A few days after the *Chantier* and *Byrd* returned to New York on June 23, Rodman Wanamaker, the department store owner, sent the commander a letter of congratulations in which he said, "I hope you will have great success in carrying on to completion the wonderful pioneering scientific work of further exploration, which has reflected so much credit upon the United States." Wanamaker had been a financial contributor to Byrd's expedition. After Byrd's polar flight, Wanamaker made a final donation to cover part of the expedition's deficit, which totaled more than $32,000.¹ A

grateful Byrd cooperated with Wanamaker, allowing him to display the Josephine Ford at his Philadelphia store as a highlight of its celebration of the national sesquicentennial in July 1926.²

On July 9, Wanamaker hosted a special luncheon in honor of the members of the Byrd Arctic Expedition. Instead of delivering a speech, he welcomed his guests by reading from a letter he had written to the president of the Aero Club of America in New York on February 4, 1914. “In the cause of science and in the interest of world peace I have the honor to announce first of all to the Aero Club of America my intention to make a scientific test of aeronautic power by crossing the Atlantic Ocean in one flight, if possible.” Wanamaker believed that airplanes capable of transatlantic flight would end the military competition among nations to build fleets of huge battleships that could be “destroyed by one aeroplane dropping bombs from the air.” Wanamaker also believed that once airplanes could cross the Atlantic without stopping, a transatlantic passenger airline industry would develop. In 1914 Wanamaker had commissioned Glen H. Curtiss, a pioneer in the development of airplanes, to design and build a plane capable of flying across the Atlantic.

Wanamaker’s 1914 proposal, not surprisingly, was overshadowed by the outbreak of World War I. By restating it at a celebration of Byrd’s polar triumph, Wanamaker implicitly challenged Byrd to attempt a transatlantic flight. “I have read this letter carefully to you. It seems but a child’s dream compared with the wonderful expedition that Commander Byrd

and his crew have just made, but it indicates to you just how quickly America forges ahead, and always will be ahead, and it will be for you men, with your daring and your pluck to go ahead.”

Byrd himself had been interested in transatlantic flight since his days at Pensacola and his navigational contributions to the U.S. Navy’s crossing from New York to Lisbon in 1919. The success of the flight to the North Pole reawakened his ambition to fly across the Atlantic.

Byrd also shared Wanamaker’s interest in the development of commercial aviation. After exhibiting the *Josephine Ford* at Wanamaker’s, Byrd lent the plane to the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Guggenheim Aviation Fund for a “tour of the United States to demonstrate the practicability of commercial aviation and to help to open up air ports in various cities.” Floyd Bennett and Bernt Balchen flew the plane from Washington to San Francisco and back, stopping along the way at forty-four cities.

With Wanamaker’s support, Byrd organized the America Trans Oceanic Company. Wanamaker’s conditions for backing Byrd were that a plane be specially built to accomplish a non-stop crossing, that it be named *America* in memory of the plane

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3. Speech given by Rodman Wanamaker at the luncheon in honor of the members of the Byrd Arctic Expedition, July 9, 1926. BP folder 4327.

4. In *Skyward*, Byrd stated that he had a transatlantic flight on his mind during the return to New York from Spitzbergen: “When we hoisted anchor at Spitzbergen after the North Pole flight I turned to Bennett and said ‘Now we can fly the Atlantic.’” Richard E. Byrd, *Skyward* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928), 222.

5. See BP folder 4282. On this national tour, Bernt Balchen studied the speed and fuel consumption of the *Josephine Ford* and reached his conclusion that the plane could not have reached the North Pole in the time Byrd reported.
Wanamaker had commissioned in 1914, and that its destination be France, where Wanamaker had once lived. Byrd was responsible for planning the flight and selecting the airplane and the crew. He also raised money for the venture by selling stories to newspapers.

Wanamaker was not the only supporter of his earlier expeditions whose backing or participation Byrd solicited for his transatlantic attempt. Once again he chose Floyd Bennett to be the pilot. Lieutenant George Noville would be his engineer. Malcolm Hanson, who had worked so long on radio communications on the USS *Chantier*, designed a special radio set for the *America*. Doc Kinkaid, the mechanic for the *Josephine Ford*, assisted with the engines of the *America*. Finally, the National Geographic Society aided Byrd by providing the services of its chief cartographer, Albert H. Bumstead, inventor of the sun compass. (Byrd had made the first field use of this instrument during the 1925 Greenland expedition.)

In choosing a plane, Byrd again turned to a Fokker trimotor. Because Wanamaker was willing to pay for a new plane, Byrd was able to work with Anthony Fokker at his plant in New Jersey in designing and testing the airplane to which he would be entrusting both his life and his reputation. Many innovations were made in the interests of safety. For example, Byrd designed a special valve that allowed the crew, in the event of a disaster, to dump gasoline from the engines quickly. Bennett added a cutoff switch that would shut down all engines simultaneously if a crash landing and fire seemed imminent.

Another safety feature that in retrospect seems foolish was catwalks on the outside of the airplane. While the plane was in the air, the crew could in theory attend to any mechanical difficulties by hanging onto the catwalks and braving the wind and the cold.

Byrd saw to it that a luminous coating was applied to the plane’s instruments so that they could be read even if the lights failed, and he prepared for the dangers posed by the weather by employing a meteorologist, as he had for the North Pole flight. The U.S. Weather Bureau assigned Dr. James H. Kimball of its New York office to make weather predictions, and for the first time in history, regular weather maps for aviation were made of the North Atlantic.

Byrd even had a special runway designed and built for the America at Roosevelt Field on Long Island, which Wanamaker had leased. A large, three-engine airplane needed a longer, smoother runway to reach the fast ground speed that would make the takeoff safer. To increase the plane’s speed during taxi and takeoff without consuming extra fuel, Byrd had a hill built at the beginning of the runway.

All these measures reflected Byrd’s characteristically careful organization, but he was also determined to advance the development of commercial transatlantic air service, for which safer planes would be a sine qua non. In addition, potential users of such a service had to be able to see that airplanes could carry more than just a pilot, a navigator, and the cargo they would need.

Consequently, the America was not designed with a heroic flight by a solo pilot in mind. It would carry a crew of four
and some eight hundred pounds of emergency equipment and cargo. Its stores included a kite for a wireless antenna if the plane landed on the ocean (the kite could double as a sail), two rubber rafts, enough food for three weeks, and special machinery to distill water. The America also carried a mailbag containing the first official transatlantic airmail.

Despite all the safety precautions, a spectacular accident marred the America’s first test flight, on April 20, 1927. Anthony Fokker himself was piloting the new plane, and Bennett, Byrd, and Noville were passengers. During the landing, the airplane hit the ground nose first and somersaulted on its back. Although the damage to the America was not irreparable, Bennett suffered such serious injuries that he had to withdraw from the project.

Byrd’s setback worked to his rivals’ advantage. The first to fly across the Atlantic would be seen as a hero and become a national celebrity. Cash as well as fame awaited the winner. In 1925 Raymond Orteig, the owner of a hotel in New York, renewed his offer of a $25,000 prize for anyone who would fly “from Paris or the shores of France to New York or from New York to Paris or the shores of France, without stop, within five years from June 1, 1925,” which he had first announced in 1919. Byrd, however, insisted that his team was not in competition for the prize. As early as March 28, 1927, the America Trans Oceanic Company issued a statement to the press that its goal was to “help the progress of aviation” and that “Mr. Wannemaker is simply trying to assist aviation progress and is even

Byrd being sworn in as an official mail carrier by the U.S. Post Office Department. 
(BP, folder 7747)
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.”

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 1926.9

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.10 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 adamantly against 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.\textsuperscript{11}

On June 20, 1927, more than two months after its disastrous test flight, the \textit{America} soared off the special runway at Roosevelt Field. Aboard were Richard Byrd as navigator and George Noville 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

\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Skyward}, 223–24.
weather. Byrd felt that the time was ripe to show that the tri-motor 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,
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.” 12 In New York City, Byrd became the first hero ever to receive a second ticker-tape parade. 13 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. 111.


13. Eugene Rodgers, Beyond the Barrier: The Story of Byrd’s First Expedition to Antarctica (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 12.
Victory parade for Byrd and his crew in Paris. (BP, folder 7751)
[June 29, 1927]14
Left 4:25 standard [Eastern Standard Time]
4:29 altitude 300 feet turning. After turn completed 400. Raining slight.

5:50


As I looked through our trap door passing north of Halifax a cl[oud] was under us and the shadow of the America on the cloud had a beautiful rainbow around it.

Oil leak near [illegible]. Leak fixed with glue.

Sometimes have difficult time attracting attention ahead [from other crew members] to send radio or change course. Lights don’t work so well. Found a long stick and hit Noville on shoe with that.

Went forward at 3:45 to pilot. I got caught in passage way.

For ten hours we have seen no land or water. It’s now ten A.M. I sit here wondering if the winds have been with us. If they haven’t we don’t reach land.

14. In the original diary, the diary entries follow the chart. The order has been reversed here for clarity. The original diary pages concerning the flight begin “January 16, 1925”—actually June 29, 1927.
I take my hat off to the boys with me. Their courage is marvelous.

[From Flight Chart recorded in diary, June 29, 1927]^{15}

5:00 [A.M.] Raining thick. Average altitude 40000

6:00 Still drizzling.

6:30 Wind shifting clockwise; nearly behind us. Wind on surface from S.W.

7:00 E. [illegible]. Compass seems out and gas cans are affecting STD Compass not so good.

7:30 At this lower altitude find drift to left changing clockwise

8:00 Are keeping altitude for safety rather than speed at this time.

10:00] Just passed Labrador Bay. Fog covers area to right.

12:00 Looks like 103 mph ground speed. Thought of NC boats flight [the 1919 crossing] when passed Halifax.

15. Pages concerning this flight in the diary run from January 16, 1925, through January 28, 1925.
2:00 Cans of gas are now all used. Must get gas check. See land to left.

5:30 Thick fog for nearly hour. Can hardly see wing tips. Can't navigate.

6:30 Impossible to navigate. Wonder how long this will last.

7:30 Impossible to navigate. Situation terrific.

8:30 Impossible to navigate.

[June 30, 1927]

12:30 Dawn is here very beautiful over the horizon. 16

2:00 Clouds are right up to us. Nothing seen below for 10 hours.

3:30 Ice began to form.

5:00 Dense fog that can't climb out of. Terribly dangerous. No water yet.

5 (?) [sic] Haven't seen water or land for 13 hours.

16 The time recorded in the log is Eastern Standard Time. Therefore, "dawn" near Europe at 12:30 a.m. is reasonable, because the local time was about 5:30 a.m.
9:00 Can see water now

10:30 Things at last are pleasant.

12:30 Taking longer than I thought to get to land.

[The photographs that follow show the diary pages on which Byrd recorded the America's transatlantic flight.]
**Sunday, January 18, 1925**

**Monday, January 19, 1925**

<table>
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<th>Max</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Avg</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Act</th>
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<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>7:30</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>9400</td>
<td>7200</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>9000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comment:**

Dreams were very beautiful over the drum.

Clouds that rose up to sea nothing when below 10 to 12

The sun began to form.

**Note:**

Frogs that can climb out of water appear.
TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 1925

[Handwritten text]

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 1925

[Handwritten text]