

This Day in History... November 29, 1929

Richard Byrd's First South Pole Expedition

On November 29, 1929, Richard E. Byrd made his first flight over the South Pole. It was the first of five expeditions he made there during his life.

Byrd learned to fly for the US Navy and flew missions during World War I. After the war, in 1924, he traveled to Greenland to explore the Arctic area by air. Byrd deeply enjoyed his flights over glaciers and sea ice and began planning a flight over the North Pole. He made that flight on May 9, 1926 in 15-and-a-half hours and received the Congressional Medal of Honor. (It was discovered decades later that they may have turned back early due to an oil leak.)

Byrd continued his harrowing journeys. In 1927, he flew nonstop across the Atlantic – a feat that made him famous and earned him financial backers for an expedition to Antarctica. In the fall of 1928, he and a group of explorers traveled to the Bay of Whales and established a sprawling base camp they named “Little America.” From this post they launched scientific and photographic expeditions, as well as geological surveys.

Then, at 3:29 p.m. on November 28, 1929, Byrd and three others boarded a plane for the South Pole. Their magnetic compasses wouldn't work there, so they depended on sun compasses and Byrd's experience as a navigator. Along the way, they dropped supplies to a geological party. The group experienced some issues reaching a high enough altitude to pass over the Polar Plateau. They had to dump empty gas tanks and emergency supplies in order to pass just a few yards above it. Around 1 a.m. on November 29, Byrd's expedition reached the South Pole. To make up for any possible navigational errors, they flew a few miles past the pole and then veered both right and left. Byrd also dropped an American flag on the pole before they headed back to Little America.

Returning home after a summer of exploration, Byrd became even more famous

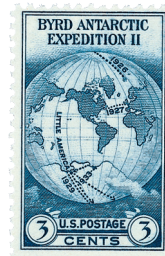
and was promoted to the rank of rear admiral. But his fascination with the arctic was far from over. A few years later, in 1933, he led a second expedition to Antarctica. During that trip, Byrd was trapped for five months at a weather station over 100 miles from Little America.

In 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt recommended Byrd to take command of the US Antarctic Service. Byrd agreed and launched his third expedition. However, his stay was brief as he was recalled to active military service when the world went to war. During the war, Byrd served as an adviser to the chief of naval operations, and flew missions to the Pacific to examine islands for potential airfields.

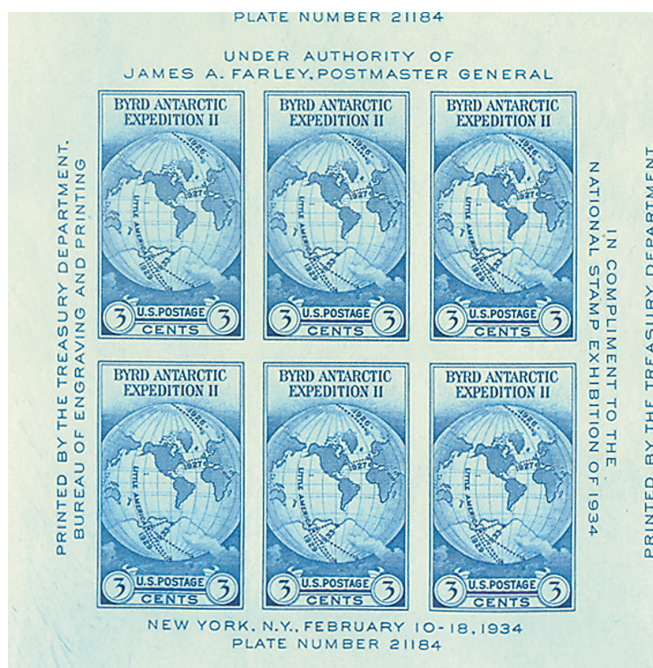
Byrd embarked on his largest Antarctic expedition in 1946. Code named Operation Highjump, it involved over 4,000 people and mapped more than 500,000 miles of the continent. Byrd made his last trip to Antarctica in 1956 and helped establish several permanent bases.



The 1988 Antarctic Explorers stamps were issued to coincide with Byrd's 100th birthday.



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One of the Farley's Follies – issued imperforate and ungummed following a Post Office controversy.

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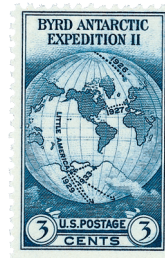
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