

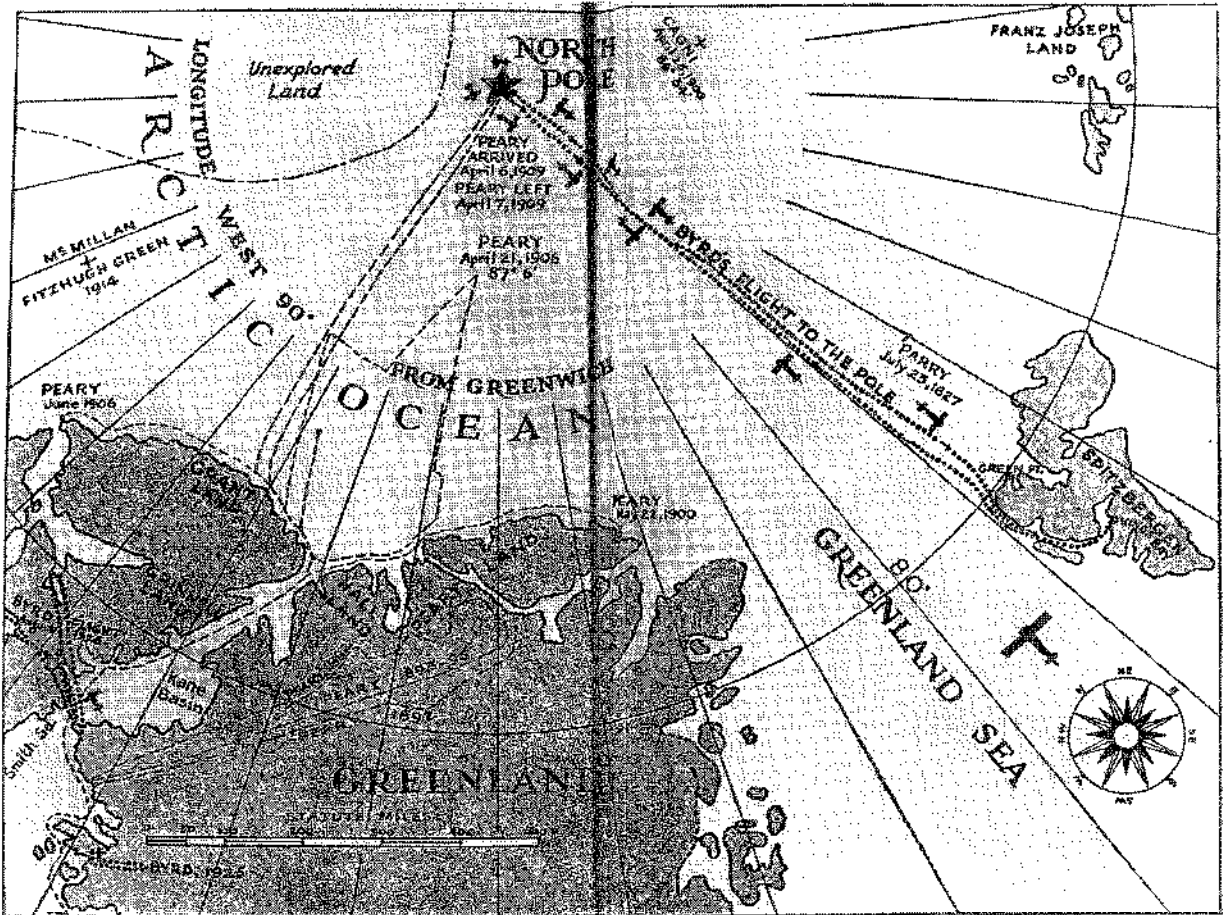
to Bennett during the flight. At several points in the diary, Byrd warns Bennett that he is steering too far to the right and that "there is a strong wind." This casts doubt on Liljequist's conclusion that there were no strong winds in the Arctic at the time of the flight. In other messages Byrd tells Bennett that the plane is 85 miles due north of Amsterdam Island and that they are 240 miles due north of Spitzbergen. At one point he instructs Bennett to radio that they are 230 miles from the pole. The series culminates in the statement that the *Josephine Ford* is at the North Pole, that Bennett should circle, and also that he should send a radio message back to the *Chantier* that the *Josephine Ford* is "returning with bad oil leak."

Unfortunately, Byrd wrote his messages hastily, on different pages of the diary. The exact order and time of each message will remain a mystery. The last page of the diary has a calculation by Byrd that they were only twenty miles from the North Pole. Clearly, this is proof that Byrd and Bennett did not merely fly into the horizon, circle out of sight of land, and return.

At the top of this page Byrd wrote, "The starboard motor has a bad oil leak," and "Can we get all the way back on two motors?" Directly below this are Byrd's calculations and his conclusion that the plane was twenty miles away from the pole. This tends to confirm Byrd's original account in his book *Skyward* that the oil leak was discovered near the North Pole, "when our calculations showed us to be about an hour from the Pole."¹⁸

That an oil leak in one motor would cause Byrd to abandon his effort to reach the North Pole seems unlikely. In planning

18. Byrd, *Skyward*, 196.



Map of Byrd's North Pole flight, from *Skyward*

for the flight, he had chosen a three-engine airplane specifically because he wanted to be able to continue flying if one engine failed. Near the bottom of this page is a partially erased question from Byrd to Bennett, "How long were we gone before we turned around?" No one knows who erased the question. But the answer, $8\frac{1}{2}$, is the number of hours Byrd reported officially to the National Geographic Society it had taken the *Josephine Ford* to reach the North Pole. It appears that when he posed his question to Bennett, Byrd really thought he had been at the pole.¹⁹

19. Dennis Rawlins, an astronomer and the publisher of the scientific-historical journal *DIO & the Journal for Hysterical Astronomy* who has specialized

Finally, the very existence of the diary supports Byrd. If it had contained evidence that he knew at the time of the flight that he had not reached the North Pole, he would, if deceitful enough, have destroyed it. Instead, Byrd published two references to the diary after the flight. In 1927 he wrote an article in the *National Geographic Magazine* about his transatlantic flight of that year and stated, "I made notes in my log and remarks in my diary, the same diary carried over the North Pole with me." He repeated this sentence in *Skyward*.²⁰ Repeatedly announcing the existence of the diary hardly seems like the action of a person who believes that it contains something that

in examining polar explorers' navigational records, inspected the diary and the navigational calculations and notes. He found erased sextant readings that differ from those in the official report submitted to the National Geographic Society. According to Rawlins, the erased readings prove that Byrd came no closer to the North Pole than 150 miles. Rawlins's report is contained in a fifteen-page letter of May 4, 1996, to Raimund Goerler, now in The Ohio State University Archives.

Colonel William Molett, an experienced polar navigator who taught navigation and has published on the subject, reviewed both the diary and Rawlins's report. He concluded that the erasures were miscalculations that Byrd realized were erroneous. He believes that Byrd did not use the erased calculations and that there is no discrepancy between the official report and the diary. Colonel Molett's report is also in a letter to Raimund Goerler in The Ohio State University Archives.

Dr. Gerald Newsom, professor of astronomy at Ohio State, also studied the diary. His evaluation is that the erasures are inconclusive. In his view, the erasures were the work of a navigator who, although tired, was still alert enough to realize that he had made an error in his calculations. According to Professor Newsom, Byrd at a minimum got within "tens of miles" of the North Pole and may have reached it. See Gerald Newsom to Rai Goerler, July 9, 1997. The Ohio State University Archives.

20. Richard E. Byrd, "Our Transatlantic Flight," *National Geographic Magazine* 52, no. 3 (September 1927): 352; Byrd, *Skyward*, 252.

needs to be hidden. Even Byrd's erasures can be read without assistance, further evidence that he made no effort to conceal.

Not present in Byrd's account of his expedition to the North Pole is any reference to his wife or his son like those that appear in the Greenland portion of his diary. As Byrd himself noted, during the trip to Spitzbergen he was preoccupied with the details of planning the flight. In fact, he was so concerned with such vital matters as the type and quantity of survival equipment to take on the plane and the impact such additional weight would have on the consumption of fuel that he left the day-to-day management of the crew to others. Personal matters do not appear in this portion of the diary at all, which Byrd himself described as "a very poor affair."

However, at this time Byrd did create an extraordinary document that shows his concerns as a father and husband. On April 28, 1926, a few days before the *Chantier* was to arrive in Spitzbergen, he wrote a six-page letter to his six-year-old son, Richard, that was to be given to him only if Byrd perished during the expedition. Byrd instructed that the letter was to be read on his son's eighth, fourteenth, and sixteenth birthdays and once every four years thereafter.

Solemnly, the letter began, "If by hard luck I do not get back this is my farewell to you my dear boy, which I know you will take very seriously and all your life I hope you will try to follow what I ask you to do. . . . Your sweet mother can tell you how I adore you. But even she does not realize the depth of my affection for you. You are everything a son should be—devoted, unselfish, thoughtful, generous and honorable with an unusual sense of justice. You have I am very thankful to say many of your mother's traits."

Much of the letter described Byrd's love and admiration for Marie: "I have loved your mother since we were little children and I have never known her to do an unkind or an unjust thing. She is the sweetest, purest human being I have ever known or have ever heard of. She is an angel—too good I am afraid for this world. My boy, I worship her. She is the kind who never hesitates to sacrifice herself for those she cares [for], and then think nothing of it nor look for credit."

To protect his wife and to counsel his son in the event that he should not return to them, Byrd wrote: "My last words to you my boy are to beg you to consecrate your life to two things—first to understand, cherish and protect your mother and secondly to emulate her in all matters. Model yourself as much as you can after her for she is the finest person in the world." Finally, he urged his son to rely on his mother's wisdom: "Your mother has an extraordinarily logical mind. So you cannot go wrong if you will always take her advice. I have done so as a rule and she has never made a mistake."²¹

21. Letter from Richard Byrd to Richard Byrd Jr., April 28, 1926. BP accession 19961, box 1, folder 6.