon Bennett.
photo from facebook

Obituaries

Stefan Makne of Poland

From our correspondent in Henfenfeld, Germany, Stefan Handl, comes the unhappy news of the passing of famed Polish gas balloonist, Stefan Makne at the age of 84. His biography from the Polish Wikipedia site, translated with a bit of help from ***Google Translate***, is given below.

Stefan Makne was the only Pole to win the prestigious Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett after it was resumed post World War II. He won in Paris in 1983, flying with co-pilot, Ireneusz Cieslak in the balloon SP-BZO Polonaise. This was the first year of the event's revival. His winning distance was 690 kilometers in 38 hours. The event launched from the Place de la Concorde in Paris and Stefan's winning flight landed in Regensburg, Germany. The Poles beat the second place U.S. team of Dean Stellas and Robert Snow by 164 kilometers.

Trained as an aerospace engineer specializing in airframe structure, his degree was obtained from the Department of Mechanical Engineering Poznan University of Technology.

He was a balloon, glider and airplane pilot. For participation in the Grey Ranks (ed: underground resistance?), he was imprisoned during the war and removed from aviation in the years of Stalinism. He was Polish glider champion in the standard class in 1975 and in the open class in 1977. As a balloon pilot and instructor he emphasized sport ballooning after the war, with gas balloons and helped foster the sport of hot air ballooning, training young pilots in Poland and abroad. He participated in seventeen Gordon Bennett Cups. In addition to winning in 1983, he was second twice (1985, 1988) and also took third place twice (1984, 1991). His last Gordon Bennett as a competitor was at age 77 in the 48th Coupe, in 2004, originating from Thionville, France.

Polish pilots have won the cup five times (1933, 1934, 1935, 1938 and 1983).

He will be sorely missed by balloonists on both sides of the Atlantic. Any further information on Stefan Makne would be greatly appreciated by your editors. ■

Sid Cutter of Albuquerque

Sidney 'Sid' Dillon Cutter died on May 21, 2011 at the age of 77 after a long battle with stomach cancer. Sid was born on May 9, 1934 and his achievements in hot air ballooning are legendary, but Sid also flew just about any kind of aircraft including gas balloons. He most recently competed in the America's Challenge in 2000 and 2001, both times flying with Mark Sullivan. Distance-made-good for each of these flights was over 1,000 miles and were good for a fourth and fifth place finish respectively. Before that, Mark and Sid flew together in the U.S. National Gas Balloon Championship and took fourth place in the 1990 World Gas Balloon Championship. My recollection is that Sid also served on several America's Challenge juries and actively followed the results of each of these annual events.

Among Sid's multitude of perhaps lesser known lifetime achievements are: commercial and flight instructor rating by the age of 18; a stint in the US Air Force flying single engine jets, cargo aircraft and helicopters; President of Cutter Flying Services from 1963 to 1974; national hot air balloon champion in both 1978 and 1986; one of the 2002 honorary Olympic Torchbearers and finally accumulating a total of over 22,000 hour in flight.

His honors include induction into the BFA, AIBF, FAI and Albuquerque Sports Halls of Fame. His awards include the Montgolfier Diploma from the FAI and the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award from the FAA. We miss you, Sid! ■

Chairman's Report
by Peter Cuneo

The Gas Board has been busy working on several tasks. First, a subcommittee consisting of Phil Bryant and Brian Critelli has produced a draft revision of the Gas Division Competition Rules & Regulations (last revised in 2007). This revision is now in the hands of the full board and will be reviewed at a single topic board meeting early next year. Second, the board has agreed in principle to a measure whose intention is to ensure that the U.S. will be more likely to field its full complement of three teams for future Coupe Gordon Bennetts. This measure will be invoked only if the existing selection process does not produce three willing teams. If, after all first pilots who flew in the U.S. qualifying competition, have been offered a spot on the U.S. team, and less than three teams have accepted, then and only then, qualifying second pilots will be offered a spot on the team in the order of their finish in the qualifier. To be a 'qualified' second pilot, that pilot must be either a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident of the U.S. and must have achieved a legal result in the U.S. qualifying event. Member comments are solicited on this proposed revision.

Next, the Gas Division has agreed to co-sponsor with the German Gordon Bennett delegation led by Wilhelm Eimers, a commemorative pin in memory of Carol Rymer Davis and Richard Abruzzo (photo). Any gas division member who would like to preserve the memory of these gas balloonists may request one of these pins by e-mailing the chairman (petercuneo@msn.com). Our mutual agreement with the German delegation, is that in as much as it is in our power, these pins are not to be resold or used for commercial purposes. We really, really hope that there are no e-bay or Craig's lists postings of these pins down the road.

Finally, on a personal note, I would like to congratulate the winners of both this years America's Challenge and Gordon Bennett competitions while I issue a personal word of advice. It seems that the standard for winning one of these competitions recently has been the skill to pull off a night landing under adverse weather conditions. Both winning teams achieved this feat with an admirable degree of skill this year, but I am sure they would be the first to tell a perhaps less experienced team to seriously consider a daytime landing and a lower finish as a safer option. Each pilot must evaluate his/her own threshold and act accordingly. There is no absolute right or wrong here, but recent history has illustrated the consequences of tempting fate. I will state from first hand experience that there is great satisfaction in finishing a competition not first, but safely. ■

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