

**EXPLORER: THE LIFE OF RICHARD E. BYRD.** Lisle A. Rose. 2008. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press. xxii + 544 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 978-0-8262-1694-6. US\$34.95. doi:10.1017/S0032247409008596

Some of the most famous polar explorers perished in pursuit of their objectives — Amundsen, Scott, Shackleton — whilst others managed to die at home. Except for perhaps Mawson and Nansen, nobody managed such a long and productive association with polar exploration as Richard E. Byrd, yet his fame on the international stage seems strangely muted given his exploits. Americans are clear about his contribution to their part in the exploration of the Antarctic, and Lisle Rose has clearly decided that the rest of the world needs a full briefing to reacquaint them with Byrd's remarkable achievements.

Byrd came from a Virginian settler family dating back to 1680, and that ethos of the Old South was an important feature of his personality. Concern for honour and reputation were fundamental attributes, and yet he also proved to be deceitful, embroidering tales of his adventures as an adolescent and continuing this throughout his life. Born the puniest of three sons, he determined at an early age that a regimen of physical development was essential to allow him to stand on his own feet. Such single-mindedness and dedication characterised his whole career, as did his youthful enthusiasm for adventure. He was 20 when he joined the US Navy, and if he had not seriously injured himself in gymnastics his career might have proved very different. Unfit for frontline duty in the First World War, he resigned his commission and determined to get into military aviation.

Byrd realised early on that a good political network was essential for him to attain his goals, and he learnt how to work the Washington scene in a way that would be vital to him later. His early friendship with Franklin D. Roosevelt turned out to be extraordinarily valuable, and his wife's money enabled him to join the right clubs. Despite all this, the navy consistently blocked many of his proposals (most of which concerned him making record-breaking flights), and it was not until his success in 1925 with flights in Greenland that his star began to rise. Rose examines the North Pole flight in 1926 with Floyd Bennett in great detail, given the contention raised by Bert Balchen, Finn Ronne, and Dennis Rawlins that the plane never reached the Pole. He concludes that the charges were fabricated for a variety of personal reasons but that Byrd did himself no favours by the way he handled the records of the flight. However, his arrival back, to the first of what would be in time three ticker-tape welcomes in New York, confirmed for both the public and him that he was now a national hero. Rose tellingly remarks: 'Richard seamlessly blended secular piety and spiritualism with the main chance.'

After the triumph of his trans-Atlantic flight, Byrd set his sights on an Antarctic expedition and used his hero status to round up the large amounts of money and goods

necessary. Gathering cash, food, clothing, fuel, and other materials worth an estimated \$1.5 million at the time, he would reward his backers with their names on Antarctic features (Horlick Mountains, Edsel Ford Range, Ruppert Coast, etc). Byrd claimed that nearly 20,000 people volunteered for his first expedition in 1928, but the haste with which he put everything together and his selection techniques nearly scuppered the expedition. What comes through clearly is how different this expedition was from all the previous ones, with its airplanes, regular radio schedule, and long-distance public relations campaign. Byrd also learnt a great deal about managing men, since it is clear he had some persistent troublemakers on this expedition.

Whilst the first expedition coup was the flight to the South Pole, Byrd's second expedition (1933–35) was to feature his lone survival in Advance Base during the Antarctic winter. Most people will probably remember how he nearly died of carbon monoxide poisoning, but few will know of the problems Thomas Poulter faced at Little America as Acting Leader. As on the first expedition, alcohol was a primary cause of discontent and factionalism, and Poulter was an astronomer unused to providing leadership. Despite all of this, Rose shows that both expeditions were a success and materially advanced Antarctic science.

Finally the US government, alarmed by the German claim to *Neue Schwabenland*, decided to support its own Antarctic expedition. Roosevelt appointed Byrd to lead it, but after the first winter both bases were abandoned in 1940, and Byrd returned to active duty in the navy. Despite falling out with President Truman, he managed to get directly involved in the enormous Antarctic exercise 'Operation Highjump,' mounted by the US Navy in 1947 and composed of three task forces of 13 ships and more than 20 aircraft to conduct aerial reconnaissance. A second planned expedition, 'Highjump II,' was killed off by Truman, at least in part because of Byrd's involvement.

Byrd was now over 60 and his health was not good. He became involved in political and philanthropic work until he was asked to help with IGY planning, which allowed him to return to the continent with Admiral Dufek. He died the following year. Rose makes the case that Byrd never lost a man; never became tainted by financial, sexual, or political scandal; and was a hard but fair taskmaster and a consummate fundraiser and publicist for his expeditions.

There have been several other biographies of Byrd, as well as accounts by Byrd himself of the expeditions. Add to those the early accounts by Siple, Owen, and Gould as well as the more recently published diaries of Stuart Paine and Charles Passell, as well as Raimund Goerler's recent book from the Byrd papers. What does this book do that the other ones have not addressed? First, this volume is in a different class. This book has been a long time in the making and it shows. Rose has tried to weave a complete and balanced picture of the man, providing the detailed political background as well as

many new insights into his thoughts and intentions culled from his letters and diaries. Clearly the author is convinced of Byrd's major contribution both in bringing Antarctica to the American public and in providing a major input to several fields of science through his expeditions. He is, however, not blind to Byrd's faults and mistakes and shows clearly that although his original style of leadership was originally very effective, in later life it was regarded as self-promotion at the expense of others. Being an explorer and national hero certainly had its drawbacks.

At 462 pages of text with another 57 pages of notes, this should be considered the definitive work

so far, using many unpublished sources not previously available, including the Byrd papers deposited at Ohio State University and interview material. There are 22 pages of half-tone photographs, all in a single group, printed on matt paper and so appearing rather lifeless. Why they could not have been incorporated in the appropriate places in the text is unclear. The same applies to the seven maps gathered together at the start of the text. The index is extensive and excellent. Considering its length and the efforts by the author, the book is a bargain at this price! (David W.H. Walton, British Antarctic Survey, High Cross, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0ET.)