In spite of his limited accomplishments in Greenland, Lieutenant Commander Richard Byrd predicted, "Aviation will conquer the Arctic—and the Antarctic, too. But it will be difficult and hazardous. These things, however, only increase the extraordinary lure of the Polar regions. . . . The world was determined that the North Pole should be reached, and now it will not be content until the secrets of this unexplored area are revealed."  

At the time, others shared Byrd's vision of using aircraft to reach the North Pole. George Hubert Wilkins, an Australian cinematographer, naturalist, and pilot, raised money from the Detroit Aviation Society and the North American Newspaper

Alliance and began preparations for a transpolar flight from Alaska. He expected to fly from Point Barrow to Spitzbergen, and he invited Byrd to join the expedition as second-in-command. Instead of focusing on the North Pole, however, Wilkins claimed that his goal was to explore undiscovered areas and to find places for weather stations.²

Also in 1926, Roald Amundsen organized a multinational expedition to fly a dirigible from Spitzbergen to Point Barrow. The Italian government under Benito Mussolini sold a newly designed and improved dirigible, the Norge, to Amundsen at a discount. Umberto Nobile, the designer, was a member of the expedition. Amundsen chose a dirigible over an airplane as a result of the failure of his and Lincoln Ellsworth’s 1925 attempt to fly planes to the pole. One of their two planes developed mechanical problems, and both landed on the ice; Amundsen and Ellsworth managed to fly one plane back to safety only after a perilous month spent on the ice. Their experience made the idea of a lighter-than-air vehicle capable of traveling great distances without refueling more attractive to both men. Private donations, the contributions of the Aero Club of Norway, and an exclusive contract with the New York Times, negotiated by Ellsworth, made their 1926 multinational expedition possible.

Richard Byrd organized his expedition with the North Pole as his objective. From the Federal War Shipping Board, the oversight agency for surplus vessels remaining from World War I, Byrd leased the USS Chantier for six months.³ Byrd

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² George Hubert Wilkins, *Flying the Arctic* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928), 21.

planned to carry his supplies, his crew, and his airplanes for the flight to the North Pole on the Chantier. Unfortunately, the ship was so small that the airplanes had to be disassembled for storage.

The choice of aircraft was a major decision. As late as January 30, 1926, Byrd was considering the possibility of using a dirigible rather than a fixed-wing aircraft, but then a three-engine Fokker became available for purchase at a reasonable price.\textsuperscript{4} The three engines offered more safety than one, as the plane could fly some distance on only two engines.\textsuperscript{5} In fact, Byrd's trimotor Fokker had demonstrated its superior dependability by winning the Ford Reliability Tour of 1925, a sixteen-hundred-mile schedule of intercity flights. Unlike Amundsen and Ellsworth in 1925, Byrd would not be forced to land because of difficulties with one engine.\textsuperscript{6} A second, single-engined

\textsuperscript{4} Statement by Lieut. Commander R. E. Byrd, January 30, 1926, BP folder 4256. See also the letter from Richard Byrd to Vincent Astor, January 1, 1926 (BP folder 4243), in which Byrd reported that Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company had offered to sell him a 320,000-cubic-foot airship for $18,000.

\textsuperscript{5} The two-engine aircraft of the time could not continue to fly safely if one engine failed. See Peter M. Bowers, \textit{Yesterday's Wings} (Washington, D.C.: Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, 1974), 26.

\textsuperscript{6} The type of plane Byrd chose, a Fokker VII-3m, also established other endurance and reliability records. Fokker VII-3m's flew nonstop from San Francisco to Honolulu and from San Francisco to Australia. See Michael J. H. Taylor, ed., \textit{Jane's Encyclopedia of Aviation} (New York: Portland House, 1989), 466.
plane, the *Oriole*, was to be used for rescue work and for filming the flight.

The importance of the three-engine airplane in this context cannot be overstated. The final statement to the press after the *Chantier* left New York City declared that while the expedition was “clean sport,” and the “adventurous side of this expedition appeal[ed] to every man going on it,” there was also a practical objective: “Conquering the Arctic with multi-motored planes will give an impetus to commercial aviation . . . the multi-motored plane is the answer. Science has made aircraft safe enough for commercial use. The stage is set. Confidence is all that is needed to lift the curtain on an era of rapid development in air commerce.”

Byrd purchased the engines separately from the plane itself, choosing air-cooled motors from the Wright Aeronautical Corporation. Selection of a coolant was of special importance, for the cold of the Arctic challenged the viscosity of oils. Even Edsel Ford approved of Byrd’s selection of these motors over those of his own company: “Your selection of Wright air-cooled motors is a good one, and I believe this motor is by far the best worked out one of its type at the present time. The multi-motored plane is a great boon to safe transportation, and I believe eliminates 90% of the hazard, although I doubt that you will be able to find a plane that will stay aloft with one motor running only, under any consideration.”

Another fateful decision was the location of a base. Byrd knew from the 1925 expedition that good flying conditions in Greenland arrived late in the summer and departed soon after. Spitzbergen in Norway was more attractive than Point Barrow, the most northerly point in the United States, for two reasons. First, it was nearly four hundred miles closer to the North Pole than Point Barrow was. This relative proximity meant that Byrd’s expedition need not (except as a precaution) stock fuel depots on the route to the North Pole, only to have to find them in bad weather conditions, land on the dangerous ice to refuel, and then take off again.

A second factor in favor of Spitzbergen as a base was its harbor. Warmed by the Gulf Stream, the harbor became open to shipping in the early spring. The Chantier could anchor in the harbor in late April or May. The Fokker could be reassembled on land and make its dash for the pole well before good flying weather came to Greenland.

For money to lease the Chantier and to buy the airplane, the engines, and supplies, Byrd turned to the same people who had helped him in 1925. Edsel Ford gave him $20,000, even though Byrd had chosen a Fokker over a Ford. In gratitude, Byrd named the Fokker the Josephine Ford, after Ford’s three-year-old daughter. John D. Rockefeller contributed an equal amount, and Byrd received additional donations from Vincent Astor and others.

To supplement this funding, Byrd turned to the news media,
guaranteeing them stories if they would make the expedition possible. For example, Pathe News, a producer of newsreels, signed a contract with Byrd that gave them the "exclusive right to take motion pictures." The contract also pledged Byrd to "prevent by every means possible, other companies or camera-
men from taking any motion pictures whatsoever of the expedi-
tion or any of its operations." In return, Byrd would receive 
financial support for the expedition, earnings from any of 
Pathe's motion pictures about the expedition, and two prints 
to use in lectures. The New York Times also invested money 
in the expedition in exchange for stories. A contract with the 
Pond agency promised Byrd a lecture tour after the expedition 
as a way to defray any debts he had incurred.

Finally, Byrd signed a contract with David Lawrence of 
Current News Features which guaranteed financial support for 
the expedition in exchange for the rights to receive and sell ar-
ticles and photographs about the expedition to other news-
papers. The least Byrd would receive from his attempt, even if 
it failed, was $18,000. A successful flight would earn as much 
as $30,000 if Byrd wrote enough firsthand accounts.

On April 5, 1926, the Chantier, under the command of 
Michael J. Brennan of the Merchant Marine, left New York City 
with much publicity and celebration. The expedition exempli-
fied Byrd's skill as an organizer and careful planner. The Chan-

BP, folder 4289.

10. Current News Features Incorporated to Commander Richard E. Byrd, 
February 6, 1926, BP, folder 4251. Byrd signed the contract, which eventually 
paid him $30,000, on February 13.
tier carried two airplanes and their fuel, food to sustain the expedition for six months, and enough coal for fifteen thousand miles, or half again as much as Byrd expected to need—a lesson learned the previous year.

Also on board were fifty volunteers. Originally, Byrd had expected to have to beg for volunteers from the Navy reserves, with whom he had worked during and after World War I, but excitement about the Byrd Arctic Expedition was so widespread that more men volunteered than could be used. Particularly noteworthy among the crew were the pilot Floyd Bennett, who had been on the 1925 expedition, and Lieutenant George Noville, a former naval officer and flight engineer with expertise in lubricating agents for aircraft engines. Byrd made Noville his executive officer, the individual responsible for directly supervising and coordinating the crew.

Another distinguished volunteer was Malcolm Hanson, a civilian on loan from the Naval War Research Laboratory. Shortwave radio was still in its infancy, especially in the Arctic, where magnetic interference made communication difficult. Hanson had the important responsibility of installing a reliable shortwave system in the Josephine Ford and the Chantier. Clearly, the Byrd Arctic Expedition expected to profit from advances in shortwave communication following the expedition to Greenland in 1925.

Byrd’s selection of two other volunteers showed his caution and attention to detail. William C. Haines of the U.S. Weather Bureau helped identify the best conditions for a flight to the North Pole. Byrd also had Harold (Doc) Kinkaid, of the

11. A list of the members of the expedition is in BP, folder 4252.
Curtiss-Wright aircraft company, on board to apply his technical expertise to the *Josephine Ford*’s engines.

Despite the careful preparations, however, numerous problems arose. First, though many in the crew were not experienced seamen, they faced the challenge of securing the precious airplanes against potentially rough and ice-covered seas. When the *Chantier* reached King’s Bay at Spitzbergen on April 29, a Norwegian gunboat, the *Heimdahl*, blocked the harbor. Its captain refused to move from the one pier—even for a few hours—because he feared that the ice floating near the harbor would damage his vessel.

Instead of waiting for the *Heimdahl* to move, Byrd, inflamed by the sight of Amundsen and Ellsworth’s expedition making its preparations, ordered his crew to make a pontoon bridge from the *Chantier* to shore. The crew nailed planks across the ship’s lifeboats and hauled the planes and other cargo to the island. Any wave or floating cake of ice could at this point have ended the expedition—and possibly the career of its commander.

Once Byrd was safely ashore, another problem awaited him. He had little experience with taking off and landing an airplane with skis. His previous experiences had been with pontoons and with wheels; skis were more fragile, and they had not been used on the 1925 expedition to Greenland. The weight of the plane and its three engines caused the first attempted flight at Spitzbergen to end in broken skis. Byrd and his crew experimented with lightening the load of equipment and supplies in order to reduce the stress on the skis.

In overcoming this difficulty, Byrd benefited from the advice and assistance of Lieutenant Bernt Balchen, a Norwegian
pilot assigned to Amundsen. Balchen, who was experienced in flying with skis, helped make new ones from the Chantier's oars, coating them with a special resin to reduce friction. In addition, he recommended taking off at night, when the cold would freeze the runway hard, and there would be less friction.

Finally, at half-past midnight on May 9, 1926, the Josephine Ford lifted off. Floyd Bennett did most of the piloting, Byrd acting as navigator. The navigator's role was in many ways a more active one than the pilot's, since the navigator had to operate several instruments, verify positions, and direct the pilot to adjust course. Byrd used the Bumstead sun compass to find direction, a chronometer to find longitude, a bubble sextant for latitude, and smoke bombs and a drift indicator in the trap door of the Josephine Ford to gauge the influence of the wind on the light plane.

Byrd described the navigation in an account published in the National Geographic: "Every minute or two he [Bennett] would look at me, to be checked if necessary, on the course by the sun-compass. If he happened to be off the course, I would wave him to the right or left until he got on it again. Once every three minutes I checked the wind drift and ground speed, so that in case of a change in wind I could detect it immediately and allow for it." 12 Much of their communication was by means of hand signals and handwritten notes, since the noise from the three engines was too loud for them to speak to each other. At some point in the flight, Byrd noticed oil spraying from the tank of the starboard motor. Instead of risking a landing on the

ice (especially on the hastily built skis) to check the engine, Byrd, believing that the Josephine Ford was close to the North Pole, directed Bennett to continue northward. They would rely on two engines to return them to Spitzbergen.\textsuperscript{13}

Finally, Byrd reported, “At 9:02 a.m. Greenwich Civil Time, our calculations showed us to be at the Pole! The dream of a lifetime had at last been realized.” Pilot and navigator took readings and motion pictures, circled, and returned. During the return, the sextant fell and broke, making it impossible to take sightings. After a total flight time of nearly sixteen hours, the Josephine Ford returned to Spitzbergen.

Byrd submitted the records of his North Pole flight to the U.S. Navy for scrutiny by a panel of experts at the National

The Josephine Ford returns to Spitzbergen from the North Pole (restaged for the cameras). (BP, folder 7739)

Geographic Society. This group confirmed the navigational calculations and instrumentation as accurate. While noting the absence of sextant observations on the return trip, the report concluded that the return demonstrated Byrd’s skill in navigating along a predetermined course and stated that “in our opinion [Byrd’s return] is one of the strongest evidences that he was equally successful in his flight northward. The feat of flying a plane 600 miles from land and returning directly to the point aimed for is a remarkable exhibition of skillful navigation and shows beyond a reasonable doubt that he [Byrd] knew where he was at all times during the flight.”

Byrd received numerous honors for his accomplishment

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and became a public hero. The National Geographic Society presented him its Hubbard Medal. Congress awarded him the Medal of Honor and promoted him to commander (after he rejected the idea of making him an admiral). New York City threw him a ticker-tape parade. Requests for lectures and interviews abounded. Byrd referred to his new status with both pride and exasperation as “the hero business.”

Despite widespread acceptance of the National Geographic Society’s report and Byrd’s own account, some had difficulty believing that he had in fact reached the pole. Even in 1926, skeptics, especially reporters in Italy who had expected Amundsen, Ellsworth, and Nobile to be the first to fly over the North Pole, argued that Byrd had fallen short of his goal. The Josephine Ford, they believed, did not have the speed to traverse the pole from Spitzbergen and return so quickly.

After Byrd’s death in 1957, more skepticism and controversy erupted. In Come North with Me, published in 1958,

16. Charles J. V. Murphy, Struggle: The Life and Exploits of Commander Byrd (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1928), 264–5; Richard Montague, Oceans, Poles and Airmen: The First Flights over Wide Waters and Desolate Ice (New York: Random House, 1971), 12–13. Actually, the speed of the flight may not have been unrealistic. A telegram from New York Times correspondent William Bird to the New York Times reported that Byrd’s plane was “poleward” and was “expected back in sixteen to twenty-four hours.” See telegram of William Bird to New York Times, May 9, 1926, BP, folder 2536. The actual flight time was verified by Captain Michael J. Brennan. He recorded the plane’s departure and arrival in the log of the Chantier as 15 hours and 57 minutes. Takeoff was at 0037 Greenwich Civil Time; landing was at 16 hours and 34 minutes. See Michael J. Brennan to Commander Byrd, June 16, 1926, BP, folder 4319. In other words, the duration of the flight was only three minutes shorter than the minimum predicted at takeoff, a negligible difference.
Bernt Balchen disputed Byrd's ability as a navigator. In 1960, Gosta H. Liljequist, a professor of meteorology at the University of Uppsala, after compiling and examining meteorological records, concluded that there could not have been a strong enough wind to enable the *Josephine Ford* to return from the North Pole so quickly. In 1971 Richard Montague, relying on interviews with Bernt Balchen, published a story that Floyd Bennett, before dying of pneumonia in 1928, had confessed to Balchen that the *Josephine Ford* had developed an oil leak early in the flight. According to Montague, Bennett confessed that the *Josephine Ford* had circled out of sight of land just north of Spitzbergen, with Byrd just claiming that he had made it to the North Pole. Finally, in 1979, Finn Ronne, who had been with Byrd to Antarctica, published in *Antarctica: My Destiny* a story that Byrd had admitted to Isaiah Bowman, president of the American Geographical Society, that he and Bennett had been no closer to the North Pole than 150 miles.  


Another prominent critic of Byrd's flight was Dennis Rawlins. *Peary at the North Pole: Fact or Fiction?* (Washington, D.C.: Robert B. Luce, 1973). In addition to issues of speed and the absence of sextant observations on the return trip, Rawlins also questioned why Byrd did not decorate the North Pole with the U.S. flags he carried on the plane (263–64).

One can only speculate about this matter. Byrd himself did not respond in detail, saying only that Peary had already done this. There are several possible explanations. One is that Byrd kept the flags to use as gifts to his prominent backers.
Byrd also had his defenders. The National Geographic Society continued to credit his accomplishment. In 1973, Joe Portney, an expert in navigation, wrote an article that appeared in the Journal of the Institute of Navigation that questioned Liljequist's evidence of winds, reviewed Byrd's navigational instruments, and concluded that Byrd was likely to have come within at least fifty nautical miles of the North Pole, despite the primitive nature of his instruments.

Byrd's diary from the North Pole flight is revealing—but also mysterious. In his own words and at the time of the action, Byrd used the diary to record his feelings aboard the Chantier, his appreciation for his backers, and his crew. Byrd also voiced his mistrust of Roald Amundsen, believing him to be behind the Heimdal's refusal to let the Chantier anchor at Spitzbergen.

Ironically, Byrd expressed appreciation for the help of Bernt Balchen, who would become his leading critic and skeptic. The diary proves that Byrd thought that Amundsen, public statements to the contrary, had not authorized Balchen to help. Byrd's information about Amundsen, however, could have come from Balchen himself, who must have been disappointed about not being included on the flight of the Norge, or from fellow American Lincoln Ellsworth, with Amundsen.

Particularly revealing are the communications from Byrd

and to raise money after the flight, something that he did in fact do. Another is that the flags, which were said to number more than a hundred, may have been left behind to lighten the load, something Byrd would not have wanted to reveal when he presented the flags to benefactors. Finally, he may have been concerned about doubts that the flags' location might have cast on his claim to have flown over the pole. Winds, Arctic drift, and delays in the takeoff of the Norge could have moved the flags far from the pole by the time Amundsen would see them.
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

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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 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*. 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 Moletti, 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 Moletti’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, 1907. The Ohio State University Archives.

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

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Monday, April 5, 1926

At last we have started on our great adventure. Chantier left the Brooklyn Navy Yard today at 3:15 PM, 15 minutes after schedule, with one of the most remarkable send-offs I have ever seen. I cannot get over my astonishment that there is so much public interest in our expedition. I have never seen such kindly feeling as was shown by every one.

The outstanding incident of the departure was an extemporaneous and spontaneous talk made by Mr. Rockefeller during lunch on Vincent Astor’s yacht. It was a wonderful talk. He referred to my great interest in [the] Pole. I know no man who is more interested in the progress of mankind than Mr. Rockefeller. I am very proud to have him backing me. Edsel Ford could not come due to his very early departure for Europe. Vincent Astor also was absent on account of the death of his uncle in law. There are no higher type men than these three who are backing me and [that] is in keeping with my original premise—that I must keep the expedition on a high plane in every particular.

It was good to have Tom and Harry see us off. It was with a feeling of unutterable relief that we left the dock. Our struggle to get ready to leave today has been terrific. The officers and crew of this ship have all put super human effort into their work and to them all goes the credit for getting off on schedule time.

I have had no peace for two months. Telegrams, phone
calls, letters. It is a curious feeling now to be able to relax. We are lying off Fort Hamilton [Brooklyn], correcting compasses and stowing the ship for sea and generally shaking down. I feel a deep gratitude to the men with me who have so willingly sacrificed themselves for the success of the expedition.

The ship is in an entirely disorganized condition and there are a lot of green men in the crew. But they are a high type all around and I predict that it won’t take long to get fairly well organized.

I also feel a deep gratitude for our backers and the business firms who have helped us so generously. There are not enough words in the dictionary with which to adequately thank these people. I feel very inarticulate and unworthy of all this. I think of the expedition not as mine but as “ours,” the boys with me and America’s.

This day has proved that there is a lot of romance and spirit of adventure in this great country. I have received hundreds of telegrams and letters from all over the country. I have simply been overwhelmed.

The responsibility is terrific. The chance of some accident of fate that would prevent our getting started is terrible to consider. The hardest part of an expedition of this kind is the worry one causes those nearest and dearest. What one goes through on that score isn’t ever to be written in a diary.
Next hardest thing is the preparation. The actual flights are easy in comparison. Almost every explorer has had great difficulty financing his expedition. Then the details of preparation are infinite. There are no gasoline stations in the Arctic and there are no aircraft factories to wire back to for spare parts.

I received today the following telegraph from my shipmates in the Bureau of Aeronautics. It has been surprising the number of people who have connected this trip up with providence.

*Tuesday, April 6, 1926*

The captain [Michael Brennan] has corrected his compasses and when we got underway the ship was three quarters ready for sea. The captain and I were most anxious to get going. “If I get underway,” he said, “there won’t be any questions about those stores being stored. The boys will have to work late into the night on the deck to straighten out the jumble of stores. That would be very serious in case of a heavy sea.”

The spirit of the men on board is wonderful. When [George] Noville asked for volunteers today, the Doctor, Daniel O’Brien (from John Hopkins), the movie men, Donahue and Van der Veer and William Haines, the ex-

22. This appears to have been a telegram wishing Byrd and the expedition well. See Byrd to Admiral W. A. Moffett, April 10, 1926. BP folder 4310.
pedition meteorologist sent by the Department of Agri-
culture volunteered without a moment's hesitation. Everyone
was utterly worn out last night but feel better today.

We have stored our great 63 foot wing in the forward
hold and have exercised exquisite care to prevent any-
thing from falling on it. One's sensations are not the
pleasantest when tons of weight are hanging over that
wing. [A. A.] Touchette was lowering a big pyrene23 to-
day into the hold. The line got away from him and ran
through his fingers so fast it burnt his hand. But he
clamped down on it and stopped it, taking the skin off
his finger rather than let the wing be injured.

Received a great many radio messages: Secretary of
Navy, Edsel Ford, American Legion, [Vilhjalmur] Ste-
fansson, the explorer, Admiral Peary's family, and many
others. It is fortunate we have smooth weather for we are
not entirely secured for sea.

Because we anchored off Fort Hamilton the newspa-
pers heard that our wing was injured and sent a reporter
to get the story.

*Wednesday, April 7, 1926*

Last night after supper I was making for my state room
on the upper deck when a man furtively passed me. I

23. Pyrene is a yellow, crystalline hydrocarbon derived from coal tar and
used to extinguish fires.
thought he looked familiar. I flashed my flashlight in his face and there was [Malcolm P.] Hanson, the radio engineer from the Naval radio research laboratory. I was greatly surprised.

“I confess to being a stow-away,” said Hanson. Now the expedition owes a very great deal to Hanson. He has worked day and night for weeks on high frequency radio sets for ship and plane. It seems that he had three or four more days work to do and deliberately stowed away and so sacrificing himself for the good of the expedition. He did not want me to know he was aboard when we left and so have the responsibility for his act. My only concern is to help him out of his scrape.

Thursday, April 8, 1926

We continue to get everything ship-shape. This morning shortly before seven o’clock the ship began rolling considerably—30 degrees rol[l]. I learned later and soon thereafter I heard the captain bellow “all hands on deck. There is something loose in the forehold.” This was an interesting moment for me. It meant that if the captain were right our wing would be smashed and the expedition ended ignominiously—failure with a capital “F.”

I did not wait to dress, reached the bridge in a moment. “Do you think it very bad, captain?” I said. He didn’t know. We reached the hatch in a jiffy and with the help of the first mate got the hatch covering off. The gasoline
barrels and other gear were all intact. I was greatly relieved. One heavy gasoline barrel rolling around in that hold would have smashed the wing so that it could not be repaired. I have given orders to put double lashings on everything. There was a hole in the wing caused by a piece of timber from one of the beams. That can be repaired.

Friday, April 9, 1926
We have received the following message from the commander and Dr. Taylor of the Naval Research Laboratory (See Radio Log). So Hanson is saved if we can get him back to the States in time. We will let Hanson off at sea after his job is completed if we pass another ship homeward bound and if it is smooth enough.

Saturday, April 10, 1926
We are gradually getting well shaken down. There are mashed fingers, sea sickness, men tired out, etc[.], but all are happy and I believe I can say we have a happy ship. It looks as if we may reach Spitzbergen May 1st if all goes well.

Sunday, April 11, 1926
I am spending most of my time pondering the problems ahead, laying down my courses, etc. and leave most of the details of regulating things to [Lieutenant G. O.]
Noville and [Lieutenant R. E.] Oertel. Both of whom have a spirit and willingness beyond reproach. We let all hands, except those who have had to stand watch or check in the engine room take a day off. Very much needed rest. I found last night that our primus stove had not been sent by Abercrombie and Fitch. I was much disappointed. Will take every possible means to procure one for our trip.

Monday, April 12, 1926

There is a wonderful spirit on board. [Charles E.] Gould the ship’s carpenter is one of the best men on board. Works twelve or fifteen hours every day. While the ship was rolling last night one of the seamen slipped and fell on his face, waking him up, “Hello, up there. How are you?” he says and turns over and goes to sleep.

There is a great deal of hard work for everyone and it is this routine daily grind that tests a man. We are passing in the vicinity of ice.

Tuesday, April 13, 1926

[W. W.] Ehrgott, one of the West Pointers, has been in the mess room. Hates it and has broken over twenty dishes. Put him on deck and tried him out at the wheel. He did very well until the captain came on the bridge when he was 80 degrees off the course. I bet his bawling out beat anything he ever got at West Point.
We have had rough following seas for days.

Much difficulty breaking in helmsmen from among the volunteers.

*Wednesday, April 14, 1926*

Sat up until late last night making list of things to be taken on sledge and in plane. It is quite a problem to know just what to put on the sledge in case we have a forced landing and crack up. What one carries on the sledges may make the difference [between] success and failure, life and death.

*Thursday, April 15, 1926*

We are still so low by the stern that we have decided to move the coal from no. 3 hold, one of the after holds, to the starboard and midship bunker. We filled this hold with 900 tons of coal in order to have enough of coal to get to Spitzbergen and back to New York without coal- ing. Everyone on board including the Pathe news men, except the doctor, have turned to at the important job. The spirit of the men is great.

The engineer's force is making all the speed possible but we cannot seem to make more than 8 and one half knots. Hanson the stowaway is working day and night on the radio. He gets only three hours sleep on an average, a night. He has a terrific proposition [challenge] with the
high frequency radio. This field is so new he is meeting with many unsuspected difficulties. Whatever results he gets I am extremely grateful to him.

*Friday, April 16, 1926*

In spite of the almost superhuman effort of Hanson, [L. K.] Grenlie and [G. H.] James the noises about the ship prevent proper reception. I don’t see how Hanson stands the loss of sleep as he does.

Spent last night weighing equipment to be taken on planes and also in deciding what is to be taken. The weight has to be kept down to a minimum and yet there are so many things we should have to add to our safety. We find that we should carry 1400 lbs of equipment, food, etc. That counts Bennett and myself. We think this may leave us with 1800 miles cruising radius but as to that we can’t tell until we reach Spitzbergen and actually try out the plane.

Got about 20 tons out of the after hold today. That helps the trim of the ship a little. Half way to Trondheim [Norway] our destination in Norway. We should reach there the 25th.

*Saturday, April 17, 1926*

Got about 25 tons out of the after hold today. I shoveled coal in the morning and spent the afternoon working out
instructions for the main base to observe after we leave on our flight. We are flying in dangerous country. The 300 miles to Greenland is the most hazardous region in the world to fly over. If we should have a forced landing there we would be swept in to the Atlantic before we could cover 50 miles and the ice would melt under us.

Read [Robert Falcon] Scott's diary of his trip to the South Pole where he writes just before he died when his fingers would hold the pencil no longer. It is a wonderful dramatic though modest and simple narrative of unequaled heroism.

Though my state room is on the upper deck it is so rough tonight. The spray is bombarding my cabin.

Sunday, April 18, 1926

I am much too occupied with doings and plannings to give the proper attention to this diary. Consequently it is a very poor affair indeed. The most uninteresting one ever written. I guess that's saying a lot too.

Hanson has rigged up a sub radio station on the poop deck to get away from the interference he encounters at the main radio room amidships. It was frightfully rough and windy last night but not a word of complaint from Hanson and too he got good results. Good for Hanson.

All hands took a rest today. They certainly needed it
after very very hard work and long hours. It has been fairly calm today. There was a great deal of fun on deck—boxing etc. and the dog [Byrd’s terrier, Igloo] and dummy goat afforded great amusement to everyone. The crew serenaded me outside my cabin tonight. I didn’t know just what to do with a serenade but enjoyed it just the same.


Monday, April 19, 1926

Funny incidents: Touchette collecting mail for mail buoy. [Roy] Bryant getting pyrene when told to get fire hose for muddy chain when we were moving 900 tons of coal to move from 3rd hold to bunker singing “Sweet little coal bunker don’t you cry. You will be empty bye and bye. When our commander is crossing the pole, we will be in the bunker shoveling coal.”

Touchette trying to find the fishing box.

Bryant holding a line and when asked to let go the line didn’t know what he had in his hands.


Tuesday, April 20, 1926

Bad blow continues to hold us back.


Wednesday, April 21, 1926

I have radioed ahead to Bird the newspaper representa-

ve to meet us at Saetimo Light on the coast 80 miles
from Trondheim in order to save time. He is bringing certain supplies we lack.

Thursday, April 22, 1926
Due to head winds yesterday and last night made only 6 knots. Too bad. We must get to Spitzbergen as soon as possible.

Friday, April 23, 1926
Looks as if this blow will never stop. We won’t reach Saetimo Light until tomorrow night probably. I spend most of my time working on problems of the flight.

Saturday, April 24, 1925
N.Y. Times correspondent William Bird met us off Saetimo Light in a tug about midnight tonight. He brought with him about $1,000 worth of supplies we had radioed ahead for. The ice pilot and Pathe news representative Wyand from London also came with Bird. Flares were lighted and moving pictures were taken of the three of them coming aboard.

Good old Hanson has left us. Went to Trondheim on the tug that brought Bird. I was delighted when the crew gave Hanson three cheers as he went over the side.
Sunday, April 25, 1926

Being Sunday I took the morning off.

Preparing for the polar flight is a matter of great detail and takes much time and thought. Noville has been a trump. He has relieved me almost entirely of the details of administering the ship! We have 55 men aboard now and it is no easy matter to keep everything running efficiently and smoothly. [Roald] Amundsen seems to us hurrying as much as possible. I am afraid [George Hubert] Wilkins and I have hurried him unduly.

We should reach Kings Bay early Friday morning.

Monday, April 26, 1926

The crew published a Sunday paper yesterday that was splendid. The jokes were great.

Tuesday, April 27, 1926

[Page left blank.]

Wednesday, April 28, 1926

Sent radio today offering help of our crew if he [Amundsen] should need it. Also asked him to arrange for us to go alongside dock. Should get in tomorrow about 3 PM.

24. Byrd to Amundsen, April 28, 1926, BP, folder 4319: "Please arrange for our ship Chantier to go alongside dock at Kingsbay immediately upon arrival to-morrow night, Thursday, about 6 PM. I wish to offer you any help we are capable of. We have fifty men aboard. Kindest and best regards to you and all members
The crew is working hard to get everything ready to put the planes ashore immediately.

Got radio message that Wilkins was 13 days overdue. Hope he is o.k.

*Thursday, April 29, 1926*

Greatly disappointed today to hear from Amundsen by radio that we could not go alongside dock as there are two Norwegian ships alongside.

Amundsen sent a lieutenant from the Norwegian gunboat that is alongside the dock out to meet us. He informed us that he didn’t know when we could go alongside dock.

We arrived about 4 PM. Asked the captain of the gunboat if we could go alongside him. He reluctantly consented. I called on Amundsen immediately but he was at supper. Met him later and went to his quarters with him.

I then called on captain of the gunboat and asked him when we could get alongside dock and get our plane ashore. He replied Monday. I then requested that he let us go alongside when he is not coaling at night and put the plane ashore. He would not do that.
We cannot wait for days and I ordered the boats lowered so as to take the plane on four of our boats rigged together by planking.

I then called on Smithmeyer, the director of the coal mine. He told us that we would have to move from alongside the gunboat to allow a Norwegian whaler to get alongside and coal. We anchored out about 300 yards at midnight. Got our pontoon made and at this writing have the small plane's [the Oriole's] wing put aboard.

Got radio that Wilkins is OK at Point Barrow. Hurrah! Smithmeyer told us to go alongside dock. Small space other side [of] gunboat. We would surely have gone aground. I cannot understand.

**Friday, April 30, 1926**

Got Oriole (which the boys have named after my boy Richard III) to beach about 4 a.m. Two hunks of ice wedged ahead of it and prevented our getting the plane ashore. All the deck force and volunteers have been up all night. So turned in about 8 AM. Chief Engineer [T. B.] Mulroy, [Alton B.] Parker, [R. W.] Konter and several others went ashore and got plane ashore. Good Work. The men worked like Trojans all night. Turned to after lunch after the men had had some sleep and working in snow and cold got the fuselage aboard the one pontoon and the wing out of the hole. Great work. Just as we got the wing out large piece of field ice drifted down and just by a few seconds saved pontoon from being smashed.
Strong wind and ice prevented further operations. Our Pathe man had gone to beach where we were to put ashore our plane from our pontoon when he was approached by Amundsen's representative and informed that we could not take movies of our own operation. Great sportsmanship. They deny us dock, deny movie, make us move out in stream. The Viking valor.

Captain and I got through ice and brought back pontoon that was stuck in ice at the beach.

Saturday, May 1, 1926

In spite of anything the Norwegians do I intend to be a sport and be dignified and calm. They have made it very difficult for us. Didn't turn in until one thirty this morning. Got up every hour thereafter to look at ice which covered everything. When I turned in, no let up. Wind twenty knots too. Turned out about six. Relieved pontoon watch. No let up. Ice covers entire area between us and Kings Bay. At eight wind was calm and ice fairly stationary. Decided to take chance and put wing on fuselage and get ashore somehow.

We seem to have either no ice and wind or no wind and ice or both. The last of course is very dangerous. We may be licked but don't want to be licked waiting around and doing nothing. Noville, Bennett, ice pilot, all opposed to my decision [to build the pontoon bridge]. They were wise probably. Had difficult time fitting wing on fuselage that was on pontoon. Sent boat ahead to clear ice as
much as possible. Had 8 oarsmen on pontoon and dinghy placed between two leading boats of pontoon. A dozen men shoving off ice cake as we went along. Finally got ashore and had [a] lot of fun doing it. Got cheers from Norwegians, which we returned. Norwegians didn’t think we would make it.

**Sunday, May 2, 1926**

Worked all night on beach to get plane ready but had bright sunlight. Built little hanger of [illegible]. Took lunch with Amundsen who professes great friendship but gave Lt. Balchen (who is a peach and wanted to help us and has helped us) orders not to come near us again.

**Monday, May 3, 1926**

Got motors started. Taxied plane up on hill towards hangar. Forward right ski split and fitting torn loose around fuselage. Very discouraging but we will not get discouraged. If no load has cracked ski what will full load do? True we made some fairly sharp turns. Treating [skis] with tar first. Very cold tonight. [S]ix degrees below zero. Several frozen feet. Amundsen got after Balchen again. The men are doing superhuman work.

[Editor’s note: What follow are notes from the diary written during or about the time of the flight to the North Pole. Transcriptions are in the sequence that seems most likely. Illustrations of these pages at the end]
of this chapter are in order as they appear in the diary. Navigational calculations are not included in the transcribed text but appear in the illustrations.

[page 5 of diary, written May 9, 1926]

We are making good speed. It looks like fog over the polar sea. Send a radio back that we are making fast speed and are about to pass Amsterdam Island. We have a little drift to the left. Direction of wind from east. Now we can't see edge of ice pack.

I want to line up the mountain and Amsterdam Island. I will do it from top side. Watch me. We have drifted way over to the West. I am trying to get back on line. Please head on, I tell you.

[page 6]

You are steering too much to the right. Set compass few degrees to left.

Send a radio back that we are 85 miles due north Amsterdam Island. Got over ice pack just north of land.

I want to use a smoke bomb. Where is a match to strike with.

Send a radio that we are 240 miles due north Spitzbergen. Then pull in your wire.
You are keeping to the right 5 degrees too much.

You must [underlined three times] not persist in keeping too far to right.

Radio that we are 230 miles from the Pole.

Radio

Nothing but ice everywhere. No sign of life. Motors going fine.

[page headed “Cash Account November”]

There is a very strong wind. Please steer very carefully.

[page headed “Cash Account December”]

The starboard motor has an oil leak.

Can you get all the way back on two motors.

What has been our average air speed[?]

20 miles to go to pole.

[page 14]

We should be at the Pole now. Make a circle. I will take a picture. Then I want the sun.
Radio that we have reached the pole and are now returning with one motor with bad oil leak. But expect to be able to make Spitzbergen.

How long were we gone before we turned around?

8½ [This response may have been written by Bennett.]

Head the plane right at the sun.

[The following photographs are pages from Byrd’s diary pertaining to the North Pole flight, May 9, 1926. The photographs on pp. 83 and 85 are blowups of the previous pages, so that the reader can see the erasures more clearly.]
MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 1925

we are making good speed

it looks like fog here the pilot has

sealed in a little ball that we are

making fast speed and are

about to pass the Amsterdam islands.

we have a little drift to the left

question of wind from east

then we don't have any east

wind.

i want to tow up the amstel

and amsterdam islands i will

do it from top side watch me

we have drifted way over to the

west i am trying to get head on

line please stand by till

now
Radio that we have reached the pole and are now returning with one motor with bad oil leak. But expect to be able to make Spitzbergen.

[pager headed “Cash Account December,” partially erased]

How long were we gone before we turned around?

8½ [This response may have been written by Bennett.]

Head the plane right at the sun.

[The following photographs are pages from Byrd’s diary pertaining to the North Pole flight, May 9, 1926. The photographs on pp. 83 and 85 are blowups of the previous pages, so that the reader can see the erasures more clearly.]
Monday, January 5, 1925

We are making good speed.
It looks like fog over the further coast, and a current back that we are running past.

We are about to pass Amsterdam Island, and we have a little drift to the left.

I want to have you know that I am feeling pretty well.

I want to have you know that I am feeling pretty well.
Tuesday, January 6, 1925

You are steering too much to the right. Set compass a few degrees to left.

Send a radio back that we are 80 miles due north, about one island off. Set compass for north, sound. Want to use this smaller land when in a match box. Think we're

Send a radio that we are 140 miles due north Spitsbergen, then pull in your wind.

You are keeping to the right too much.

You must not persist in keeping too far to right.

Radio that we are 150 miles from the Pole.

Polar weather everywhere - no signs of life unless going forward.
THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 1925

ight 4 - 39 - 40  c/mm2

           21

4 - 39 - 19

3.37

4 - 42 - 3.6

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\begin{align*}
6 & = 15 \sqrt{6} - 47 \\
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\text{Act} \ &= \ 17 - \sqrt{14.3} \\
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SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 1925

watch 7:07-30

7-07-10
3-37
7-10-47
\[ \theta_\varphi = 17 - 10 - 4 \]

\[ = 3 \]

\[ 19 - 2 = 17 \]

\[ \frac{17}{2} = 8.5 \]
We moved in at the Fall from small a circle
will talk a question
then I went the two

Poles that we have reached
the poles and are now
returning with one meter
to until last the back. But expect
to be able to make Spitzhanger
SUMMER TIME.

To be laid off towards observed body when observed altitude is greater than computed.

Example.

G.C.T. July 27 = 6:06:20

Eq. = 6:20

G.M.T. = 6:00:00

Alt. at Pole . Sec. = 19:20:02

- observed = 16:09

Polar dist. = 3° 13.1

Summ point to be laid off away from obs body.

\[ G.C.T. \text{ July 27, 6:06:20} \]
\[ \text{Sid. Time 0° East 20:16:37} \]
\[ \text{Carr. for G.C.T.} \]
\[ 1:04 \]
\[ \text{Carr.} \]
\[ 2:23:59 \]
\[ \text{RA in hour} \]
\[ 13:00:35 \]
\[ \text{A in sec.} \]
\[ 10:36:56 \text{ E} \]
\[ 13:23:04 \text{ W.} \]

\[ \text{Alt. w.r. at Pole = 1°:06:56} \]
\[ \text{Alt. w.r. = 3:53} \]
\[ \text{Alt. diff = 2:00} \text{ to be laid off towards body.} \]
Wednesday, December 2, 1925

To get true alt. of moon.

May 6, 1925, C.T. 18:25:00, alt. lowest limb 8:00, west. was 25° 30' 30" E.P. 20 ft.

Obs. alt. 25° 30' 30"

Parallax and refraction 7"-04" = 7"-00" added for true altitude.

Meridian altitude

June 21, 1925, 21:13-21 60° w. Q = 40° 04'

Cosine bearing south, 60° = 40° 04' 00" from Table I = 10-33

\[ \delta = \frac{46-17}{21} \] 50° = 10-21 + 3.6

\[ \theta = 46-42-29(N) \]

\[ \varphi = 216-26-48(N) \]

\[ \lambda = 79-09-21(N) \]

G.A.C.T. = 16-00-00

\[ \text{Eq} = 1-29-1 \]

\[ \text{Eq} = 23-26-8 \]
Rule for measuring altitude

1. $\theta - \phi = \text{true} \pm 90 - \text{true} - \text{alt}$
2. $\phi - \theta = \text{true} + 90 - \text{true} + \text{alt}$
3. $\lambda + \text{true} + \text{true} = 90 - \theta + \text{true}$
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1925

Course

Magnetic Compass

Kings Bay to Woolastok Sand - 30-1-Turn
1st hour 15° Var 316° Magnetic
2nd hour 20° Var 321°
3rd hour 25° Var 326°

Speed 1st hour about 80 mph. = 70 knots
2nd hour 80
3rd hour 90

Sun Compass

Kings Bay to Woolastok Sand
1st hour (1st) = 11° 45' East = 47°
2nd hour = 6° 30' East = 26°
3rd hour = 45° East = 3°
LAT = C.C.T. + 2°. ± λ
Add when east. Subtract when west.
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1925

Course

Northeast Sand to King's Bay

12.1 Jan

1st forty minutes  25° V.A 15° magnetic

1st  hour thereafter  25°  15°  14.6

2nd  hour  20°  14.1

3rd  hour  15°  13.6
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1925

About winter gap, only very small glacier to see. Col
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There is a very strong
kind please offer
Very carefully

CASH ACCOUNT

DATE:  

December

RECEIVED:  8.12  

PAID:  

The 5th month was an end lead
Can you get all the way which  is two 1 meter
What has been our average air speed

85
63
8.0
42
76

80 miles + 90 + pole

Will have the plane ought at the 85