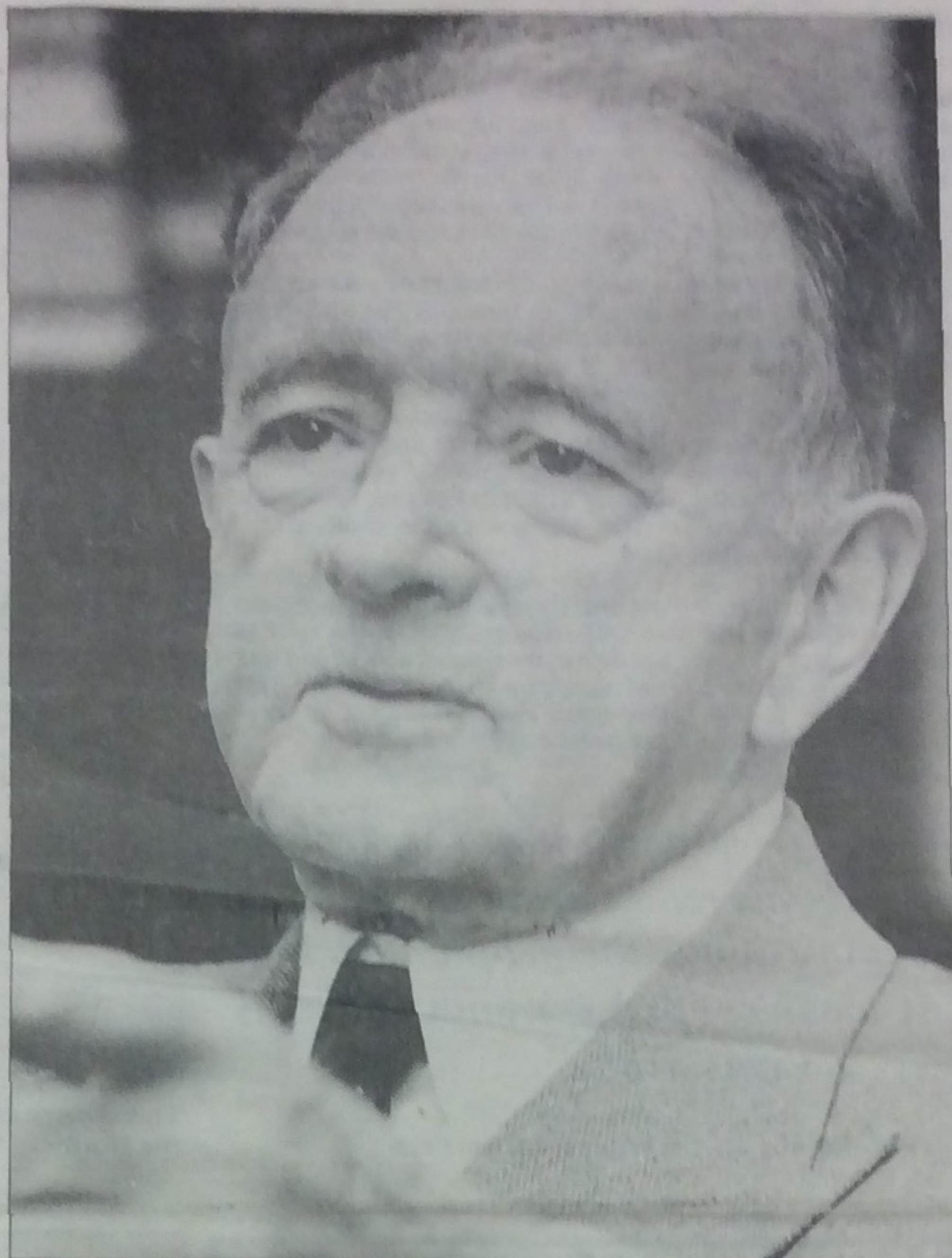


"It is very, very doubtful whether any other family has produced more statesmen from the beginning of our history to the present day."

Lyndon B. Johnson
speaking during a 1961 ceremony to dedicate the
Richard E. Byrd Jr. memorial



AP file photos

Far left, Admiral Richard E. Byrd Jr. was the first to fly over the North Pole. Left, Harry F. Byrd Sr. was Virginia's youngest governor since Thomas Jefferson and went on to create a political powerhouse.

THE BYRD LEGACY

While Harry Byrd Sr. took on politics, Richard Byrd took on the North Pole

By Elizabeth Libby

Harry F. Byrd Jr. stood before the big box microphone in the front parlor of the Executive Mansion in Richmond, next to his father, Virginia's youngest governor since Thomas Jefferson.

The father and son listened as Richard Evelyn Byrd Jr.'s voice crackled over the microphone as he recounted his recent flight to the North Pole, an adventure that days before had made him the world's newest hero.

4 This Century

While the younger Byrd could barely make out the details through the static, he knew the story better than most. In a family of achievers, Byrd's historic 1926 flight was the latest in a long line of successes.

At age 14, with his political giant of a father standing next to him, and his courageous uncle connected continents away, Harry Byrd Jr. beamed full of pride. At that moment, two brothers from a rural Virginia community stood on top

of the world. They would leave marks that easily make them among the most celebrated natives of the Northern Shenandoah Valley in the 20th century.

At a 1961 ceremony to dedicate a memorial to Richard Byrd, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson paid tribute to the entire family when he said that even before Byrd explored Antarctica, "the Byrds of Virginia had been serving this land we love. It is very, very doubtful whether any other family has produced more statesmen from the beginning of our history to the present day."

Strong parental influence

Harry Flood Byrd Sr. and Richard Evelyn Byrd Jr. were born a year apart to Richard Evelyn Byrd Sr. and the former Eleanor Bolling Flood of Winchester. Thomas followed three years after his oldest brother, in 1890.

The boys traced their paternal ancestry to William the Conqueror and to William Byrd, founder of Richmond. Their mother could trace her lineage to Pocahontas. Her younger brother, Henry D. Flood, for whom Harry was named, was a U.S. congressman who had a great impact on his namesake.

The three Byrd brothers grew up on Amherst Street in Winchester. Their father was a lawyer who served as com-

monwealth's attorney and would later become speaker of the House of Delegates. Harry grew up closest to his father, developing the same interest in politics and business. Richard, called Dick, was named for his father but sought adventure in a more physical and, many times, dangerous form.

Ronald L. Heinemann, author of "Harry Byrd of Virginia," said that while the parents imparted values of responsibility, discipline and independence in their sons, "the times might have had something to do" with their success as much as anything.

"They were fortunate that opportunities were available" and had the personalities to take advantage of those moments, Heinemann said.

It didn't take long for the boys to develop self-discipline and independence. At 15, Harry persuaded his father to allow him to leave school and take over the family's struggling newspaper. Richard, at just 12, talked reluctant parents into letting him travel by himself around the world.

"Dick"

While Harry enjoyed most of his success in Virginia, Richard's celebrity rivaled that of contemporaries Babe Ruth and Charles Lindbergh.

While Richard is best known for becoming the first man to fly over the North Pole, accompanied by pilot Floyd Bennett, his adventurous spirit and dedication to Arctic exploration resulted in many geographic discoveries and scientific breakthroughs.

Harry Byrd Jr. remembers his grandmother often telling him that she recognized Richard "was quite different from most people," picking up on his adventurous spirit early in life.

After stints at Virginia Military Institute and the University of Virginia, Richard Byrd entered the Naval Academy, where he twice injured his right foot in athletic competitions. After breaking it a third time in an accident aboard a ship, he was unable to fulfill his duty at sea and was forced to retire in 1916.

But World War I ended Byrd's retirement within months. Then married to his childhood sweetheart, Byrd was assigned to desk jobs until he sought a transfer to flight school in 1917. He earned his pilot's wings while also being responsible for investigating the nearly daily crashes at Pensacola Air Station. The experience helped Byrd become an expert in the growing field of aviation.

Byrd took a particular interest in night

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