



## Notes on the Norge

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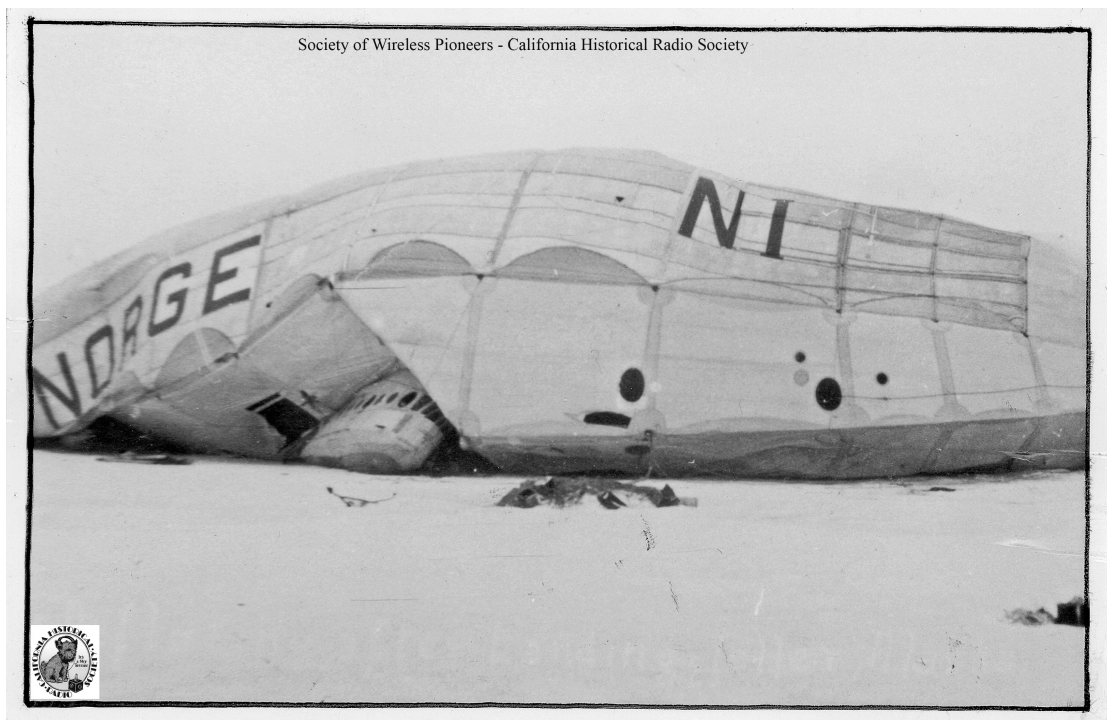
The dirigible NORGE (N.1) was Italian built in 1925 under the direction of aeronautical engineer General Umberto Nobile. The Norwegian Arctic explorer Roald Amundsen became interested in it and decided to buy it and use it for polar exploration. However, the money was actually provided by an American, Lincoln Ellsworth, who had financed an earlier attempt by Amundsen to reach the North Pole in a heavier-than-air machine. The NORGE was only 350 feet long but she held 653,000 cubic feet of hydrogen. Her three Maybach engines made her fast and reliable.

Nobile agreed to fly Amundsen to the Pole providing he had some control of the airship but agreed that Amundsen would exercise general supervision over the enterprise as a shore. The NORGE left Italy on April 10, 1926, stopping in the U.K., Oslo, and Leningrad where bad weather held her. She left there May 5th for Spitzbergen by way of Varanger Fjord and North Cape, arriving May 7th when Amundsen joined the ship. Here at Spitzbergen they found Commander Richard Byrd of the U.S. Navy and his co-pilot preparing a Fokker monoplane to attempt to beat the NORGE in being the first to fly over the North Pole. Byrd, after a sixteen-hour flight claimed he had flown over the Pole. Nobile and Amundsen in the NORGE with a crew of sixteen capped the feat by traversing the polar ice-cap and actually landing on the far side of it on May 11th. Italian, Norwegian and American flags were tossed out and onto the "pole" and handshakes were made all around.

Leaving the Pole for Alaska in dense fog, the NORGE relied only on instruments for navigation. The cold was intense, with ice forming on exposed metal parts of the ship and falling off in chunks, striking the propellers which hurled pieces into the fabric hull. Holes were hastily patched by the crew. No one could be sure of the NORGE's location in the dense fog. The crew was becoming exhausted after continuous rugged duty for over 96 hours. Finally, through a gap in the fog the sighted houses on May 13, and Nobile virtually flew the ship into the ice-covered ground. They discovered they were at Teller, Alaska.

Nobile and Amundsen and the crew were heroes. Reference material is rather vague on what became of the NORGE, but the Encyclopedia Britannica says she was "dismantled" at Teller. Austin Cooley recently visited Alaska and reports that some of the remains of the ship are still in Nome and postcards of her are still sold to tourists.

I've been unable to find any history on wireless facilities which may have been used on this flight. However, they must have been operating because Collier in his "History of Airships" says that when the NORGE reached the Pole "a wireless announcement brought forth a stream of congratulatory messages from the outside world."



*Note: The above accompanied a memo to Austin Cooley in which Don deNeuf says that he "put together the attached squib which I'm sending to Bill Breniman of SOWP in case he would like to use it..." To the best of our knowledge, it has not previously seen the light of day in a SOWP or any other publication. [Bob R.]*