

more anxious than we are to dissociate our proposed effort from any commercial aspect and so we will avoid advertising any particular organization or any commercial product.”<sup>8</sup>

Before the *America* was ready for another attempt, two rivals in two single-engine planes landed at Roosevelt Field for the transatlantic journey. One was Charles Lindbergh, an airmail and stunt pilot, in *The Spirit of St. Louis*. The other was Clarence Chamberlin, in the *Columbia*. Byrd, perhaps remembering his own frustrations with the Norwegians at Spitzbergen, generously offered the use both of his specially designed runway and of his meteorological service. His mechanic, Harry Kinkaid, even tuned Lindbergh’s engine and checked Chamberlin’s—as Balchen had aided the *Josephine Ford* in Spitzbergen in 1926.<sup>9</sup>

On May 20, Charles Lindbergh was the first to leave Roosevelt field. The next day, while Byrd, with his crew and his sponsors, christened the *America* in a public ceremony, he received the news that “Lucky Lindy” had landed safely in France.<sup>10</sup> On June 4, Clarence Chamberlin and his financier, Charles Levine, took off in the *Columbia* and reached Berlin.

8. Statement for the morning papers, March 28, 1927, BP folder 4343. Letters in the file indicate that Byrd genuinely feared that Wanamaker would withdraw his sponsorship if the expedition appeared to be seeking commercial advantage or gain.

9. Montague, *Oceans, Poles and Airmen*, 84.

10. After Lindbergh’s flight, Byrd did try in vain to change the direction and destination of his flight from France to Hawaii. See Commander Richard E. Byrd to Rodman Wanamaker, May 23, 1927, BP folder 4344. Wanamaker, however, was adamant about flying to France. Still, Byrd persisted, proposing on June 17 that if the weather was favorable to “touch our wheels at Paris” and continue to

Many in the public and the news media criticized Byrd for an overcautiousness that lost him "the race." Byrd maintained, however, that his goal was not to compete with single-engine aircraft but to demonstrate that the more sophisticated and much heavier three-engine aircraft could fly longer distances and transport more. In his view, single-engine aircraft had no commercial future in the area of transatlantic flight. He believed instead that the trimotor would become the standard.<sup>11</sup>

On June 29, 1927, more than two months after its disastrous test flight, the *America* soared off the special runway at Roosevelt Field. Aboard were Richard Byrd as navigator and George Noyes as radio operator. The pilot who took Floyd Bennett's place was Bert Acosta, a well-known stunt flier and a naval reserve officer. The second pilot was Bernt Balchen, who had accompanied Byrd to New York after the North Pole flight and had become chief pilot and performance engineer for Anthony Fokker. From his time in the Norwegian air force, Balchen had experience in flying by instruments alone, which Acosta lacked.

Balchen's background proved critical, because the normally cautious Byrd decided to take a chance on the weather. Although reports predicted an imminent deterioration in the

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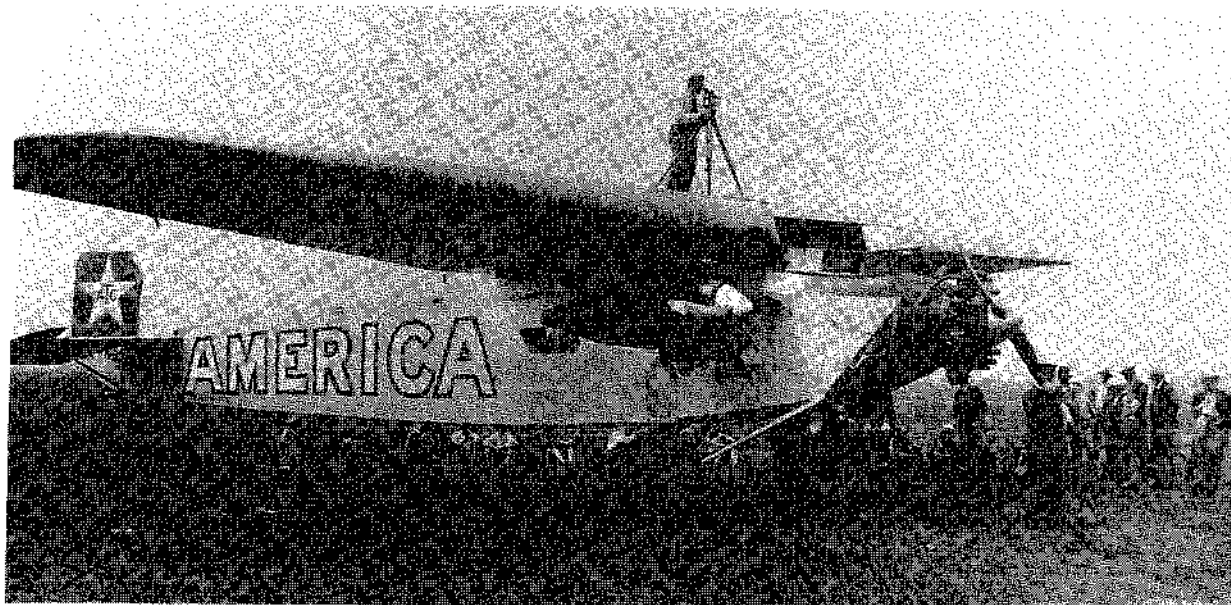
fly until nearly out of gas in order to demonstrate the cruising radius of the three-engine plane. See Commander Richard Byrd to Rodman Wanamaker, June 17, 1927, BP, folder 4344.

11. See Commander Richard Byrd to Anthony Fokker, October 11, 1926, BP, folder 4343, in which Byrd requests Fokker to develop and sell him a three-engine plane with a cruising range sufficient to cross the Atlantic. "I do not believe that I would like to try the Atlantic with a one motored ship." See also *Skyward*, 223-24.



An injured Floyd Bennett and Byrd inspect the *America*. (BP, folder 7748)

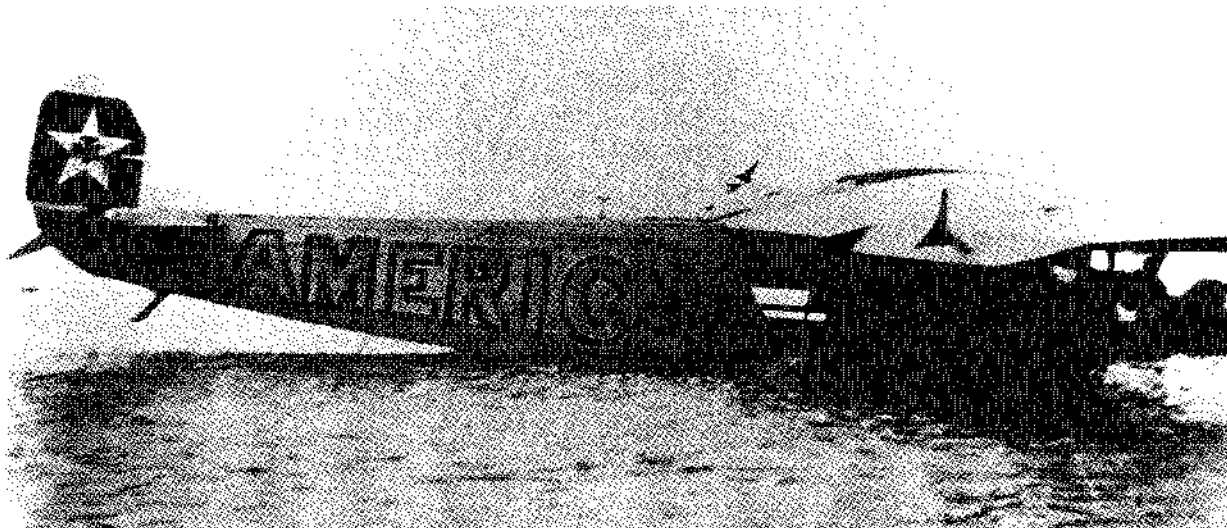
weather. Byrd felt that the time was ripe to show that the trimotor could overcome at least some adverse conditions. For much of the trip, they encountered rain and fog. Then a dense fog over Paris made navigation difficult and landing dangerous, especially after darkness fell. Instead of landing in Paris,



Reporters and photographers surrounding Byrd's plane, the *America*, before its takeoff for the 1927 transatlantic flight. (BP, folder 7744)

the *America* turned back to the French coast in search of a lighthouse and a stretch of water to land in. The crew dropped navigation flares from the plane, and with their aid Balchen was able to make a safe water landing. The long flight—forty-two hours—had ended. Byrd, Balchen, Acosta, and Noville rowed to shore in one of the plane's rubber rafts, then walked to the village of Ver-sur-Mer, near Caen in Normandy.

Even though Byrd and his men were the third to fly to Europe from New York and the second to reach France, they met an enthusiastic public. Byrd wrote, "The wild scenes of joy and welcome which we received wherever we went in France are far beyond my power to describe. When we arrived in Paris, it was a long time before we could get away from the station. The entire city seemed to have turned out to welcome us. . . . The glass in one of our automobiles was broken, and the machine in which I was riding was almost upset several times by



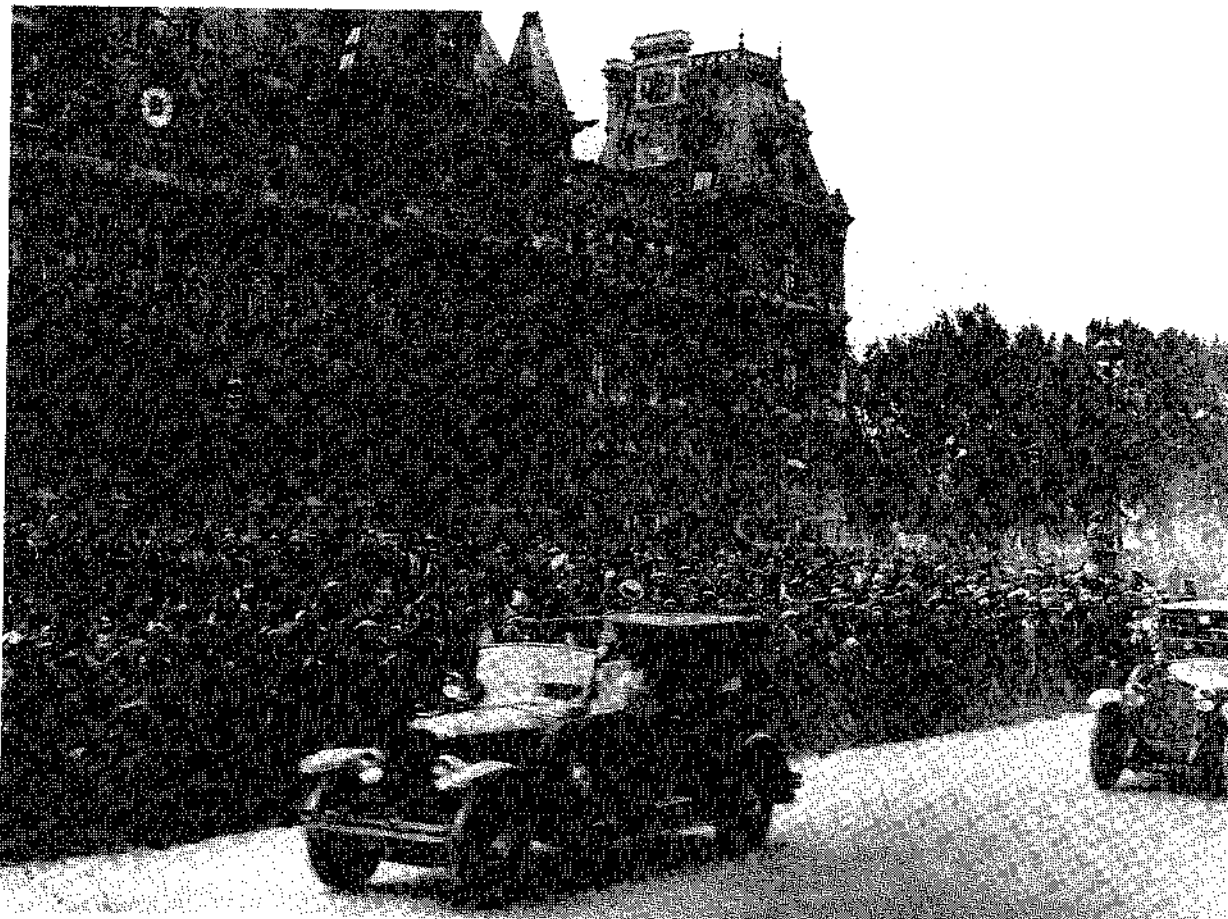
Emergency landing of the *America* off the coast of France. (BP, folder 7744)

the crowds that surged against it. Some of the people must have been crushed and injured, but they did not seem to mind.”<sup>12</sup> In New York City, Byrd became the first hero ever to receive a second ticker-tape parade.<sup>13</sup> More honors awaited Byrd and his crew, and they were inundated with invitations and interviews. The transatlantic flight marked another milestone in the career of Richard Evelyn Byrd.

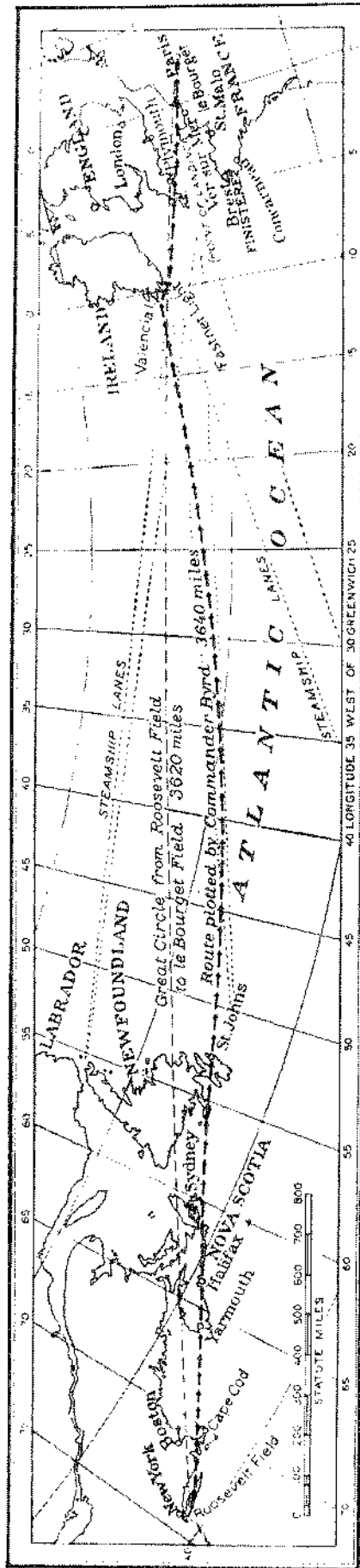
The entries Byrd made in his notebook appeared in part in his book *Skyward* and in an article he wrote for the *National Geographic*. The complete transcription starts on p. III.

12. Richard E. Byrd, “Our Transatlantic Flight,” *National Geographic Magazine* 52, no. 3 (September 1927): 366–67.

13. Eugene Rodgers, *Beyond the Barrier: The Story of Byrd's First Expedition to Antarctica* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 12.



Victory parade for Byrd and his crew in Paris. (BP, folder 7751)



Map of Byrd's transatlantic flight. (Courtesy of the National Geographic Magazine)