

FIVE THOUSAND MILES UNDERGROUND



Roy Rockwood

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Chapter 1 - WASHINGTON BACKS OUT

"WASHINGTON! I say Washington!"

Throughout a big shed, filled for the most part with huge pieces of machinery, echoed the voice of Professor Amos Henderson. He did not look up from a small engine over which he was bending.

"Washington! Where are you? Why don't you answer me?"

From somewhere underneath an immense pile of iron, steel and aluminum came the voice of a colored man.

"Yas sir, Perfesser, I'se goin' t' saggasiate my bodily presence in yo' contiguous proximity an' attend t' yo' immediate conglomerated prescriptions at th' predistined period. Yas, sir!"

"Well, Washington, if you had started when you began that long speech you would have been at least half way here by this time. Hurry up! Never mind tightning those bolts now. Find the boys. I need them to help me with this engine. They must be around somewhere."

"I seen 'em goin' fishin' down by th' brook a little while ago," answered the negro, crawling out from under what seemed to be a combined airship and watercraft. "Jack says as how yo' gived him permission t' occupy his indisputatious period of levity in endeavorin' t' extract from th' liquid element some specimens of swimmin' creatures."

"If you mean I said he and Mark could go fishing in the brook, you're right, Washington," replied the professor with a smile. "But you waste a lot of time and breath trying to say it. Why, don't you give up using big words?"

"I reckon I was brought up t' it," replied the colored man grinning from ear to ear. He did not always use big words

but when he did they were generally the wrong ones. Sometimes, he spoke quite correctly.

"Well, I suppose you can't help it," resumed Mr. Henderson. "However, never mind that. Find the boys and send them to me."

"With th' least appreciatableness amount of postponement," answered the messenger, and he went out.

Washington White, who in color was just the opposite to his name, a general helper and companion to Professor Henderson, found Mark Sampson and Jack Darrow about a quarter of a mile from the big shed, which was in the center of a wooded island off the coast of Maine. The lads were seated on the bank of a small brook, fishing.

"Perfesser wants yo' immediate," said Washington.

"But we haven't caught a single fish," objected Mark.

"Them's the orders from headquarters," replied the colored man. "Yo' both got t' project yo'selves in th' vicinity of th' machine shop. I reckon th' new fangled contraption that th' perfesser is goin' t' navigate th' air an' sail th' angry seas in, am about done. He want's t' try th' engine."

"Come on then," said Jack. "We probably would not catch any fish, anyhow, Mark."

Accompanied by Washington, the youths, each of whom was about eighteen years old, started toward the big shed.

While they are on their way opportunity may be taken to tell a little about them, as well as about Washington and the professor, and the curious craft on which the scientist was working.

A few years before this story opens Mr. Henderson had invented a wonderful electric airship. He had it about completed when, one day, he and the two boys became unexpectedly acquainted, and, as it developed, friends.

Mark and Jack were orphans. After having rather a hard time knocking about the world trying to make a living, they chanced to meet, and resolved to cast their lots together. They boarded a freight train, and, as told in the first

volume of this series, entitled, "Through the Air to the North Pole; or the Wonderful Cruise of the Electric Monarch," the cars were wrecked near where Professor Henderson was building his strange craft.

The boys were cared for by the scientist, and, after their recovery from hurts received in the collision, they accepted his invitation to make the trip through the upper regions in the airship, to search for the north pole. With them went Andy Sudds, an old hunter, and Tom Smith and Bill Jones, two farmers, but who were hired as helpers on the voyage. The party had many adventures on the trip, having battles with savage animals and more savage Esquimaux, and were tossed about in terrible storms. After making some scientific observations, which the professor was much interested in, they started back home.

Having found he could successfully sail in the air, Mr. Henderson resolved to try what it might be like under water.

He moved his machine shop to a lonely spot on the Maine coast, and there, with the help of the boys, Washington, Andy and two machinists constructed a submarine boat, called the Porpoise.

In this the professor resolved to seek the south pole, he having a theory that it was surrounded by an open sea. After much hard work the Porpoise was made ready for the voyage.

What occurred on this great trip is described in the second book of this series, called "Under the Ocean to the South Pole, or the Strange Cruise of the Submarine Wonder." In that is told how once more Tom and Bill, with Andy, the boys and Washington, accompanying Professor Henderson, had many thrilling experiences.

They were caught in the grip of the grass of the terrible Sargasso Sea. Monstrous suckers grasped the boat in their powerful arms, and had to be fought off. They were caught

in a sea of boiling water and imprisoned between big fields of ice.

By means of strong diving suits they were able to leave the ship and walk about on the bottom of the sea. They visited a graveyard of sunken ships, saw many strange monsters as well as many beautiful fish in the great depths to which they sunk. Many times they were in dire peril but the resources of the professor, the bravery and daring of the boys, no less than the help Washington and Andy Sudds, the hunter, rendered at times, brought them through.

Those of you who read of their adventures will recall the strange island which they came upon in the Atlantic Ocean, far from the coast of South America.

When they first drew near this island they were almost sucked into the depths of a great whirlpool, caused by water pouring down a big hole that seemed to lead far into the earth. They reversed their ship just in time.

But, on going to another side of the island they were able to approach safely, as at this point the great hole was farther from the shore. Then they landed and investigated.

They found the island was almost circular, and the hole was also round, but not in the center of the land. It was an immense cavity, so wide they could not see across, and as for the depth they could only guess at it. Looking down they could only see rolling masses of vapor and clouds caused by the water which poured down from the ocean with the force of a Niagara.

Gazing down into the big hole Mark suggested it might lead to the centre of the earth, which some scientists claim is hollow. The professor admitted that the cavity looked as though it led to China.

They had no means of investigating further the mystery of the opening and returned to their submarine, completing the voyage to the south pole.

It was now about two years since they had come back from that eventful trip. One of the first things the professor did,

after docking the Porpoise, was to shut himself up in his study and begin to draw plans. To the questions of the boys he returned no answer for several days. Then he announced he was working on a craft which could both sail on top of the water and navigate the air.

In time the plans were done, and, in order to keep the work secret, the shop was moved to an island which the professor owned.

Parts of the Monarch and the Porpoise were used in constructing the new craft, so there was no need to get other help than that which the boys, Washington and Bill and Tom could give, since the two latter accepted an offer of the professor to remain and work for him. The boys, of course, would not leave their friend.

The professor realized that he had a more difficult task in his new venture than he had set himself on other occasions. For a ship to be light enough to rise in the air, and, at another time, and with no change, to be strong enough to navigate the ocean, was indeed something to tax Mr. Henderson's ingenuity.

However, in the course of a little over a year the larger part of the work was done. Inside the big shed was the huge affair which, it was hoped, would enable its owner to be master of both air and water.

"Did the professor say anything special?" asked Mark of Washington.

"Nope. I reckon he were too busy problamatin' the exact altitude projected in an inverse direction by th' square root of th' new engine when operated at a million times inside of a few seconds, but he didn't say nothin' t' me. I were busy underneath th' ship, fixin' bolts when he tole me t' find yo'. I wouldn't be s'prised if he had th' thing goin' soon."

"Do you think he'll be generating the new gas to-day?" asked Jack eagerly. "That's the most troublesome part; to get that gas right."

"He didn't say nothin' t' me 'bout it," Washington stated, as he walked along beside the two boys. "He jest seemed anxious like."

"We'd better hurry," advised Mark. "He may be at an important part in his experiments and probably needs us. I hope it will work. He has spent many days on it, and we all have worked hard. It ought to be a success."

"Perfesser allers makes things work," declared Washington stoutly.

"That's a good way to feel about it, anyway," observed Mark. "Well, we'll soon know."

The three hurried to the shed which they could see as they rounded a turn of the path through the wood. They noticed an elderly man approaching with a gun on his shoulder. On one arm he carried a game bag.

"Guess Andy got something for dinner," remarked Jack.

"I hopes so, honey," put in Washington. "I'se got a sort of gone feelin' in my stomach!"

"Any luck, Andy?" called Mark, when he came within hailing distance.

"Fine," replied Andy Sudds. "Rabbits and quail. We'll have a good dinner to-morrow."

While Andy entered the living part of the big shed to put away his gun and game, the boys and Washington kept on to the engine room. They found the professor, with Bill and Tom, busy fitting pipes to the small engine which was set up at one side of the structure.

"Come, boys, I need your aid," remarked Mr. Henderson as they entered. "Take off your coats and pitch in. Tighten up these bolts, Jack. Mark, you mix up those chemicals the way I taught you, and see that the dynamo is in working order for Washington to attend to."

In a little while the shop was a veritable hive of industry, and it resounded to the sound of hammers, wrenches and machinery. In the background was the big ship, which

seemed like two immense cigars, one above the other, the lower one the larger.

"Where was you callatin' t' take this here ship when it gits done, Perfesser?" asked Washington, during a lull in the operations.

"Do you remember that big hole in the island we visited on our trip to the south pole?"

"I suah does," answered the colored man.

"We are going to explore that," went on the scientist. "We are going to make a voyage to the interior of the earth in our Flying Mermaid."

"Go down into th' earth!" exclaimed Washington, his eyes big with fright.

"Certainly; why not?"

"Not for mine!" cried the colored man, dropping the wrench he was holding. "No sire I'm not goin' t' project myself int' a grave while I'se alive. Time enough when I kicks th' bucket. No sir! If yo' an' the boys wants t' risk yo' se'ves goin' down int' th' interior of th' earth, where th' Bible says there's fiery furnaces, yo' kin go, but Washington White stays on terra cotta! That's where he stays; He ain't ready t' be buried, not jest yet!" and the frightened colored man started to leave the shed.

Chapter 2 - THE FLYING MERMAID

"HERE! Stop him!" cried Professor Henderson. "Don't let him get away. We still need his help to get the ship in shape. He needn't be frightened. We're not going to start at once."

Mark and Jack ran after Washington, whose progress was somewhat impeded because he kept looking back as if he feared the new ship was chasing him.

"Come on back!" said Mark. "There's no danger, and if there was we're not going to start to-day."

"Ain't yo' foolin' me?" asked Washington, pausing and looking doubtfully at the boys.

"Of course not," answered Mark. "You know Professor Henderson would not make you do anything you didn't want to do, Wash. He wishes you to stay and help him get ready, that's all."

"Well, Washington," observed the aged scientist. "I didn't think you'd go back on me."

"I'd do mos' anything fer yo', Perfesser," said the colored man, "but I got t' beg off this time," and he looked at the Flying Mermaid as if he thought the metal sides would open and devour him.

"Then help me get things in shape to generate the gas," the scientist said. "I want to give the new vapor the first real test in lifting power to-day. On the success of it depends the future of the ship."

Seeing there was no immediate danger of being carried to the centre of the earth, Washington resumed his labors. The professor, the boys, Bill and Tom were also hurrying matters to enable a test to be made before night.

As will readily be seen, even by those not familiar with the construction of airships and submarines, the chief problem was to find some agent strong enough to lift from the earth a weight heavier than had ever before been put into an apparatus that was destined to traverse the clouds. For the Flying Mermaid was not only an airship but an ocean voyager as well. It had to be made light enough to be lifted far above the earth, yet the very nature of it, necessitating it being made heavy enough to stand the buffeting of the waves and the pressure of water, was against its flying abilities.

Professor Henderson realized this and knew that the chief concern would be to discover a gas or vapor with five times the lifting power of hydrogen, one of the lightest gases known, and one sometimes used to inflate balloons.

After long study he had been partially successful, but he knew from experiments made that the gas he had so far been able to manufacture would not answer. What he wanted was some element that could be mixed with the gas, to neutralize the attraction of gravitation, or downward pull of the earth.

While he was seeking this, and experimenting on many lines, the construction of the air-water ship went on. In general the outward construction was two cigar shaped hulls, one above the other. Aluminum, being the lightest and strongest metal that could be used for the purpose, formed the main part of both bodies.

The upper hull was one hundred feet long and twenty feet in diameter at the widest part. It tapered to points at either end. It was attached to the lower hull by strong braces, at either end, while from the center there extended a pipe which connected with the lower section. This pipe was intended to convey the lifting gas to the part which corresponded to the bag of the balloon, save that it was of metal instead of silk, or rubber as is usual.

There were two reasons for this. One was that it would not be liable to puncture, particularly in the proposed underground trip, and the other was that it did not have to be so large as a cloth bag would have had to be. It was also a permanent part of the ship, and on a voyage where part of the time the travelers would be in the air and part on the water, and when the change from one to the other would have to be made quickly, this was necessary. It would have taken too long to raise the ship in the air had a cloth bag been used to contain the gas.

The lower hull or main part of the craft was one hundred and fifty feet long, and forty feet through at the largest part, in the centre.

It was divided into four sections. The forward one contained the sleeping quarters of Professor Henderson and his crew. There was a small stateroom for each one. Above was a conning or observation tower, reached by a small flight of steps. From this tower the ship could be steered, stopped and started, as could also be done from the engine room, which was in the after part of the hull.

As in the Porpoise and Monarch, electricity formed the motive power and was also used for many other purposes on board. Engines operated by gas produced the current which heated, lighted and moved the ship, as well as played a part in producing the wonderful gas.

The ship moved forward or backward by means of a novel arrangement. This was by the power of compressed air. From either end of the lower hull there projected a short pipe working in a ball and socket joint, so it could be turned in any direction. By means of strong pumps a current of compressed air could be sent out from either pipe. Thus when floating above the earth the ship was forced forward by the blast of air rushing from the pipe at the stern. It was the same principle as that on which a sky rocket is shot heavenward, save that gases produced by the

burning of powder in the pasteboard rocket form its moving impulse.

In the case of the Flying Mermaid, it could be made to move backward by sending the air out of the forward tube. Thus, when in the water, the compressed air rushing from the pipe struck the fluid and forced the ship forward or backward as was desired. It floated on the surface, the deck being about three feet out of water, while the aluminum gas bag was overhead.

The engine room was a marvel of machine construction. It contained pumps for air and water, motors, dynamos, gas engines, and a maze of wheels and levers. Yet everything was very compact and no room was wasted.

The use of the air method of propulsion did away with the necessity of a large propellor such as most airships have to use, a propellor which must of necessity be very light and which is easily broken.

Next to the engine room was the kitchen. It contained an electric range and all necessary appliances and utensils for preparing meals. There were lockers and a large reserve storeroom which when the time came would be well stocked with food. Forward of the kitchen was the living and dining room. It contained comfortable seats, folding tables and a small library. Here, also were many instruments designed to show how the various machines were working. There were gages, pointers and dials, which told the direction the ship was traveling, the speed and the distance above the earth or below the surface. Similar indicators were in the conning tower, which had a powerful search light.

The ship was lighted throughout by incandescent lamps, and there was even a small automatic piano worked by the electric current, on which popular airs could be played.

If the gas and the gravity neutralizer worked as Professor Henderson hoped they would, as soon as the ship was completed, all that would be necessary to start on the

voyage would be to fill the aluminum bag and set the air compressor in motion.

The gas was made from common air, chemically treated and with a secret material added which by means of a complicated machine in a measure did away with the downward pull of the earth. Thus all that was necessary to carry on a long voyage was a quantity of gasolene to operate the engine which worked the electric machines, and some of this secret compound.

The professor and his helpers had been working to good advantage. At last all was in readiness for the gas test.

It was proposed to try it on an experimental scale. Some of the fluid was to be generated and forced into an aluminum cylinder under the same pressure it would be used in the air ship. To this cylinder were attached weights in proportion to the weight of the Flying Mermaid with its load of human freight, engines and equipment.

"This cylinder is just one one-hundredth the size of the cylinder of the ship," said the professor. "I am going to fasten to it a hundred pound weight. If it lifts that our latest contrivance will be a success."

"You mean if the little cylinder pulls a hundred pounds up the big ship will take us and the machinery up?" asked Mark.

"Certainly," answered the professor. "If this cylinder lifts a hundred pounds, one a hundred times as big (as that of the Mermaid is), will lift a hundred times as much, or ten thousand pounds. That is five tons, or more than a ton over what I figure to be the weight of our ship and contents. The latest war balloon can lift one ton with ease, and if my machine can not do five times as well I shall be disappointed."

The last adjustments were made, pipes were run from the gas generator to the cylinder, and the hundred pound weight was attached.

"Everybody look out now," said Mr. Henderson. "I am going to start the machine and let the gas enter the cylinder. It is a very powerful gas and may break the cylinder. If it does you must all duck."

The scientist gave a last look at everything. The boys got behind some boards whence they could see without being in danger. Washington, who had little fear so long as there was no danger of going under ground, took his place at the dynamo. Andy Sudds, with Bill and Tom, stationed themselves in safe places.

"All ready!" called the professor.

He pulled a lever toward him, turned a wheel and signalled to Washington to start the dynamo. There was a sound of buzzing machinery, which was followed by a hiss as the gas began to enter the cylinder under pressure. Would it stand the strain? That question was uppermost in every one's mind save the professor's. He only cared to see the cylinder leave the ground, carrying the weight with it. That would prove his long labors were crowned with success.

Faster and faster whirred the dynamo. The gas was being generated from the air. The secret chemical made a hissing which could be heard for some distance. The gage registered a heavy pressure. Anxiously the professor watched the cylinder.

"There!" he exclaimed at length. "It has all the gas it can hold. Now to see if it works!"

He disconnected the pipe leading from the generator. This left the cylinder free. It seemed to tremble slightly. There appeared to be a movement to the hundred pound weight which rested on the ground. It was as if it was tugging to get loose.

"There it goes! There it goes!" cried Mark, joyfully.

"Hurrah!" shouted Jack. "There she rises!"

"It suttinly am projectin' itself skyward!" yelled Washington, coming from the dynamo.

Sure enough the cylinder was slowly rising in the air, bearing the weight with it. It had lifted it clear from the ground and was approaching the roof of the big shed.

"It will work! It will work!" exclaimed the professor, strangely excited.

The next instant the cylinder, carrying the weight, sailed right out of an open skylight, and began drifting outside the shop, and across the fields.

"Quick! We must get it back!" cried Mr. Henderson. "If it gets away my secret may be discovered and I will lose all! We must secure it!"

But the cylinder was now two hundred feet in the air and being blown to the east, the weight dangling below it, making it look like a miniature airship.

"We can never catch that!" cried Mark.