Richard 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-
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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