

## Did Byrd Fly Over the North Pole in 1926?

### Description of Primary Sources Teacher's Guide

(For an excellent overview of the arguments and counter-arguments regarding whether Byrd reached the North Pole, read "Explorer: The Life of Richard E. Byrd" by Lisle A. Rose, pp. 125-143)

#### Arguments for Byrd reaching the Pole:

Document	Author	Description
North Pole Report to the National Geographic Society, dated June 28, 1926 - 5 pages	Mitchell, Bumstead, and Avers	Provides statistical data by the National Geographic Society supporting Byrd's claim to have reached the North Pole.
Byrd's Description of North Pole Flight, Lecture by Byrd (date and place unknown) 10 page document	Richard Byrd	Describes his trip to the Pole.
Notes on a Controversy, excerpt from "Explorer: Life of Richard E. Byrd" (book), p. 141 para. 3 through p. 142 para. 1	Lisle A. Rose (first author to publish a full biography about Byrd since 1968)	Author describes a powerful reason Byrd had for being honest about reaching the North Pole.
<i>Public Correspondences: New York Times</i> , 1926	Reporter for the New York Times, coincidentally last name of Bird	Telegram sent to the <i>New York Times</i> at the time of the flight, giving Byrd's departure time.

**Arguments against Byrd reaching the Pole:**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Description</b>
Controversy Arises, excerpt from "Antarctica, My Destiny," by Finn Ronne, pp. 182-183	Captain Finn Ronne	Ronne's conversation with Dr. Isaiah Bowman (Director of the American Geographical Society), in which Bowman told Ronne that Byrd admitted that he didn't reach the North Pole.
2001 Newspaper Article on Byrd Controversy, <i>Baltimore Sun</i> "Byrd Polar Trip a Flight of Fancy?" (5/8/2001)	Bethany Robinson	Evidence that Byrd falsified his log books.

**Other Documents:**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Description</b>
Chart of Byrd's North Pole Flight	Hugh Mitchell, Albert Bumstead, Henry Avers (Officials from National Geographic)	Shows Byrd's flight path over the pole
<i>New York Times</i> funding memo	Andrew H. Salzberger (NY Times employee)	Describes a \$36,500 advance that Byrd received from the NY Times for selling his personal narrative.
Letter from National Geographic Society	Jack (John) La Gorce (Vice President, National Geographic Society)	Provides Byrd with a check for \$25,000 for his expedition "that has no strings attached". Also advised Byrd of the potential problems associated with selling his story to the press.

Letter from George Palmer Putnam, Inc. to Byrd	George T. Bye of George Palmer Putnam, Inc. book publisher	Letter about royalties that Byrd received for selling “preparation pictures” before the flight.
Expedition Flight Times	Michael Brennan (Captain of the Chantier, the ship that was in the North with Byrd)	Letter verifies the time that Byrd’s flight took off and returned .

Letter Describing Relationship with George Palmer Putnam, Inc.	Unknown	Contract for Putnam’s rights to motion pictures, magazine articles, lectures and books.
Byrd’s Expedition Diary, page entitled “Wednesday January 4, 1925”	Quote, “We should be at the Pole now”	Some critics would argue that the “should” proves that Byrd didn’t know if he reached the Pole; supporters argue that navigation in the 1920s was an imprecise science.
Byrd diary 2, page entitled “cash Account December”	Quote, “How long were we gone before we turned around?” – erased but easily readable on the page	Some critics use this quote as evidence that Byrd was “plotting” to be gone long enough to make it look like he went to the Pole; supporters argue that navigation in the 1920s was an imprecise science and that his question was appropriate.
Expedition Contract, with Current News Features	Current News Features, Inc.	Details the terms of Byrd’s agreement with Current News Features

Rockefeller Donation	Raymond B. Fosdick, attorney for John D. Rockefeller, Jr.	Advises Byrd of \$10,000 donation by John D. Rockefeller.
Letter From Byrd to Rockefeller, December 7, 1927	Richard E. Byrd to John D. Rockefeller, Jr.	Describes the help that Rockefeller has given to Byrd over time.