



# FIFTEEN TH ABOVE DIXIE

CARL FISHER'S OWN STORY  
THRILLING AERIAL RIDE IN  
GREAT NATIONAL BALLOON


By CARL G. FISHER,

Pilot Balloon Indiana in National Championship  
Race of Aero Club of America.

**A**FTER four ascensions abroad and eleven here in Indiana, one of which I made alone at night, I began to think I knew something about exploring the trackless, silent regions above us. When I received my pilot's license from the Aero Club of America I was sure I knew all about it.

Now, after my experience of forty-nine hours in the air, from Hoosierdom to Dixieland, some of which time was spent at an altitude of close to 16,000 feet, and which included a "thriller" that my aid, Capt. G. L. Bumbaugh, had never met with before in his 300 ventures into cloud-land, I am frank to admit that when I started in the big race I did not have a clear and concise idea of real ballooning.

While the Military Band rent the air with strains of the "Star-Spangled Banner," and more than 40,000 spectators cheered us to the echo, Capt. G. L. Bumbaugh and myself rose from the Motor Speedway June 5 at about



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penetrate the darkness  
below, is worth risking  
rest my body on the basket  
at the glory unfolding before

looning.

While the Military Band rent the air with strains of the "Star-Spangled Banner," and more than 40,000 spectators cheered us to the echo, Capt. G. L. Bumbaugh and myself rose from the Motor Speedway June 5 at about 5 o'clock, nerved to brave whatever obstacle time had in store. We were armed, too, to baffle with the elements of the clouds and to defy hunger and thirst, but our armor had defects as developments proved.

No sooner had we mounted on the wings of a south-east wind, following close on the trail of A. Holland Forbes and Clifford B. Harmon in their balloon, the New York, than we began the work of examining the conditions of our vessel. It is necessary to inspect all valve ropes, the supply of ballast, and the instruments that tell the story of ascent or descent. I might say here for the benefit of the uninitiated that the key to the gates of the mysteries above is the canvas bag of sand. Sand is to the pilot of the sky what water is to the traveler of a desert.

All was well at the start. We made a gradual ascent of 2,000 feet, all the time keeping our eyes on Forbes, who was rising rapidly and apparently seeking for a high current, which he found at 7,000 feet. We decided that we had better chance it at about 3,000 feet, where we found a wind blowing directly south.

At the height of 4,000 feet the Speedway grounds presented an inspiring sight, as we could see thousands of men and women waving us a last good-by and wishing us good luck. It is a queer sensation that creeps gradually over one's body until you are flooded with a feeling that the earth is fast falling away, while you have become the helpless victim of the invisible element that rules the sky. For miles around the Speedway in every direction we could see the crowds on foot and in automobiles trying to follow us. But we soon left them. For the roads of the sky are not beset with turns and curves, bridges and hills, nor do you meet passersby and have to slow down to let them pass.

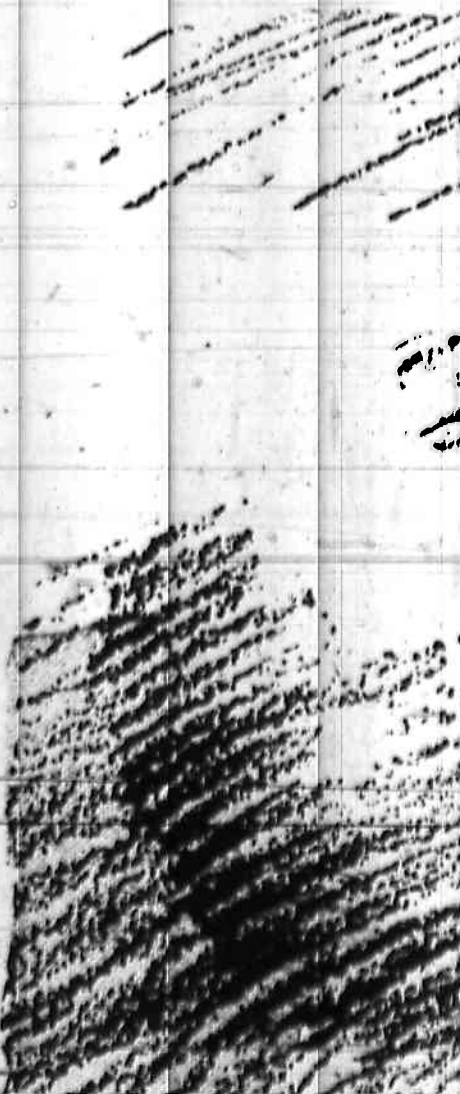
## Magnificent Scene in Moonlight.

Up to 6:30 o'clock all the entrants in the national race were in sight. We then rose to 8,000 feet in order to keep the University City, which had followed and was gaining,

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## Magnificent Scene in Moonlight.


Up to 6:30 o'clock all the entrants in the national race were in sight. We then rose to 8,000 feet in order to keep the University City, which had followed and was gaining, from overtaking us. We drifted at this height as peacefully as a sail boat on smooth waters. We had also quieted down, from the excitement consequent to the start and by the time the moon had risen I had concluded that man has never really lived until he has floated high over the terrestrial ball, watching the earth lured to sleep by the magic wand of night.

We felt like famished animals on our supply of food and enjoyed our first meal, not knowing that it would be the only undisturbed one we would be able to munch together.

Remembering that we had promised to send word home and knowing that anything dropped after dark would not be found we let go two of our carrier pigeons. They refused to leave the basket, as we were then 8,000 feet high. They were evidently afraid of the drop. One of them caught on the load ring and clung on desperately. We poked it up in our hands and it would clinch its little feet in our flesh, quivering with fright. We let them stay in the basket and dropped over a message in a paper bag.

We then settled down for the night. Ballancing up for the night comes along with the setting of the sun or cooling off or congealing of the gas in the balloon. Usually in a balloon of 40,000 cubic feet capacity it takes from forty to fifty pounds of sand if there has been a hot sun to get the big bag properly balanced for the night. However, after it is once balanced a handful of sand every 20 to 30 minutes will keep the balloon riding at a level all through the night. In the morning as the sun comes up the gas begins to expand, and unless you are careful the bag will leap to a height of 12,000 feet.

At 10 o'clock Saturday night we were just beginning to fly over the hills of Brown County. Our experience here as we drifted along sleepless and alert reminded me that I was a sentinel on vigil on the skirmish line of eternity. Suddenly I had another reminder that I was a sentinel for all at once, and without warning, we heard gun reports from below. For four hours this shooting



take us back to Indianapolis. We went to 10,000 feet and east. We went 2,000 feet current until noon Sunday directly over the spot we were in, when we had decided. We had lost six hours and foolish maneuvering. We and found a current blowing held it until 6 o'clock that

At this time we found in cans that had held oil. as we discovered this our by leaps and bounds until I could not taste just oil. We had been riding all temperature to 110 degrees directly over the balloon shadow protected us. We in every direction and reflected into the basket hot and tired, and because we were out of the race, get water and rest.

## Get Water at

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At 11 o'clock that night Bumbaugh, who had been up all the previous night preparing the balloon for the flight, had fallen asleep, hanging over the edge of the basket with one arm around a stay rope. At 1 o'clock we righted Forbes again. He had apparently abandoned the southwest current and was drifting back to the southeast current. We were traveling at about ten miles an hour.

Bumbaugh slept but an hour or so and was soon as active as ever helping steer the balloon. Soon day broke.

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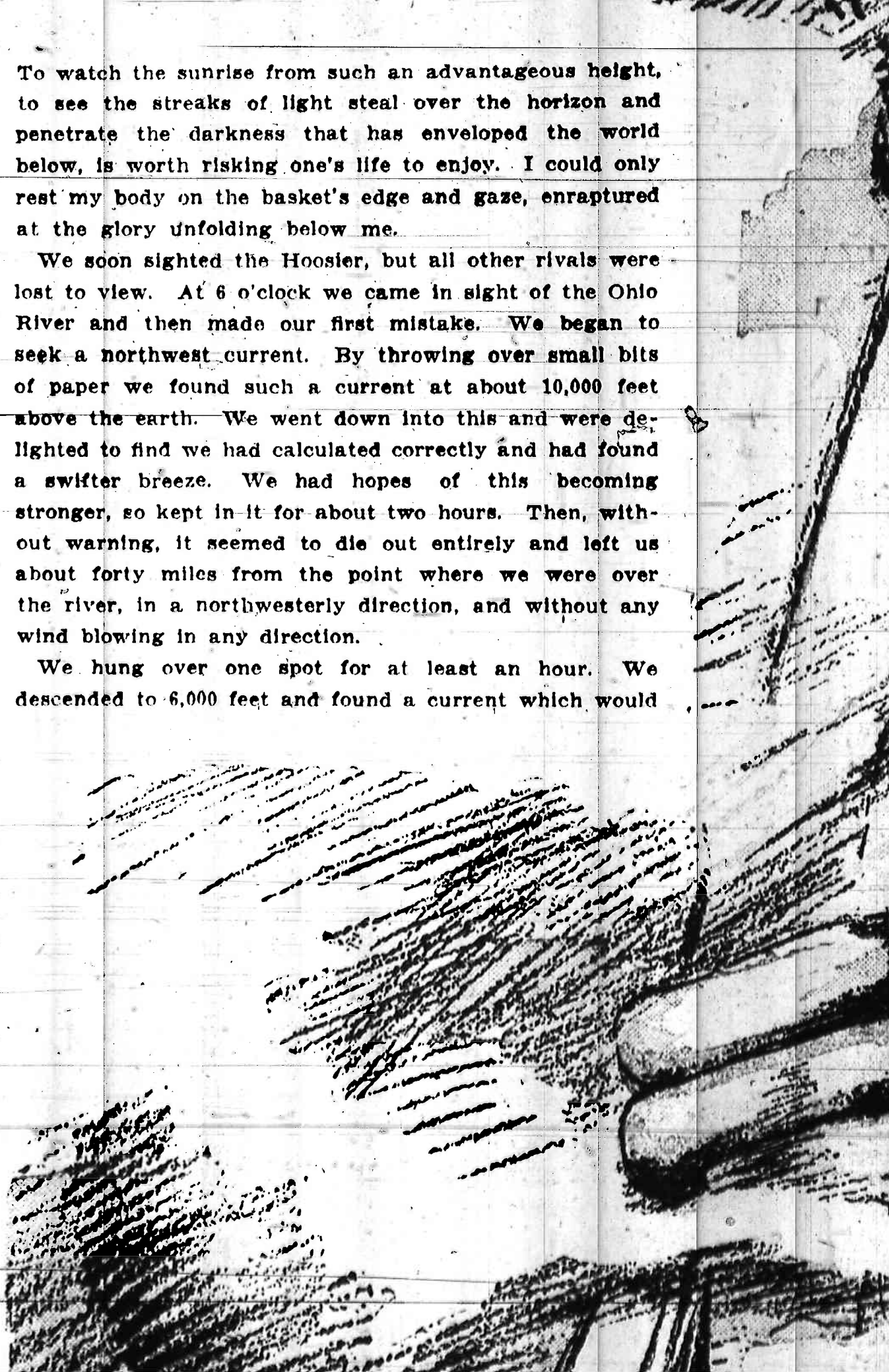
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To watch the sunrise from such an advantageous height, to see the streaks of light steal over the horizon and penetrate the darkness that has enveloped the world below, is worth risking one's life to enjoy. I could only rest my body on the basket's edge and gaze, enraptured at the glory unfolding below me.

We soon sighted the Hoosier, but all other rivals were lost to view. At 6 o'clock we came in sight of the Ohio River and then made our first mistake. We began to seek a northwest current. By throwing over small bits of paper we found such a current at about 10,000 feet above the earth. We went down into this and were delighted to find we had calculated correctly and had found a swifter breeze. We had hopes of this becoming stronger, so kept in it for about two hours. Then, without warning, it seemed to die out entirely and left us about forty miles from the point where we were over the river, in a northwesterly direction, and without any wind blowing in any direction.

We hung over one spot for at least an hour. We descended to 6,000 feet and found a current which would



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take us back to Indianapolis. This would not do at all. We went to 10,000 feet and found a current to the south-east. We went 2,000 feet higher and remained in that current until noon Sunday, when we passed almost directly over the spot we had abandoned Saturday morning, when we had decided to take a northwest current. We had lost six hours and several bags of sand by this foolish maneuvering. We had ascended to 12,500 feet and found a current blowing eighteen miles an hour and held it until 6 o'clock that evening.

At this time we found that our water had been placed in cans that had held oil. It suffices to say that as soon as we discovered this our already aching thirst increased by leaps and bounds until I thought I would go insane if I could not taste just one mouthful of delicious water. We had been riding all day in a sun that raised the temperature to 110 degrees, except at noon, when it was directly over the balloon. For an hour the balloon's shadow protected us. White fleecy clouds were under us in every direction and from these the sun's heat was reflected into the basket at an intense degree. We were hot and tired, and because of the loss of time we thought we were out of the race, so we decided to descend and get water and rest.

## Get Water at Schackle Island.

We dropped at Schackle Island, Tenn. By the time we neared the earth a large crowd had gathered beneath us. We let down a bucket by a rope, procured the much needed water, bid good-by to the curious country folks, after finding that we were about twelve miles from Nashville, and rose to continue our journey. This stop did not disqualify us from the race, however.

We rose to 600 feet, hoping to strike a current that would carry us to the coast, about 550 miles southeast. But at this time we experienced our first encounter with the enemies of ballooning - air eddies. We were trespassing on the rights of an aviator proprietor of the sky. When a fight was around, Rumbough has made more than 200 balloon trips, but says that this one was the most thrilling journey to the fact that he has survived some half a century in the clouds. Without air warping, while the feet above the earth



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We rose to 600 feet, hoping to strike a current that would carry us to the coast, about 550 miles southeast. But at this time we experienced our first encounter with the enemies of ballooning—air eddies. We were trespassing on the rights of an unseen proprietor of the sky-lands, whose anger was aroused. Bumbaugh has made more than 300 balloon trips, but says that this one was his most thrilling, despite the fact that he has survived some hair-raising incidents among the clouds.

Without any warning, while 600 feet above the earth, the balloon commenced to turn around. Our ascent became so rapid that it took all our energies to watch the altimeter and gauge the gas and ballast accordingly. The current of air seemed to be straight upward and was blowing so hard that it went directly past the basket. I think we leaped into the sky at the rate of 100 feet

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a minute. At an altitude of 10,000 feet, having gone directly straight above, I could tell that even an old veteran, cool and accustomed to aerial dangers like Bumbaugh, was worried. It was growing very cold, and yet small beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

I confess that I began to share his anxiety and I urged him to tell me what was wrong. He said that in all his experience he had never encountered such conditions. Without throwing out an ounce of ballast we had ascended 12,000 feet and were still going up at a terrific clip. Our teeth were chattering and we hurriedly crawled into sweaters and overcoats and soon wrapped blankets around these. The gas in the bag was congealed to such an extent that it was forced out of the appendix in a stream which looked like smoke. And all this far above any chance to yell for help. It was up to us, or rather up to the laws of nature, to decide whether we would soon be dashed to death thousands of feet below or strike a current that would lead us out of this whirlpool of winds.

Bumbaugh said we must release the balloon or there was danger of its bursting. We pulled the valve rope and about a small quantity of gas to escape.

But it did no good. To let out more gas meant that when we did begin to drop we would go down like a feather. At 14,000 feet we began to descend. This was

the ray of hope so much over six bags of precious much as that much gold

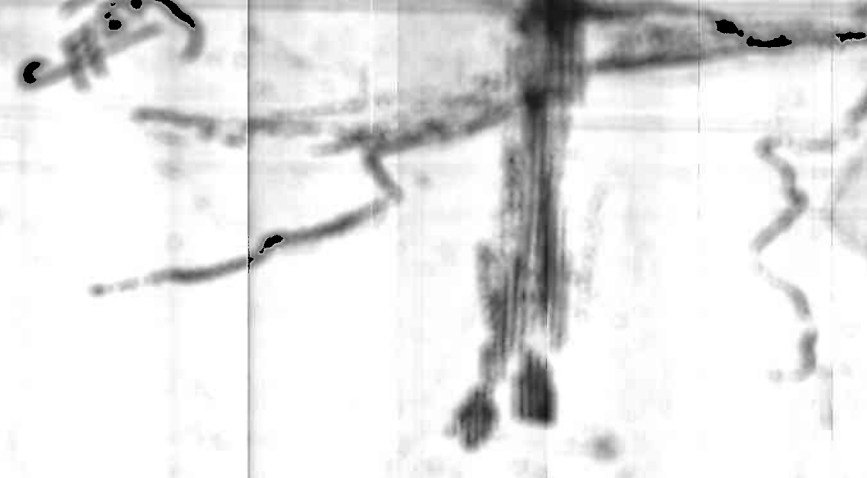
We were in a gray light far underneath us. Apparently the world. It lent a color thing about us, while we condition, together with the force all our ballast, if we dropped out of the race entirely, at least.

Our descent was hardly Bumbaugh said he feared frozen and tapped it to find however, when the needle working order and yet our could hardly see the needle.

After half an hour of such like a toy balloon 15,000 feet we neared the earth. It was enough to recognize a house.

But just when our need we shot again with the out any more warning that was turning and the air said, "We must get out





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the ray of hope so much longed for. At once we cast over six bags of precious sand, worth at that time as much as that much gold dust, in order to check the drop.

We were in a gray light with reddish-grayish clouds far underneath us. Apparently we were at the top of the world. It lent a cold, barren appearance to every thing about us, while we were about half frozen. This condition, together with the chances of having to sacrifice all our ballast, if we did not break our necks, and be out of the race entirely, was not cheering, to say the least.

Our descent was hardly noticeable it was so slow. Bumbaugh said he feared the staticscope needle had been frozen and tapped it to find out. Imagine our surprise, however, when the needle was found to be in perfect working order and yet our descent was so slow that we could hardly see the needle move..

After half an hour of suspense and having been tossed like a toy balloon 15,000 feet over the Cumberland valley we neared the earth. It was a decided relief to be near enough to recognize a house again.

But just when our nerves had quieted down, up we shot again with the same terrific speed and without any more warning that we had before. The balloon was turning and the air rushing past us. Bumbaugh said, "We must get out of this as we can not always

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...the gas meant that  
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the ray of hope we much hoped for. At once we cut  
over the bags of precious sand, worth at that time as  
much as that much gold dust, in order to check the drop.

We were in a gray light with reddish-gray clouds  
far underneath us. Apparently we were at the top of  
the world. It lent a cold, barren appearance to every  
thing about us, while we were about half frozen. This  
condition, together with the chances of having to sacri-  
fice all our ballast, if we did not break our necks, and be  
out of the race entirely, was not cheering, to say the  
least.

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IN THE PICTURE, AT THE LEFT.



ESIDE  
WHILE

come down as before." But we only went 9,000 feet this time and then began to descend in the same slow manner as before. At 800 feet above the earth we dared not rise again and risk our chances at another "shoot the chutes" in the clouds, so we decided to drop a rope and anchor to a tree if possible. We were then weak from loss of sleep, excitement and worry. We let out a drag rope, which was 450 feet long, and one inch thick, weighing 140 pounds. When the rope was dragging over the tops of the trees, which were very thick at this place, it made a good anchorage. We sat huddled in the basket, expecting any minute to be jerked into the air again. For half an hour this suspense continued. But we drifted to the southwest and escaped our death trap.

By morning we had made about thirty-five miles in a southwesterly direction and were over Island City. Our water had again become tainted and unfit to drink, and believing that we were sure out of the race, because of the misfortune with currents, we decided to make a landing.

We hailed some plantation colored workers at early dawn, and though reluctant to take hold of our drag

rope at first as directed, they finally lent a hand and pulled us down. The earth was quite rugged and for fear of hurting the basket we ordered the men to pile some ties and we effected a landing on these.

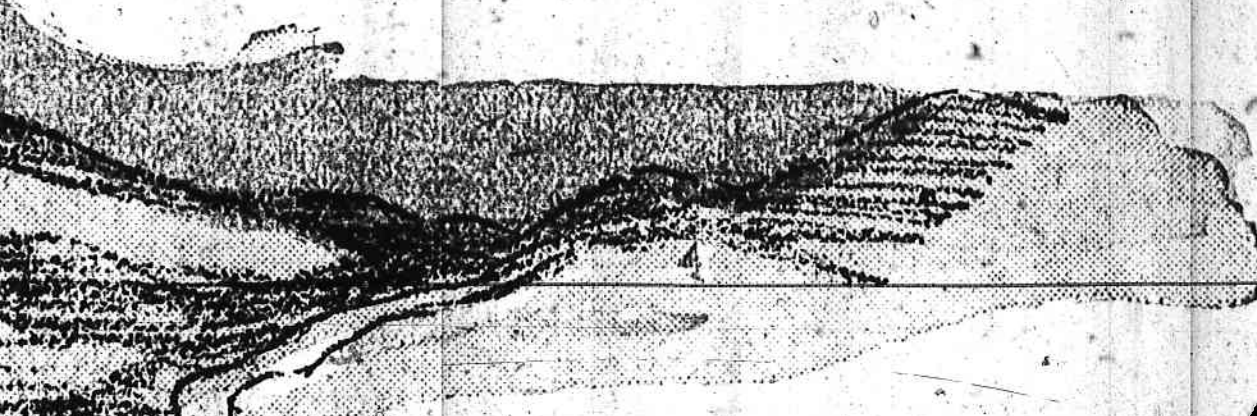
We scoured our buckets and replenished our water supply. I had a cigar in my pocket and was aching to enjoy a good smoke, so I crawled out of the basket and curled up under a nearby tree and smoked.

### Girls Sieze Rope and Hold Balloon.

We did not have quite enough ballast at this time to ride through the night, but we did have enough to continue until 6:30 o'clock in the evening, which gave us

## Girls Sieze Rope and Hold Balloon.

We did not have quite enough ballast at this time to ride through the night, but we did have enough to continue until 6:30 o'clock in the evening, which gave us 49 hours and 25 minutes in the air. Deducting thirty minutes for the time we were landed at Island City, we spent 48 hours and 55 minutes riding, which was several hours longer than any other contestant. We were,



however, quite a number of miles short of the distance traveled by the University City balloon or Mr. Forbes in the New York. They apparently had kept to the southwest wind the morning of Sunday, while we had gone off on the wild goose chase after a northwest wind. The loss of this time no doubt lost us both the race and endurance trophy.

We landed seven and one-half miles in from Tennessee City, in a very rough and mountainous district of the state, on a farm owned by a man by the name of Burgess. When we decided to land we had about forty pounds of ballast, which was not enough to balance the balloon to ride into the night. As far as we could see the ground was covered with scrub trees, and, inasmuch as we were out of the race anyway, we decided we had better come down and not use up our last ounce of ballast before landing.

Two girls rushed from the farmhouse as we began to descend. They screamed and ran back, evidently very much frightened. They soon rushed out again and began to pull frantically at the dinner bell rope to summon the men who were working in the fields.

As we came nearer to earth and the girls saw we were men, and white ones, too, they were willing to assist us. They took hold of the drag rope as requested, and ran around a tree with it, thus holding us securely.

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Mr. Burgess and his son and three or four other neighbors came to our assistance and helped us roll up the balloon and pack it away. We loaded it on a little mountain wagon hauled by a couple of mules, and got down in the valley at 10:30 at night.

As we were going down, Mr. Burgess informed us that when they had seen the balloon he and his son had made a bet to see which one could "bust" it first. They had no idea that there were passengers in the basket, but thought it was a stray circus balloon. As we came close to the earth on his farm they were waiting for a shot. We commenced to use the megaphone just in time. As we drove up to the house two long rifles were leaning against the door, and we were informed that they were the instruments they had decided to use in "busting" the balloon.

In the morning we had a seven-mile tramp to Tennessee City over the mountains, which took four hours' hard walking and pulling. We arrived in Tennessee City and there learned that but for our disqualifications we had won the endurance trophy and had broken the American endurance record for ballooning, but that Porter and the University City wife both ahead of us in distance covered.

When we reached the top we had about forty pounds of ballast, which was not enough to hold the balloon in the night. As far as we could see the ground was covered with snow, and, consequently, as we went out of the cave doorway, we decided we had better come down and put up our last ounce of ballast before leaving.

Two girls looked from the farmhouse as we began to descend. They seemed very much interested, and very much frightened. They were sitting on the porch and looking so full of curiosity at the dinner table that we could see them who were watching us the whole time.

As we came down to earth and the girls saw us were near, and while near, too, they were willing to assist us. They took hold of the drag rope as requested, and we landed a tree with it, thus holding us securely.

Mr. Burgess and his son and three or four other neighbors came to our assistance and helped us get up the balloon and put it away. We loaded it on a little mountain wagon hauled by a couple of mules, and got down in the valley at 10:30 at night.

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# OWN STORY OF HIS L RIDE IN THE BALLOON RACE.

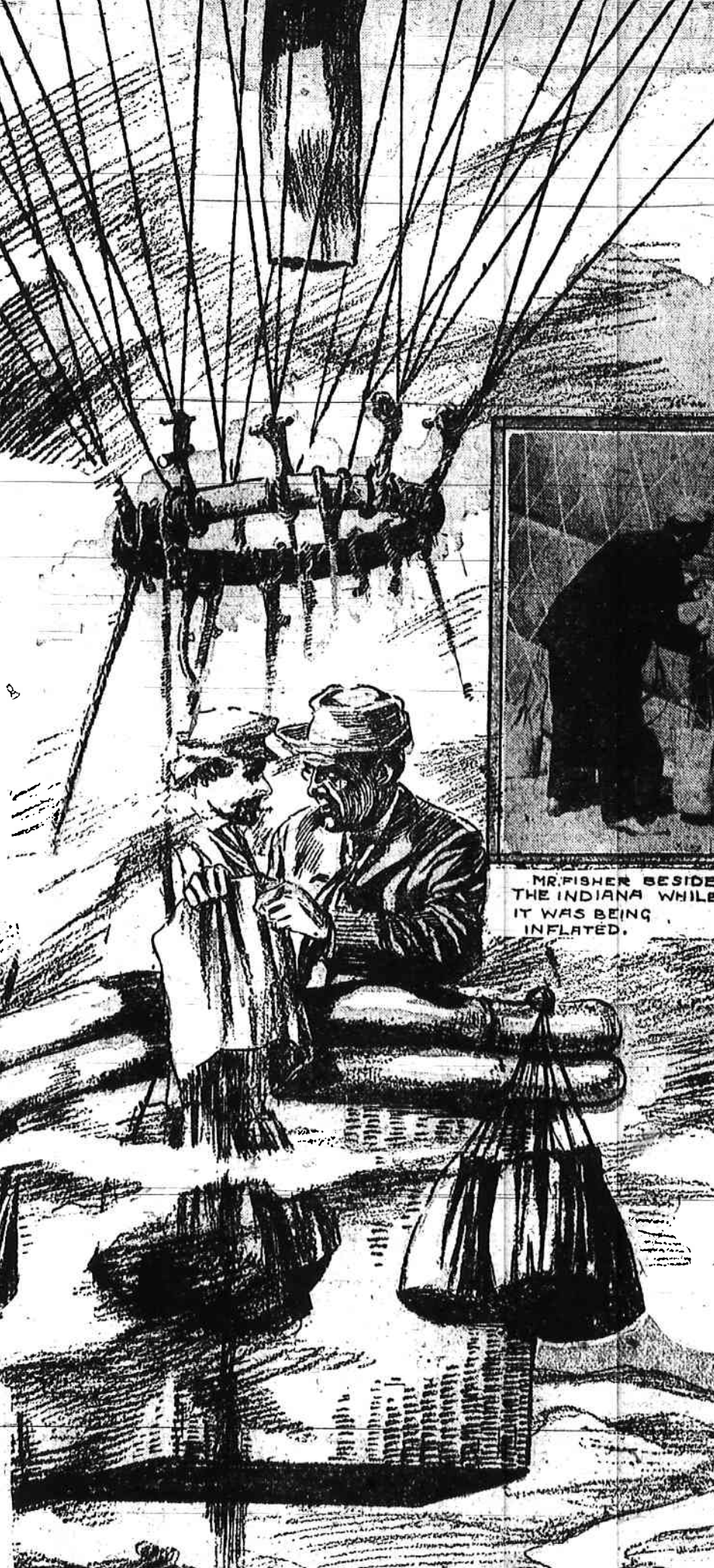


CARL FISHER

To watch the sunrise from such an advantageous height, to see the streaks of light steal over the horizon and penetrate the darkness that has enveloped the world below, is worth risking one's life to enjoy. I could only rest my body on the basket's edge and gaze, enraptured at the glory unfolding below me.

We soon sighted the Hoosier, but all other rivals were lost to view. At 6 o'clock we came in sight of the Ohio River and then made our first mistake. We began to seek a northwest current. By throwing over small bits of paper we found such a current at about 10,000 feet above the earth. We went down into this and were delighted to find we had calculated correctly and had found a swifter breeze. We had hopes of this becoming stronger, so kept in it for about two hours. Then, without warning, it seemed to die out entirely and left us about forty miles from the point where we were over the river, in a northwesterly direction, and without any wind blowing in any direction.

We hung over one spot for at least an hour. We descended to 6,000 feet and found a current which would



MR. FISHER BESIDE  
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take us back to Indianapolis. This would not do at all. We went to 10,000 feet and found a current to the south-east. We went 2,000 feet higher and remained in that current until noon Sunday, when we passed almost directly over the spot we had abandoned Saturday morning, when we had decided to take a northwest current. We had lost six hours and several bags of sand by this foolish maneuvering. We had ascended to 12,500 feet and found a current blowing eighteen miles an hour and