

complishments in Greenland, his flight to the North Pole in 1926, and his 1927 transatlantic flight, it is very unlikely that Byrd would have gained the recognition and support necessary for his later career to blossom.

Of Byrd's numerous achievements, the one that has always been the most disputed and controversial was his claim to have been the first to fly to the North Pole in 1926. Critics have claimed that Byrd's plane was not fast enough to have reached the North Pole in the time he said it had. One skeptic has even scoffed that Byrd flew out of sight, circled for hours, and then returned. His diary contains not only daily entries leading up to the flight but also messages from Byrd to the pilot and navigational calculations. When Byrd warns the pilot Floyd Bennett, "You are steering too far to the right," the reader cannot help but be transported back in place and time to the cockpit of the *Josephine Ford*, May 9, 1926.

Several principles guided me in editing this intensely personal document. First and foremost, it had to be an accurate representation of the original. Byrd's handwriting was reasonably legible but done hastily at times. In a few places, I was not able to decipher his hand and have used brackets to explain. Sometimes the identity of an individual to whom Byrd referred by surname could not be established. All editorial comments in the text are enclosed in brackets.

A few pages of navigational calculations to the North Pole in the diary show evidence of erasures, which are still faintly legible. No one will ever know who did the erasures, or when they were done. I had the diary photographed by means of ultraviolet light to make certain that all erasures had been detected and could be read properly. Erasures are noted in this edition.

A second principle that guided me in editing was the need for clarity. The diary's organization is confusing and misleading. For example, it begins with Byrd's speculation about what the new year (1925) will bring. A few pages after this come the communications from Byrd to Floyd Bennett during the flight to the North Pole on May 9, 1926. Pages concerning the 1927 transatlantic flight follow. Next come daily notes about the USS *Chantier*'s cruise from New York to Spitzbergen and preparations for Byrd's 1926 flight to the North Pole. The diary ends with daily entries about Byrd's expedition with Donald MacMillan to Greenland in 1925, and mixed with these are still more notes about the North Pole flight.

The disorder can be explained. Byrd began the diary in January 1925 and turned to it again on June 20, 1925, at the beginning of his expedition with MacMillan. In April 1926 the frugal Byrd used the blank pages of his 1925 journal to record his North Pole flight of that year, which ended on May 9; in June 1927 he used more blank pages to make notes about his transatlantic flight. Sometimes Byrd crossed out the printed dates for 1925; sometimes he did not.

For clarity, I have rearranged the diary entries in chronological order, from the Greenland expedition in 1925 to the North Pole flight of 1926 and the transatlantic crossing of 1927. The notes explain where these sections appeared in the original diary.

A third principle of editing was historical context. I have attempted to explain the diary with reference to historical events that affected Byrd—or events that he shaped. I have included photographs and maps to help situate the diary in its time, and I have added an introduction to each section of the diary to set the stage for Byrd's words.

The historical context includes scholars' writings about Byrd. Both my introductory texts and the notes refer to other scholars' works and to points of disagreement and controversy. Particularly important is my use of the massive collection (one and a half million items) of Byrd's papers, which is located at The Ohio State University. These papers remained inaccessible to scholars for many years after Byrd's death in 1957. They were made fully available for research by the Byrd Polar Research Center Archival Program in 1994. The notes contain references to historical documents that have not been previously cited.

Byrd remained a historic figure long after this diary ended. For this reason, I have added an epilogue summarizing his life and work after 1927. The bibliography contains a brief list of literature about Byrd for the interested reader, and the two appendixes include a chronology of Byrd's life (appendix A) and a navigational report submitted to the National Geographical Society for the controversial North Pole flight (appendix B).

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# The Making of an Explorer

**RICHARD EVELYN BYRD,**

**1888-1924**

**R**ICHARD EVELYN BYRD, WHO WAS BORN ON October 25, 1888, at Winchester, Virginia, belonged to one of the oldest and most influential families of that state. In 1671 Colonel William Byrd had established the family in Virginia and developed Westover Plantation along the James River, near Jamestown. After the Civil War, the Byrd family moved to Winchester. Richard Evelyn Byrd, the explorer's father and namesake, achieved distinction as an attorney in private practice. He also pursued a political career, serving as a prosecuting attorney for twenty years, and as speaker of the house in the Virginia state assembly.<sup>1</sup>

The family's prominence seems to have inspired a desire for

1. Charles J. V. Murphy, *Struggle: The Life and Exploits of Commander Richard E. Byrd* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1928), 1-12; Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Last Explorer: The Adventures of Admiral Byrd* (New York: John Day, 1968), 1-19.



Richard Evelyn Byrd at 15, a cadet at Shenandoah Valley Academy. (BP, folder 7638)

achievement in all of its sons. Harry Byrd, the explorer's older brother, followed his father into politics and won election first as governor and then as a U.S. senator. He was a force in Democratic politics for many years. Richard's younger brother, Tom, became a successful businessman and owner of apple orchards.

A pivotal event in the life of the future explorer took place in 1900, when he was twelve, when he received an invitation from Adam C. Carson, who had been an attorney in his father's firm, to visit him in the Philippines. Carson had been stationed there as the captain of a regiment that was putting down an insurrection against the American occupation in the wake of the Spanish-American War of 1898, and after the revolt he stayed on as a district judge.

This opportunity gave Byrd the experience of travel and adventure that shaped much of his life. He journeyed alone to San Francisco and then to Japan before reaching the Philippines. A year later, he traveled around the world to make his way back to Virginia. Not only did he have extraordinary opportunities to observe unusual places, events, and cultures; he also wrote about them. His letters from the Philippines ran as stories in the Winchester newspaper. Even as a teenager, Byrd was a celebrity, at least in Winchester.

For a young Southerner of distinguished family—and for anyone who liked to travel—a career as an officer in the U.S. Navy was a good choice. From 1904 to 1907 Byrd attended first the Shenandoah Valley Academy and then the Virginia Military Institute. After a brief career at the University of Virginia, where his brother Tom was a student, Richard Evelyn Byrd entered the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1908.<sup>2</sup>

Byrd was adequate in academics and excelled in sports, especially football. While at the University of Virginia, he had been a second-string quarterback and had been injured in a game against Washington and Lee University. At Annapolis, he

2. For the early years of Byrd's life, *Struggle* is the most detailed source. For a history of the Byrd family, see Alden Hatch, *The Byrds of Virginia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

Commander Byrd, for whom I predict a brilliant career, if only the opportunity for service can be given him.”<sup>6</sup>

A year later, Byrd’s abilities as an organizer and an efficient planner earned him both recognition and a transfer to Washington, D.C., where he was first assigned to the Bureau of Naval Personnel and then to the Commission on Training Camps. Having had these positions later proved useful to Byrd as an explorer. At the Commission on Training Camps, he served as secretary to Raymond B. Fosdick, the chairman. Fosdick was a prominent attorney and an associate of John D. Rockefeller. He was president of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1920 to 1936 and a lifelong friend and supporter of Richard Byrd.

With Fosdick’s support, Byrd sought and won appointment as a naval aviation cadet at Pensacola Naval Air Station in 1917. A career in flying was an exciting one—and it did not demand long hours of standing on a weak right foot. Byrd earned his pilot’s wings and also a position as assistant superintendent at Pensacola, with responsibility for investigating crashes.

By redirecting his career into naval aviation, Byrd made significant contributions to a new field. When he won his wings, barely fourteen years had passed since the Wright brothers had first flown at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Byrd became an expert in night flying and took a particular interest in the problems of navigating airplanes. The speed of airplanes, the distance from landmarks, and the vulnerability of aircraft to winds posed unusual navigational challenges, and Byrd taught cadets about these topics.<sup>7</sup>

6. R. Livingston Beechman to Secretary of the Navy Joseph Daniels, June 28, 1917, BP, folder 4126.

7. See BP, folder 4128.