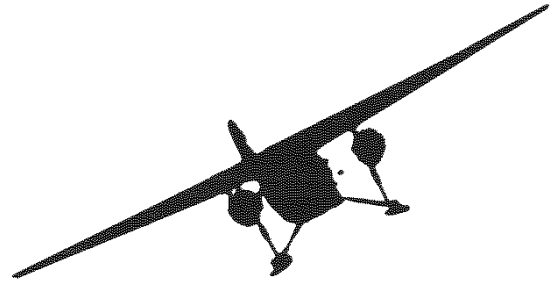


# TO THE POLE



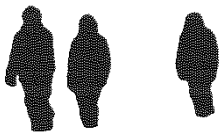
Richard E. Byrd as a naval aviator. (BP, folder 7639)



# TO THE POLE

The Diary and Notebook of  
Richard E. Byrd, 1925–1927

*Edited by*  
Raimund E. Goerler



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# Introduction

**R**ICHARD EVELYN BYRD (1888–1957) HAD A spectacular career as a polar explorer and pioneer aviator. His flight to the North Pole in 1926 established him as a public hero. Songs, poems, parades, medals, and other honors followed. Adoring parents named their children in his honor. He received the Congressional Medal of Honor. More honors and parades followed his flight across the Atlantic in 1927, the third after Charles Lindbergh. For the remaining three decades of his life, Byrd invested his resources and his energies in the exploration of Antarctica.

In contrast to his lustrous public career, Byrd's private diary is ordinary—even shabby—in appearance. Its cover is a faded black, and it bears the printed title “Diary, 1925” although the document contains passages written in 1926 and 1927. Byrd wrote most entries in pencil and with a hasty hand. Many

pages are blank; some pages have notes and mathematical calculations that are randomly placed. Clearly the diary served Byrd as both a daily journal and a convenient message pad.

Nevertheless, this unappealing book is an extraordinary document. Byrd wrote the entries for himself, not for public inspection, although in 1928 he quoted from parts of the diary for his book *Skyward*. At the time of its writing, the diary was a private notebook for recording Byrd's thoughts and observations about himself, about his colleagues and his rivals, and about his family and the state of his career.

Some pages reveal Byrd as a man deeply in love with his wife, Marie, as a father who missed his family greatly during expeditions, and as a man of ambition determined to make his place in history. Others offer new insights into a public hero's thoughts, and observations about other contemporary explorers, especially Roald Amundsen, the Norwegian explorer who reached the South Pole in 1911 and the North Pole three days after Byrd in 1926.

In several places it is clear that Byrd was not entirely obsessed with seeking fame for himself, a charge that his rivals voiced. For example, he often praises the work of his subordinates. At times he raises philosophical questions about man and nature—questions that reappeared in his most famous book, *Alone*, his account of his near-death experience in a weather station in the interior of Antarctica in 1934.

The diary, begun at a time when Byrd was relatively unknown to the general public, is also significant chronologically. The events and times recorded in the diary set the stage for his most outstanding accomplishment: the exploration of Antarctica. From 1928 to his death in 1957, Byrd organized or helped to lead five expeditions to Antarctica. Without his 1925 ac-