

Milestone Film & Video presents

The Academy Award® Winning  
**WITH BYRD  
AT THE  
SOUTH POLE**

A Milestone Film Release  
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## Credits

1930. USA and Antarctica. Produced and Distributed by Paramount-Publix Corp. Edited by Emanuel Cohen. Photographed by Willard Van der Veer and Joseph Rucker. Titles by Julian Johnson. Music score by Manny Baer. Narration by Floyd Gibbons. B&W. 82 minutes. Restored from original 35mm material by Milestone Film & Video, Incorporated. © 1992 Milestone.

## Introduction

The 1920s were an age of technology and adventure. The radio became part of daily life. Airplanes became a common sight. The movies became one of America's biggest industries.

Adventurers and explorers became American heroes. While Charles Lindbergh is still remembered for his epic solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927, others were making equally impressive achievements, which captured the public's imagination. Explorers such as Martin and Osa Johnson, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack were visiting the unknown areas of the world, and returning with photographs and motion pictures of areas never seen by civilized man.

The thrills of the risky new technology of aviation and excitement of exploration were combined in the adventures of Commander Richard Byrd.

Byrd was one of the most popular heroes in the age of exploration of the twenties. While he is nearly forgotten today, Richard Byrd nearly beat Lindbergh to Paris (he flew a month later). In 1925, he was the first to fly over the North Pole making international heroes of himself and his pilot, Floyd Bennett. Then in an amazing feat of organization, heroism and courage in 1929 Byrd became the first to fly over the South Pole.

The South Pole flight could be called the first media expedition. It was conducted as much for publicity as for science. A contest was held for a boy Scout to join the Byrd party. Russell Owen, a reporter for *The New York Times*, won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the adventure, published daily on front pages throughout the country. Two Paramount Newsreel cameramen, Willard Van der Veer and Joseph Rucker, captured the entire journey on film and won an Academy Award for the amazing **With Byrd at the South Pole**. *The National Geographic Magazine* published Byrd's account of the adventure, and his book, *Little America*, was a best-seller.

## Richard Evelyn Byrd

The man who orchestrated this public relations bonanza was one of the most fascinating public figures of the twentieth century. Richard Evelyn Byrd came from an aristocratic Virginia family. His brother, Harry, chose politics and became a senator in the 1940s. Richard Byrd joined the Navy, but was forced to retire due to a disability. His North and South Pole expeditions operated without official government support. He raised money from wealthy donors, including Edsel Ford and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and accepted supplies from major companies in return for allowing them to use his name in their advertising.

The official purpose of the South Pole expedition was science, and a team of scientists conducted valuable meteorological experiments, took rock samples, and photographed the surface of the continent from the air.

But the goal of the expedition was glory and adventure.

### Newsreels

Before television and the weekly newsmagazines, most people learned the news from the daily newspapers or the radio. But the biggest impact came from the images in the newsreels.

Newsreels were released twice a week to motion picture theaters, and included stories on national and international stories of interest. Running about ten minutes, a typical newsreel might include stories on movie stars, the President or other national figures, a natural disaster, and a fashion show. During the newsreel's heyday in the 1930s, there were five major newsreel companies, each releasing 100 issues per year. While best remembered for their coverage of disasters, such as the explosion of *The Hindenberg* in 1937, the different newsreel companies competed for exclusives. One of the biggest exclusives was scored by Paramount News by their arrangement with the Byrd expedition for the first flight over the South Pole.

### The First to Reach the South Pole

The North Pole was reached in 1903 by Robert Peary. The South Pole was a much more difficult challenge because of its distance from any other land. In 1911 there were two expeditions attempting to reach the Pole. By his brilliant organization, Roald Amundsen and his party were the first to reach 90° south on December 16, 1911. Only a month and a day later, Robert Falcon Scott's British expedition reached the site and discovered they had lost the race. Scott's party perished on the return trip, and his diary of the expedition and their heroism became familiar to every schoolboy in England. Robert Scott achieved lasting fame not only for his heroic death, but also because (unlike Amundsen) he had commissioned a photographic record of his expedition. Herbert Ponting, a noted photographer of the time, accompanied Scott, taking both still photos and moving pictures. His final version of the film, 90° SOUTH (shown in 1933), is available from Milestone Film and Video.

### The Byrd Expedition

Before leaving on the expedition, Richard Byrd reflected on the role of motion picture for both public relations and for the historical record. "In 1925 when I was flying on explorations, I paid little attention to motion pictures. When I went to the North Pole, I took two good men with me: Willard Van der Veer, who is with me this time, and Donahue, of Pathe." At that time Byrd did not realize the power of film. "They were good men. I didn't exactly neglect them, but I didn't give them much time and attention, and I regret it."

The South Pole expedition would be another matter and the highlights of the trip would be staged for the cameras.

For this expedition, Paramount News chose two of their best. Willard Van der Veer had begun his career as a cameraman filming the intertitles for silent films. Wanderlust overtook him, and he spent part of the teens filming travelogues around the world for Gaumont-British. Later he joined Paramount, and at the time of the expedition was in charge of the Paramount News branch in New York City. Joseph Rucker was head of the newsreel's San Francisco office. They were selected by Emanuel Cohen, the chief of the newsreel division, because of their contrasting personalities and easygoing natures and their experience working independently.

### The Story of the Expedition

Byrd's lead ship, *The City of New York*, left from New York in August 1928 headed for New Zealand, the point of embarkation for the Pole. A whaling ship, the *C.A. Larsen*, was hired by Byrd to act as an ice breaker to allow *The City of New York* to penetrate the icepack to reach the ice-free Ross Sea. The seasons are reversed in the southern hemisphere, and the weather at the South Pole is warmest in December and January.

On Christmas Day, 1928, *The City of New York* reached the Ross Barrier, now known as the Ross Ice Shelf, a floating sheet of ice which is the closest that a ship can get to the South Pole. After scouting inland Byrd decided to locate his camp ten miles in from the bay. They called their new home *Little America*. Byrd planned for a two year expedition. Since the summer is short, he decided to set up a city on the Antarctic Spring. Mindful of Scott's fate, Byrd used some of this time to establish provisions along the flight path, in case his plane was forced down.

A force of forty-two men wintered over at the South Pole for 14 months. They had brought 650 tons of equipment and supplies, dozens of sled dogs, and three airplanes, including a Ford Tri-Motor for the important flight. Like the rest of the expedition, the two cameramen had to bring all of their supplies with them. This included 190,000 feet of negative film, and several cameras.

After setting up camp, including the radio tower that would be their primary contact with the outside world, they hunkered down for the long winter. The sun was last seen on April 18 and did not return until August 20.

On the fourth of July, 1929, the daily radio message from New York gave the temperature as 102, while in Little America was over 70 degrees below zero, a difference of 170 degrees! The coldest day was three weeks later on July 28 when the *high* for the day was 64 below. Two days later, their instruments measured the wind velocity at 75 miles per hour.

Filming in these sub-zero temperatures was a special challenge. Any moisture in the camera mechanism would lock up the camera if brought outside, and fog the lenses when brought inside. While they could develop exposure tests, none of the motion picture footage was developed until the cameramen returned after the expedition.

The problem was not just the cold, but the snow. Cameraman Willard Van der Veer recalled that “our cameras were left outdoors as much as possible to prevent the sweating of the lenses, but it was often very difficult to keep out the snow when it was drifting. Drifting snow has a way of getting into a tight camera case -even though it’s light-proof, it’s not snow-proof, and it’s a very interesting thing to open your camera and find snow in it.”

The expedition included 65 hours of aerial photography and survey flying, since little of the Antarctic had been mapped. Van der Veer acknowledged that “the aerial stuff was of more scientific value than the motion pictures, of course, but the motion picture were a record of how the men worked, what they saw and where they went, and it brought home to the public what the expedition went through.”

Finally, the short Antarctic spring and summer began, along with preparations for the historic flight.

The cameramen were not able to go on the plane. Van der Veer recalled that they “were supposed to draw straws to see who would accompany them to do the photography, but it didn’t work out. They figured that 200 pounds of man was not as valuable as 200 pounds of gasoline. Once again they had to rely on the training of Harold June, along with McKinley, the aerial photographer; every flight was recorded, and not one foot of film was made back in the States after our return. Everything was intact; that was one of the things that our boss, Manny Cohn, insisted on. Everything had to be the real McCoy -and it was.”

The plane took off on November 28, 1929 at 3:29 PM local time for a round trip of over 1,600 miles. Byrd and his crew reached the South Pole at 1:25 AM, November 29. After refueling at a depot that had been previously established near the mountains, the plane returned to Little America at 10:10 AM.

Van der Veer noted that the quality of the photography was outstanding. “The weather was perfect all the way. The big hazard they had was in climbing up over the mountains to the plateau, 10,000 feet above sea level; the plane only had a ceiling of some 12,000 feet, so therefore they were only 2,000 feet above the mountain peaks. They had to throw overboard valuable equipment, 200 pounds of food supplies and they made it. Again came the foresight: the 200 pound of excess baggage that a cameraman would have made, could have spelled disaster.”

Their mission complete, the expedition made plans to depart. *The City of New York* arrived at the Bay of Whales on February 18, 1930 after a dangerous voyage through the ice pack, and departed the next day, headed for home.

The evening of Friday, June 20, 1930 saw the official premier of the motion picture WITH BYRD AT THE SOUTH POLE. The largest hall in Washington, D.C., was the site of the event, which saw President Herbert Hoover present the National Geographic Society Special Gold Medal of Honor to Byrd. Adolph Zukor, president of the Paramount-Publix Corp., was on the platform along with every member of Byrd’s Antarctic crew. Also among the 6000 in attendance were the Vice-President, 31 Senators and 62 Representatives.

The critics were generally kind to the film, although all acknowledged that it would be hard to sell. The Paramount press material recognized this by instructing theater owners not to give their publicity campaign “an unentertaining, unattractive suggestion by using icicles [and] igloos... This will tend to drive away the entertainment seeker, especially the girls and women. Display photos of handsome Admiral Byrd in his natty uniform.”

Completely sidestepping the fact that the film has absolutely no women or love interest, the advertisements used catchlines such as “thrilling romance,” “revealed to women for the first time!” and “no woman ever laid eyes on such scenes.”

Byrd returned to the Antarctic several times, but none of his expeditions captured the public’s imagination the way this one did. During his 1934-35 trip, he spent the winter in an isolated cabin, and nearly succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. This was recounted in his best-selling book, *Alone*. During World War II, Byrd returned to active duty with the navy’s Bureau of Aeronautics, but saw no action. With all his adventures, Byrd nevertheless died at home after a long period of ill health, on March 11, 1957.

There have been over the last few years, questions regarding Byrd’s achievements (even his claims of reaching the North Pole in 1927) and character. For the best look at Byrd’s career, Eugene Rodgers’ *BEYOND THE BARRIER* offers a fascinating look at a very complex man.

### Members of the Crew

Bernt Balchen (aviation pilot). Twenty-eight years old at the time of the expedition, Balchen was the son of a surgeon. His uncle had crossed the Greenland ice cap, and a cousin was the pilot who died with Amundsen on a rescue attempt of Nobile. Chosen by Byrd as the pilot to the South Pole, Balchen was a flight lieutenant in the Royal Norwegian Naval Air Force and later was a captain in the U.S. Army Air Corps reserves. He later returned to Antarctica as the chief pilot for the Ellsworth-Wilkins expedition and served as Amelia Earhart’s technical advisor for the first solo transatlantic flight by a woman. He also helped establish and later became the president of Norwegian Airlines, the parent company of Scandinavian Airlines. He died of bone cancer on October 17, 1973.

Dr. Lawrence M. Gould (Geologist & geographer, second in command). Known for his leadership and brilliant mind (a Phi Beta Kapa graduate from the University of Michigan), Gould became executive officer of the expedition at the age of thirty-two. His geographical and geological explorations during the expedition were among the most valuable scientific contributions of the expedition. Afterward, Gould joined the faculty of Carleton College and was elected its president after WWII. His accomplishments were extensive and for his character he remained a popular figure in the academic and scientific communities.

Harold I. June (aviation pilot). A chief engineer for Harold Vanderbilt’s yachts, June entered WWI as a navy pilot. He was thirty-three years old at the time of the mission. With Byrd’s second Antarctic expedition, he became Byrd’s chief pilot. He later represented United Aircraft Corporation and worked with the helicopter manufacturer, Kaman Corporation. He died in 1962.

Russell Owen (*New York Times* reporter). Owen first rose to journalistic prominence when he was attached to Amundsen's Spitsbergen expedition to the North Pole. Although not a well-liked member of the crew, his reports back to America gained all of them fame as did the two books he authored after their return. He died of a heart attack at the age of sixty-three in 1952.

Paul A. Siple (Boy Scout). A possessor of fifty-six merit badges, Siple had won a contest to Antarctica with the Byrd Expedition. Extremely popular with the press he was seen as the epitome of brave youth. To the crew, however, he was a very talented, twenty year old who proved to be a great contribution to the expedition. Siple went on to earn his Ph.D. in geography and returned to Antarctica six times — spending more time there than any other man on earth. He also went on to develop the concept of the windchill factor and invented the equation on which the table is still based today. Siple died of a heart attack at the young age of fifty-nine.

Igloo. A smooth-coated white fox terrier with black ears, Igloo was Richard Byrd's constant companion. One time Byrd got drunk during the expedition, he begged his companions, "Don't tell Simon about this. Don't tell Owen. And above all, don't tell Igloo." A darling of the media, Igloo was honored with a biography published by Putnam on his return. His death several years later caused national mourning and *Literary Digest* wrote a two-page obituary.

Little America. Located in the Bay of Whales and chosen (and named by Byrd) as the campsite for the expedition, Byrd and Siple returned to one of the most famous spots on earth in 1955. By then, it was almost buried in snow — its sixty-five-foot-tall radio towers barely rising out of the ground. Late in 1987, the entire Bay of Whales section broke loose from Antarctica and floated off. Today, Little America lies somewhere at the bottom of the Southern Ocean.

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## Milestone Film & Video

*"Since its birth 10 years ago, the Milestone Film and Video Co. has steadily become the industry's foremost boutique distributor of classic and art films — and probably the only distributor in America whose name is actually a guarantee of some quality."* — William Arnold, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

Milestone is a boutique distribution company with over ten years experience in art-house film distribution. The company has earned an unparalleled reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American

independent features. Thanks to Milestone's rediscovery, restoration and release of such important lost films as Mikhail Kalatozov's award-winning *I am Cuba*, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*, and F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, the company now occupies an honored position as one of the most influential independent distributors in the American film industry. In 1999, the *L.A. Weekly* chose Milestone as "Indie Distributor of the Year."

Amy Heller and Dennis Doros started Milestone in 1990 to bring out the best films of yesterday *and* today. The company has released such remarkable new films as Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East*, Luc Besson's *Atlantis*, Yoichi Higashi's *Village of Dreams*, Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi*, the films of famed artist Eleanor Antin, the art documentaries of Philip Haas (director of *Music of Chance* and *Angels and Insects*), Edoardo Winspeare's *Pizzicata*, and Takeshi Kitano's *Fireworks (Hana-Bi)*.

Milestone's re-releases have included restored versions of Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass and Chang*, Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*, and Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Woman in the Dunes* and *Antonio Gaudi*. Milestone is also working with the Mary Pickford Foundation on a long-term project to preserve, re-score and release the best films of the legendary silent screen star. In 1999, Milestone released restored versions of Roy and John Boulting's anti-Nazi drama *Pastor Hall* (1940), Roland West's *The Bat Whispers* (1930), Frank Hurley's *South: Ernest Shackleton and the Endurance Expedition*, and Kevin Brownlow's feature films, *It Happened Here* (1964) and *Winstanley* (1975).

Milestone is also known for rediscovering, acquiring, restoring and distributing unknown "classics" that have *never* been available in the US and Canada. These include Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*, Alfred Hitchcock's "lost" WWII propaganda films, *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, *Early Russian Cinema* (a series of twenty-eight films from Czarist Russia from 1908–1919), *I am Cuba* and Jane Campion's *Two Friends*.

Milestone celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2000 with the release of two great "lost" classics: Michael Powell's *The Edge of the World* (1937), a Martin Scorsese presentation, and a stunning restoration of Rolando Klein's Mexican classic, *Chac* (1976). The Milestone 10th Anniversary Tour is yet another project the company has scheduled for 2000–2001. This nationwide tour of Milestone's most famous releases premiered at the Film Society of Lincoln Center in New York in August. All revenues earned by Milestone from retrospective screenings will be donated to four major archives in the United States and England to help restore films that might otherwise be lost.

Scheduled so far for 2001, besides Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Wide Blue Road*, is the beautifully restored and tinted Lotte Reiniger's *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, the first ever animated feature. This next year, 2002, promises to be an extremely exciting release schedule including two feature films by famed director Charles Burnett: *Killer of Sheep* and *My Brother's Wedding* and three of his short films, *The Horse*, *Several Friends* and *When It Rains*. Also in the pipeline is another feature by the team that created *I am Cuba*: Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Letter Never Sent*.

On video over the next year, Milestone will be releasing an important series of great silent films restored by the world's premiere film historians and preservationists, Photoplay Productions of London. These stunning restorations by the team of Kevin Brownlow,

Patrick Stanbury and the late David Gill, have never before been available on video in the United States. They include the horror classic, *The Phantom of the Opera*; the first authorized release of F.W. Murnau's great vampire film, *Nosferatu*; woman film pioneer Lois Weber's magnificent *The Blot*, André Antoine's early "neo-realist" adaptation of Emile Zola's *La Terre*; the beautiful and hilarious Clara Bow in *It*; and an astonishing historical epic of Polish independence by Raymond Bernard, *The Chess Player*.

Milestone will also be premiering on video two amazing "lost" comedies — Buster Keaton and Fatty Arbuckle's *The Cook* along with Arbuckle's *A Reckless Romeo*. Milestone is also proud to announce the release of *Marching to A Different Toon*, a collection of animated films by John Canemaker, whose artistry (along with his erudition as a historian of animation) has earned him fans and friends worldwide. And continuing its animation series, Milestone will also release *Cut-Up: The films of Grant Munro* — a collection of films done at the National Film Board of Canada that will showcase Munro, one of the renowned animators (and documentarians) from that famed organization.

Milestone received a Special Archival Award in 1995 from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I am Cuba*. Seven of its preserved films — Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, *Tabu*, Edward S. Curtis' *In the Land of the War Canoes*, Mary Pickford's *Poor Little Rich Girl*, Clarence Brown and Maurice Tourneur's *The Last of the Mohicans*, Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* and *Grass* — are listed on the Library of Congress's National Film Registry.

Cindi Rowell joined the company in 1999 and is head of acquisitions.

*"Milestone Film and Video [is] an art-film distributor that has released some of the most distinguished new movies (along with seldom-seen vintage movie classics) of the past decade."*  
— Stephen Holden, *New York Times*

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