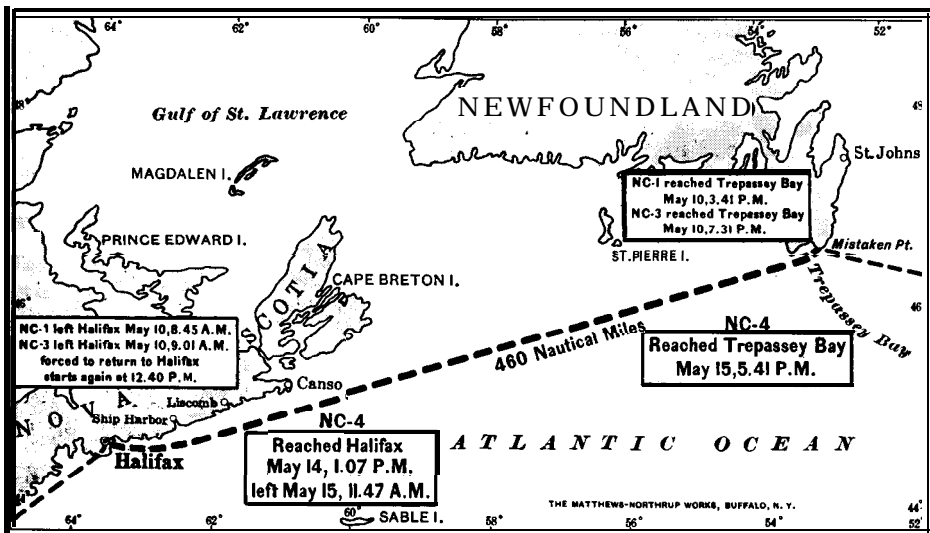


## THE FIRST FLIGHT ACROSS THE ATLANTIC



**R**EAD's "shakedown" had turned into a breakdown. Headlines announced the incident which, when added to the NC-4's past misfortune, gave rise to her new name: the "Lame Duck."

Within two days one bad engine was replaced, the other repaired. But once again the elements were against them; a gale set in and a 40-knot northeaster held them in the Chatham hangar till the 13th. Public indignation was aroused. A lot of taxpayers'

money was supporting a vast fleet of station ships waiting idly at sea. Read was frustrated, but during this period he received some encouragement from the northern weather dispatches. Conditions on the Newfoundland-Azores route were so bad that the NC-1 and NC-3 weren't going anywhere, either.

When the NC-4 had been lost to sight and its distress call intercepted, Towers assumed it would either land by the *McDermut* for repairs or return to Chatham, so he kept on. During the afternoon, he and Byrd kept busy in

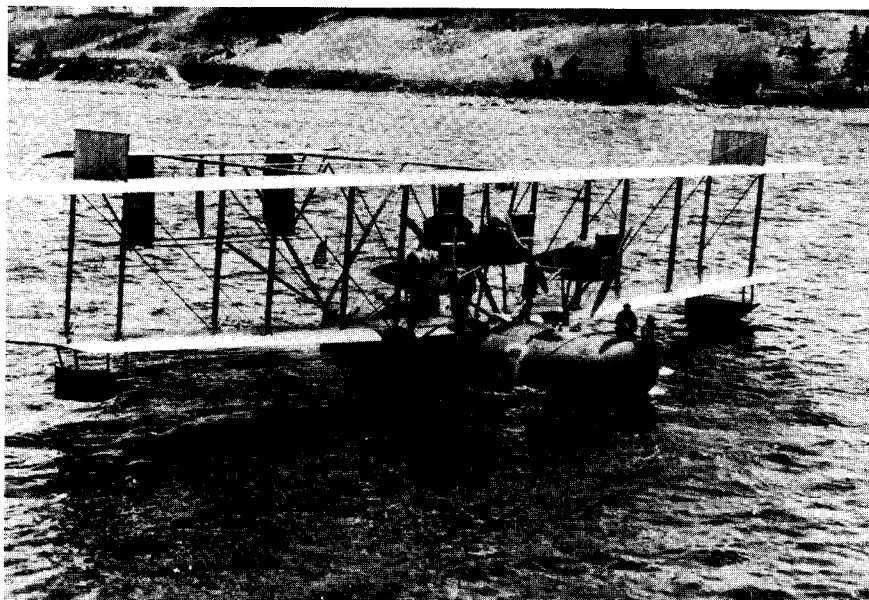
the NC-3's cramped forward compartment, trying out the sextant, dropping smoke bombs and making calculations with the drift indicator.

During the trip north, both planes were in and out of squalls. Hot and cold air rushing over headlands toward the sea combined to form a vicious mixture. The strain of handling the big boats was taking its toll on the pilots, especially Dick Richardson who was over 40 years of age. Buffeted by gusty winds, the *Nancy's* pitched and yawed, and it took the constant efforts of the pilots to remain on course.

The final three hours were the most severe but, upon arrival over Halifax, they were rewarded with a wondrous view. A beautiful rainbow extended from a hilltop to the clouds 6,000 feet above. Beyond the brilliant band, a rich red sunset tinted the fading colors of the rolling landscape with a crimson glow. Cheering crowds and factory whistles added to the glamor as the NC's taxied to their moorings.

Upon arriving in the Canadian port, Towers was disturbed to hear of the apparent loss of the NC-4, but he knew the sea conditions had been good and had no fear for the safety of Read and his crew. Hence the news of their "rescue" the next morning came

**NAVY CREWS** waited in Newfoundland for suitable weather as newsmen gather (below) to report their activities. Some reporters lived in remodeled railroad car (right). Had conditions improved sooner, either at the Azores or over the north Atlantic route to Ireland, U.S. or British teams would have been on their way and the delayed "Lame Duck," NC-4, might have lost its chance to be first across Atlantic.



as no surprise, and he set about repairing minor damage to his own plane. Cracked propellers were a problem, but with the help of wartime friends of Byrd, exchanges were achieved. On the 10th of May they were off again.

Still the air was rough and now quite cold. To his annoyance, Richardson aboard the NC-3 found his arms muscle-bound from the exertions of two days before, and he was slow in his reaction on controls. His copilot, McCulloch, assumed the load until he had the kinks worked out.

Following the line of station ships, the NC-3 passed Placentia Bay and the men sighted their first icebergs. From 3,000 feet, Richardson noted they had the appearance of majestic steamships, but that their intense whiteness gave betrayal. "Around each berg," he later wrote, "the water was illuminated by reflected light from submerged portions, presenting a particularly arresting appearance — like that of the sun shining through the back of high breakers running in on the beach." Dick Richardson always enjoyed things like that.

As they approached Trepassey Bay, a gradual descent was made. The air was gusty and the shocks were more violent as they neared the surface and

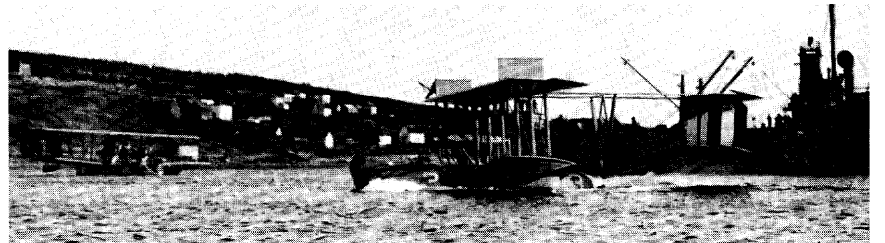
came closer to the barren land. Strong swells were rolling as they touched water near Powell's Point. To get within the bay, Richardson kept the NC-3 skimming at high planing speed — careening, bouncing, slipping through "an avalanche of wind which rushed across the harbor from the bluffs." With goggles fogged by salty spatter, he couldn't see the water clearly and consequently mistook the spraying wake of a speeding boat, which raced beyond in welcome, for an iceberg. He had visions of floes all around him and "would not have been surprised had one come crashing through the hull at any moment." Bellinger experienced the same conditions. By evening both NC's were safely tied up near the base ship, USS *Aroostook*. It had been an interesting day.

**D**REARY, windswept Trepassey Bay hadn't seen so much activity since the times when sinister ships made use of the harbor's haven. To the British teams, 60 miles across the hills, over at St. John's, it might well have seemed that pirates were again abroad in those waters — with Lord Northcliffe's prize

at stake. The members of the press enjoyed the situation. North Atlantic weather was still delaying an English start so, once the reporters realized the Americans meant business, they forsook their favorites, Hawker and Grieve, and moved their camp from the comfortable surroundings of the Cochrane Hotel in St. John's to the windy, forlorn wastes of Trepassey.

Not that it was all that bad. They acquired a railroad dining car, outfitting it with a stove, table, cots and a cook. This they had hauled down to Trepassey as living quarters. On its side they painted the name, *NANCY-5*.

The *Aroostook* was the mother ship of Seaplane Division One. Since each NC crew member was limited to five pounds of personal luggage, the *Aroostook*, carrying all their clothes and extra articles, would follow them to Plymouth. Towers and Richardson, being the senior officers, were assigned the ship's pilot house as sleeping quarters. It had even been fitted out with two brass beds. Towers noted that since the room was mostly glass-sided, they had the privacy of the proverbial goldfish bowl. Nevertheless, while waiting for the Atlantic weather to clear up, they had a comfortable time of it.



**HEAVILY** loaded NC-3 taxis around base ship at Trepassey. The *Aroostook* provided quarters and servicing for NC's, later joined the crews at Plymouth. At left, McCulloch, Bellinger, Towers and Richardson are shown making the various, necessary checks on the weather, so essential to the ocean flight.