

Richard Evelyn Byrd

1888-1957



Richard Byrd



Ford Tri-motor

Richard Evelyn Byrd Jr. (no prizes for guessing his nationality!) was a US Navy officer who may or may not have been the first to fly over the North Pole in 1926. His achievement, with Floyd Bennett, a Chief Petty Officer, as pilot, has long been disputed, and credit is usually given to Amundsen in the Italian airship *Norge* a few weeks later. The following year, Byrd commanded the first flight between the USA and Europe, at the end of which his aircraft had to crash-land, not in an Irish peat-bog, like Alcock and Brown, but on a Normandy beach that would 17 years later, achieve fame as "Gold" beach on June 6th 1944, D-day.

In 1928, he commanded an expedition to Antarctica comprising two ships and three aircraft. In November 1929, he navigated a Ford Tri-motor aircraft over the South Pole and back to their base on the Ross Ice Shelf, the first to go to the Pole since Scott, 17 years earlier. The flight took nearly 19 hours and they had to ditch empty spare fuel tanks as well as their emergency rations (!) to achieve the altitude of the Polar Plateau (over 9000ft).

Courtesy of a special Act of Congress, Byrd became one of only three USN officers to attain the rank of Rear-Admiral without being promoted to Captain first. He went on to command four more trips to the Antarctic, culminating in Operation Deep-Freeze, which in 1955-56 established permanent bases at McMurdo Sound, the Bay of Whales and the South Pole itself.