

National Geographic Society

WASHINGTON, D. C.

JOHN OLIVER LA GORCE
VICE-PRESIDENT

September 10, 1927.

Commander Richard E. Byrd,
Byrd Arctic Expedition,
Cohasset, Massachusetts.

My dear Dick:

Hildebrand reported to me this morning your message of yesterday and I wish to assure you that I understand your position perfectly.

One other point which I wish to make clear is that the \$25,000 The Society is contributing to your enterprise has no strings attached, and is dependent in no way upon our subsequent and friendly discussions about your news releases.

Dave Lawrence asked me the other evening, "Just what are you getting for the \$25,000 you are giving Byrd?"

I told him "Nothing whatsoever. The Society is giving him that amount to use as he deems best, in any way he sees fit, to further a highly important and valuable geographic research."

That seemed incomprehensible to Dave; and he still is looking for "the nigger in the wood pile." There is none.

Having sat in a position to see expeditions go out for these past 20 years; seeing some men go down in history as great explorers, and others of equal merit have their names tarnished by some mistake of business management or in not making their status clear to the public, I have wished you to have the benefit of what advice I can offer in regard to what seems to me to be a dangerous situation in the news handling of your project and its scientific auspices.

On the grounds of personal friendship, and also because you have been out under The Society's auspices and are a holder of its highest award, the Hubbard Gold Medal, I do wish to tell you frankly that the more I consider it the more I realize the newspaper-syndicate tieup is a dangerous one for you and your future in the field of exploration.

And I will say frankly that if you are going to enter the field of travel writing instead of exploration I know of no better commercial partners you could have than the New York Times and Lawrence.

Frankly, I believe the matter of your obligation, legal or moral, has been over emphasized for salesmanship purposes. I do not believe that such an obligation reflected more than a generous, patriotic and grateful gesture on the part of The Times when it was made. And all that stands in the way of cancelling that obligation is a very frank offer to return the amount which was given you as a bonus, and probably is a very small fraction of the expenses of your present project.

The matter of enlisting the financial aid necessary to carry out your present project is a much more important question. If you have the backing necessary aside from the amount you would earn by becoming a syndicate writer it seems to me that the remaining amount could be raised with far less jeopardy to the prestige of the expedition.

I trust Hildebrand told you of the technical difficulties that will confront you on a long expedition if you attempt to handle the spot news through a restricted group of newspapers. I will not go into them here except to say what you probably realize, that selling a story of an exploration that will extend over months is quite a different problem from that of a story on a brief, clear-cut flight like that to the Pole or across the Atlantic.

What I would like to suggest, however, is that, so far as the financing of your expedition is concerned, you talk over that phase of it with us before you feel compelled to resort to selling your news of the expedition commercially. I cannot say anything more definite in the absence of Dr. Grosvenor, and of many of our Trustees who still are away from the city, but I have hopes that a way might be found to offset in a fair degree what you would lose by "selling" the news of the expedition.

I trust you will realize that I am speaking frankly, and perhaps emphatically, because of experience which leads me to feel strongly on this point, but not with the object of pressing you into any decision beyond the point of making sure you consider all the issues involved.

With kindest regards, I am

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jack", written in dark ink.