Canadian Flying Tales

Two Stories of Vintage Canadian Aviation History

by Herb Kugel

All photographs are from the National Archives of Canada and courtesy of the author.

Captain John Alcock and Lieutenant Arthur Brown. On 14 June 1919, flying a Vickers Vimy biplane, the pair departed Lester's Field, St. Johns for an ultimate crash landing in Ireland. This flight eclipsed the one being readied at the Harbour Grace airstrip.

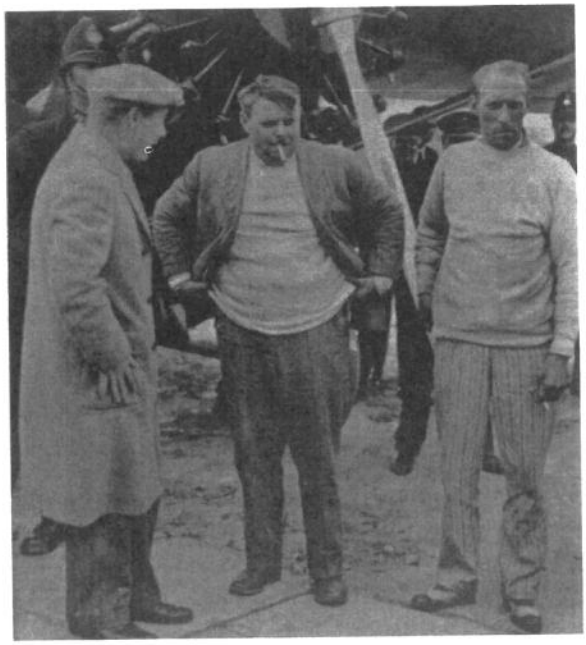
Part One

The Harbour Grace Airstrip- The World's First Transatlantic Airfield

When aviation enthusiasts and historians think of Newfoundland, the modern Gander Airport comes to mind, but Gander was not Newfoundland's first airfield. Before the Gander Airport, the little airstrip at Harbour Grace – a small town located on the west side of Conception Bay and some 29 miles (46.7 kilometers) from St. Johns, Newfoundland. Here was the starting point for adventure, danger, excitement and tragedy during the era of the 'seat of the pants' daredevil pilots of the 1920s and 1930s. The airstrip was the point of embarkation for transatlantic flights at a time when airplanes, engines, and navigational equipment were almost ridiculously unreliable when viewed from any measurable standard of safety today. Seat of the pants flying meant relying on physical feelings, sight, and reactions rather than the inadequate instruments. For example, it a plane began to dive, the seat of the pants tended to lift off the cockpit seat and this movement would warn the pilot. Unfortunately, these senses could be misleading and one mistake was often fatal. Pilots who flew too long in the clouds became disoriented and could suddenly feel they were banking when they were not; they could overcorrect and go into a fatal spin. Of the twenty transoceanic flights attempted from the Harbour Grace Airport, only eleven succeeded. Two flights were aborted,, two crashed on take-off and one crash-landed off the coast of Ireland. Four planes simply disappeared after takeoff.

The airstrip's story began on 10 May 1919, when the Furness Withy Royal Mail steamer Digby arrived at St. Johns. The ship carried 105 crates, each containing parts of a disassembled airplane. It was the Handley Page V/1500 Atlantic, a mammoth 24,700-pound (9,219 kilograms) four-engine biplane with a wingspan of 126 feet (38.4 meters). Each wing's chord was about 12 feet (3.7 meters). Admiral Sir Mark Kerr commanded the Atlantic. The crates were immediately shipped by rail to Harbour Grace, where the plane was assembled. Getting the crates from the train to the airstrip was no easy task because the field was located about a quarter mile (.4 kilometers) from the train station and some of the crates were said to be large enough to be houses. Attaching the huge wheels of the plane to the crates and then wheeling the crates to the field solved the problem.

Lord Northcliffe's London Daily Mail had offered a prize of ten thousand pounds to the crew of the first plane to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Four groups went after the prize and since Newfoundland was closer to Europe than any other part of North America, all four groups came to Newfoundland. Three of the groups chose the St. Johns area. The Harbour Grace townspeople naturally wanted the Atlantic to win hoping this would help establish the town's importance. They even removed small buildings and barns bordering the airstrip to allow for a safer takeoff. Their work, however, was in vain. The Atlantic's attempt was preempted on 14 June 1919, when two British officers, John Alcock



Above, Left: Seen at Croydon, London after their successful Transatlantic crossing are pilot William Brock (center) and Waco Oil Company President Edward Schlee (right). The hop was part of a planned around-the-world flight that unfortunately was terminated in Japan.
Above, Right: The airstrip outside the town of Harbour Grace, Newfoundland. The aircraft is the Stinson Detroiter "Pride of Detroit" piloted by Brock and Schlee.

and Arthur Brown, flying from Lester's Field, St. Johns, crossed the Atlantic in sixteen hours and twenty-seven minutes and promptly claimed the prize money.

The field languished and was not used again until 1927, at which time air history had changed. Daredevil pilots became an exciting part of the Harbour Grace landscape upon Fred Koehler's arrival in Newfoundland. Koehler, traveling on behalf of the Waco Oil Company of Detroit, was scouting for an appropriate location for the launching of an around-the-world flight publicizing Waco. During his search, he met Harbour Grace resident John L. Oke, who convinced him of the benefits of Harbour Grace and the wheels quickly started to spin. On 25 July 1927, a public meeting was held in the Town Hall and a committee of twenty-one members founded the "Harbour Grace Airport Trust Company." Each member contributed money based on a non-profit sharing arrangement. Koehler also contributed money on behalf of Waco. In addition, the Government of Newfoundland contributed a grant and technical advice.

The site selected was a long level plateau to the northwest of the town. Running east and west, the strip was parallel to the harbor on the south and Lady Lake on the north. The surroundings were free of obstructions with the exception of a low bluff on the east end, which proved to be an excellent landmark to flyers unfamiliar with the field. Two-thirds of the field was completely level, but one-third of the field – on the east end – had a 4-degree decline, which actually proved helpful to planes taking off with heavy loads. The field measured approximately 4,000 feet in length by 200 feet in width (1,220 meters by 61 meters). It was popular with the local residents from the beginning, All of the clearing was accomplished by townspeople who used horses and carts to haul away rocks and debris and then employed shovels and rakes to finish the smooth gravel strip. The field was completed on 26 August 1927,exactly a month and a day after the initial meeting with Koehler. It was completed hours before its first use. At 4:16pm on that date, the Waco Oil Company's bright yellow Stinson 'Detroiter' – aptly named The Pride of Detroit – landed. The landing was a celebration but was to be followed first by disappointment then, as more pilots came to Harbour Grace, by tragedy and finally success.

Edward Schlee, the President of the Waco Oil Company, and his pilot, William S. Brock, took off from Old Orchard, Maine at 4:25am Eastern Standard Time, as part of their round-the-world flight. On landing at Harbour Grace they were greeted by a large crowd, including Colonial Secretary John R. Bennett, who welcomed them on behalf of the Government of Newfoundland. The two airmen did not stay long. They warmed up their aircraft at 7:43am the next morning and were off the ground within minutes, passing over the harbor at an altitude of between four and five hundred feet. They landed at Croydon, England 32 hours and 21 minutes later. This was the first stop of their flight. They were supposed to return to Harbour Grace, coming in from the west some 240 flying hours later, but it was never completed. When they reached Tokyo, they discovered a slight engine malfunction and had to abandon the flight. Because of this malfunction, it was deemed too dangerous to attempt to fly across the Pacific from Tokyo to Midway Island. The flight's

failure was a disappointment to many Harbour Grace residents who hoped the flight would earn the town worldwide prominence.

The first attempt by Canadian pilots to fly across the Atlantic Ocean from Harbour Grace – on 6 September 1927 – ended in tragedy. Canada's Carling Brewery Company sponsored the flight of their own Stinson Detroiter, the Sir John Carling. After some thirty pilots were interviewed, Captain Terrence Tully and Lieutenant James Medcalf were selected to make the attempt. The Sir John Carling arrived at Harbour Grace on 5 September 1927, however the rudder and tailskid were damaged as the plane landed at an unusually high speed. While the plane was being refueled, fire broke out near it when gasoline escaped from a cask. Perhaps these were omens. The pilots also received the news that the American plane, Old Glory, which was attempting a transatlantic flight, had crashed into the sea.

Also flying a Stinson Detroiter, this time christened "Sir John Carling" after the brewing company, are pilots Terrence B. Tully (left) and Lieutenant James V. Metcalf. The cause of their disappearance has never been determined.

Tully and Medcalf were undaunted and went ahead with their flight. They were attempting to fly from London, Ontario to London, England, via Caribou, Maine and Harbour Grace, Newfoundland. The flight was a major occurrence. Canada's first airmail stamp at twenty-five cents was issued in honor of the event. As the people of Harbour Grace watched, the Sir John Carling took off at 9:54am the next morning. However, the weather wasn't very promising and a weather ship out in the Atlantic reported violent thunderstorms. The people at Harbour Grace watched as the Stinson flew eastward and disappeared from sight. It was never seen again.

The Sir John Carling and the Old Glory were not the only planes to crash within days of each other. The British-built St. Raphael was lost as well while trying to fly the Atlantic. The loss of lives in the three concurrent crashes caused public opinion to demand no more flights be undertaken. Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, threatened to legislate the prohibition of flights across the Atlantic leaving from Canada. But, since Newfoundland was not actually part of Canada, the Harbour Grace airstrip continued to be used regularly as a transatlantic take-off point until 29 October 1936.

Two additional flights were particularly interesting from a historical perspective. The first flight was especially significant but never received the fame it justly deserved. On 9 October 1930, two Canadians – Captain Erroll Boyd of the Royal Air Force, acting as the pilot, and Lieutenant Harry P. Connor of the U.S. Naval Reserve, acting as navigator – attempted something never tried before. At the time, flying the Atlantic was something hazardous under the best weather conditions. Attempting the Atlantic in the autumn or winter was indeed the most dangerous. Flying a five year-old Bellanca monoplane – originally christened Columbia but now named -The Maple Leaf - Boyd wanted to try to be the first pilot to fly across the Atlantic outside of the more benign spring and summer seasons. He would fly the Atlantic at a time when the days were shorter and the weather often took sudden changes. The Ontario-born pilot would also become the first Canadian to fly the Atlantic.

Carrying some 300 letters, the first airmail to leave Canada, his heavily loaded plane struggled into the air at 12:50pm, after lumbering the entire length of the airstrip. The flight was harrowing. The two flyers fought heavy winds and rain squalls and flew blind for considerable periods. However, they succeeded. Boyd and Connor's flight ended at 11:38am the next morning when a faulty gas tank forced a landing at Tresco, in the Scilly Islands. This was actually some 300 miles (483 kilometers) short of their Croydon destination, but they had reached England.

Boyd was forced to land at high tide, landing on a sloping beach between two streams, stopping only a few inches from the water's edge and only about 200 feet (61 meters) from where the landing gear first touched the soft sand. Boyd described this beach as the "narrowest landing place I had ever attempted." He went on to say that "the tide was full and we had less than fifty yards [45.7 meters] between the water and the rocks." He went on to describe his feelings, "There were moments when Connor and I wondered whether we would ever have the privilege of shaking hands with anybody in this world, but we cheated death and defeated the

Amelia Earhart

Atlantic and ... are thanking fortune that we are alive."

On 20 May 1932, there was more excitement in Harbour Grace. Amelia Earhart, holding the title of the first woman to fly in Newfoundland, was preparing to fly from Harbour Grace in an attempt to complete the first solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean by a woman. Earhart waved goodbye to cheering crowds and took off at 7:20pm. Since she drank neither coffee nor tea, she carried a can of tomato juice and a thermos of soup. She had smelling salts to help keep her awake. It too was a harrowing flight. The plane's exhaust manifold broke when she was only four hours out of Newfoundland. For the next ten hours her aircraft was constantly threatened by flames from the exhaust. Then her altimeter broke, she had to fly blind for several hours and if that were not enough, she had to fight her way through a severe rain and lightening storm. She made it. Earhart, flying a red and gold single-engine modified Lockheed Vega flew 2,026 miles (3,261 kilometers) and landed slightly off course. She landed in a field at Culmore, Northern Ireland after her perilous flight of 14 hours and 54 minutes. As she climbed from her plane, a man approached her. The dialogue was priceless:

"Where am I?"

"In Galleghar's pasture....have you come far?"

"From America."

Earhart's flight set other records. She was the only person to have flown the Atlantic twice. She set records for flying the longest non-stop distance by a woman and crossing the Atlantic in the shortest time.

The last of the daredevils to use the Harbour Grace airstrip – on 29 October1936 – was James Mollison. He flew an orange and green Bellanca, the Miss Dorothy – named after Dorothy Ward, his latest girlfriend. Mollison barely escaped death when, the day prior, he landed at Harbour Grace on only one wheel. By brilliant piloting, he managed to bring the plane to a stop about halfway up the runway. The plane was then carefully secured and filled with 610 gallons (2308 liters) of gasoline. It took to the air next day at 5:10pm. The Bellanca's 750 horsepower Pratt and Whitney engine gave the plane an average speed of' 160 miles per hour (257.5 kilometers per hour).

Mollison reached Croydon in 13 hours and 18 minutes, landing at 6:28am Newfoundland Standard Time on the 30th of October. There were only a few people on hand to greet the exhausted pilot. Mollison's first words when he was lifted from the plane were, "I'm so damned tired. I'm going to have a large scotch and soda." Sadly, the pubs did not open until 11:00am so Mollison had to settle for a glass of ginger beer. He had shattered all the eastbound speed records and became the first man to fly directly to London without a forced landing along the way.

The age of the flying daredevils was over but the Harbour Grace airstrip was – and still is – far from dead. During World War Two, the Royal Canadian Navy built and ran a high-frequency direction-finding station on the airstrip, which is still maintained. Transport Canada officials have inspected the field and have certified it on their flight maps and in their publication Canadian Flight Supplement as suitable for use by small aircraft. Its official international identifier is CHG2. The daredevil's strip still welcomes the recreational flyer.•

Part Two

Erroll Boyd
Canada's Lindy

On the afternoon of 9 October 1930, at the Harbour Grace Airstrip in Newfoundland, pilot Erroll Boyd readied for take-off. He gunned the motor of his Bellanca monoplane, the Maple Leaf, but the plane didn't budge. Its tailskid had sunk into the rocky runway because of the weight of the 460 gallons of fuel and 27 gallons of oil it was carrying. This fuel was planned to give the plane thirty-five hours of flying time; it was more than half of the plane's gross weight of 5,200 pounds. The plane's radio had been removed. It weighed eighty pounds and represented thirteen gallons of fuel or one hour of critical flying time. The tailskid, acting as a brake, was not a propitious beginning to what was hoped to be the first nonstop flight over the North Atlantic in the treacherous autumn weather. Boyd throttled back, got out of the plane, and instructed onlookers on how to push. At 16:18 Z-Time (GMT), with a light easterly wind at its tail, the plane, struggled into the air. It was a hard takeoff because the tailskid continued to drag. Lifting a heavily loaded plane airborne from a rocky runway of about 3,000 feet in length required a great deal of piloting skill, but that was something Erroll Boyd possessed. With the assistance of his American-born navigator Harry Connor, Boyd's flight plan called for a trip from Newfoundland to thirty-five degrees west longitude, then for a great circle flight to Swansea, Wales, then over Bristol and finally landing near London at Croydon.

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Boyd was not new to danger. In 1915, after World War One started, the Toronto-born twenty-four year old had traveled to England, at his family's expense, to join the Royal Flying Corps, but he failed the physical examination because he was color-blind. Undeterred, he succeeded in joining the newly organized Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), which had been just formed by Winston Churchill, who was then First Lord of the Admiralty.

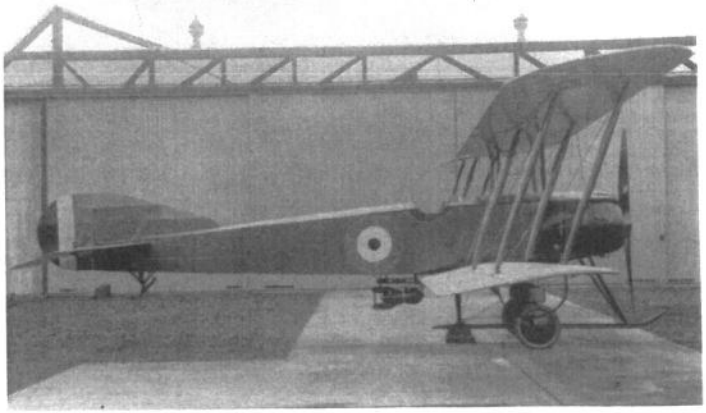
Boyd began his flight training under John Alcock, who was later knighted. Boyd's first solo flight was in a Short Brothers pusher biplane. (The Short brothers formed the first British aircraft company). After completing 'flying school,' Boyd was issued license number 1358 by the Royal Aero Club. It was a pilot's license valid throughout the British Empire.

Boyd's first combat assignment was as a night pilot with orders to destroy German Zeppelins, which were bombing London. It was a dangerous assignment and Boyd later wrote: "Night flying was...a matter of getting into the air between biscuit tins filled with salt and petrol used for flares along the field, and arrive safely back at the airport without breaking your neck."

Boyd was to fly a Blackburn B.E.2C on his first Zeppelin attack. A fifty-horsepower Gnome motor powered the

Captain Erroll Boyd.

B.E.2C; it carried no guns. It had only four twenty-pound bombs strapped to its undercarriage. However, while taking off, Boyd was hurled from his plane when its landing gear struck a fresh bomb crater, which had just been caused by a bomb dropped on the runway from the very Zeppelin Boyd was taking off to attack. (The Zeppelin homed in on the base searchlight seeking it.) Boyd was hurled into thick mud so no bones were broken; luckily the bombs on his plane did not explode or he would have been blown to bits. Dazed, he thought he was through for the evening but he heard orders barked at him, informing him that another plane was ready and waiting. This plane was a new 80-horsepower Avro, probably a variant of the Avro 504, and, after a shot of whisky from a fellow officer, Boyd took off again. This time he missed the bomb craters and got into the air. Flying under a 1,500-foot ceiling, he followed the Thames River toward London, which he felt was the Zeppelin's destination. He knew he was right when he saw the flash of anti-aircraft guns and searchlight beams in the sky ahead of him as the ground defenses tried to destroy the attacking Zeppelin. Beneath him now was the big horseshoe curve of the Thames as it flowed through



File photographs of two of the aircraft types Boyd flew while in the Royal Naval Air Service. Above left: an early AVRO biplane. Above: an R.E.P. Parasol monoplane.

London under blackout. The cloud cover had begun to lessen and, in the occasional holes in the clouds, Boyd caught sight of the shadow of the Zeppelin high above him. He forced his plane higher, trying to get above the Zeppelin to drop his bombs, but the Zeppelin changed course toward Dover and the English Channel and disappeared. Boyd had been flying for an hour when he saw what was later learned to be another Zeppelin, above and ahead of him; it was bombing Dover. The Zeppelin's crew saw him; the great airship moved out to sea and was soon lost in a cloud cover. Boyd, now out over the Dover Strait, suddenly realized his fuel was perilously low. He jettisoned his bombs and barely made it back to England. In the roughly two months he was posted to this duty, Boyd did not shoot down any Zeppelins but managed to survive the dangerous night flying missions.

In September 1915, Boyd was transferred to a base in Dunkirk, near the border between France and Belgium. He was to fly reconnaissance, a perilous duty. The German anti-aircraft batteries were a great danger. In addition, the weather could go from hazardous to worse in as little as 15 minutes. Boyd's usual run was northeast off the French coast then inland to Ghent and then southwest over Roulers and Ypres, a total distance of about 130 miles. His job was to search for submarines and to report on the quantity and the direction of the poison gas being rolled out at the allies from the German trenches. On one flight, Boyd, flying a single-seat Nieuport biplane, spotted a surfaced German submarine. He throttled the Nieuport's 90-horsepower motor so he could glide as quietly as possible toward his target but the Germans saw him and the submarine readied for diving. Boyd leveled off at 50 feet and dropped his four small bombs in rapid succession. He thought he saw an oil slick, but after the war the Germans denied they had lost any submarines to aircraft in 1915.

On 3 October 1915, Erroll Boyd was shot down. Together with two other planes, Boyd had taken off before dawn on a forty-mile flight to bomb German aircraft installations in Zeebruggee, Belgium. The three pilots were using French-built Robert Esnault-Pelterie R.E.P. Parasol monoplanes, so named because of their single wing, which was supported above the fuselage by an arrangement of struts and trusses called the cabane. Each plane, driven by a nine-cylinder LeRhone 110-horsepower engine, carried six 65-pound bombs under the fuselage. Boyd also carried about a dozen hand bombs, each weighing about five or six pounds. The planes reached their targets just as dawn was breaking and dropped their bombs. Shells from German anti-aircraft guns – Archies – began to explode around them and the planes became separated. Boyd, attempting to avoid the anti-aircraft fire, climbed to slightly over 12,000 feet and wheeled for home. He never made it. There was a flash and an explosion in front of him. "Archie" had hit his wings and propeller and he spun down out of control. Had he not been strapped in, he would have been thrown from the plane. He struggled with the controls and barely managed to get the plane under control and make a forced landing just inside the Dutch border. His combat career was over. The Dutch interned him, but it was a very unusual internment. He was given periodic parole and allowed to return home.

In March 1917, Boyd, still on Dutch parole, made a trip to America. He became a test pilot, frequently traveling to Buffalo to test Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" training planes. This plane became the U.S. Signal Corps standard primary trainer during the last ten months of the war. He tested other planes as well; however, he was involved in a serious accident on 1 July 1917. He was testing the Lanzius I, an early all-metal welded biplane. On his first test flight, Boyd could not maintain lateral control because of a defective aileron and crashed. His seat belt broke and he was thrown clear of the plane. When help arrived, Boyd was standing near the shattered plane, nonchalantly smoking a cigarette.

Boyd, who had been promoted to a full Lieutenant in the RNAS, was promoted to Captain in April 1918, when the RNAS merged with the Royal Flying Corps. After World War One ended, there was a surplus of pilots and planes on the market. The public did not want to remember the carnage of the war. There were few careers in aviation so Boyd held a series of jobs. He ran a car rental in Toronto, renting Model T Fords for a dollar an hour. He wrote songs, and one of his

While on parole from a Dutch internment camp, Boyd came to North America where he flew both the Curtiss JN-4 Jenny, above left, and the Fairchild Model 71, above - both file photographs.

songs – Dreams – became a Broadway hit in 1924. However, flying remained in his blood.

Boyd's world changed on 21 May 1927 when Charles Lindbergh flew solo across the Atlantic. North America caught aviation fever. Suddenly there were jobs available again and Boyd's thoughts of flying returned. He took a temporary job flying the mail in Quebec. This rekindled his dream of becoming the first Canadian to fly the Atlantic Ocean. In 1928, Boyd obtained piloting work in Mexico, where he gained instrument flying experience. He flew a Hisso Standard aircraft over mountainous areas and dropped payrolls in leather sacks to oil companies working in remote regions. He also flew the Fairchild 71, a plane powered by a 420-horsepower Pratt & Whitney Wasp engine, a transport that could carry up to six passengers; Boyd flew without a radio and carried a gross weight 400 pounds greater than was allowed in Canada. Flying in Mexico was primitive. There were no radios or emergency landing fields and they often flew over hundreds of miles of uncharted jungles. Boyd's Mexican instrument flying experience would prove invaluable during his North Atlantic crossing two years later.

Boyd returned to New York in 1929, and took a job with Coastal Airways, which was running a popular floatplane service from LaGuardia Airport in New York City to Albany, New York. However, the airline floundered because of fatal accidents and financial irregularities, none of which involved Boyd. It went bankrupt in the stock market crash of 1929 that began the Great Depression, but Boyd was lucky. He landed a well paying flying job for Charles Levine, a former scrap dealer who had made millions by the time he was twenty-eight, and who loved hanging out with pilots. In 1927, two years before the Great Depression, Levine, together with Giuseppe Bellanca, one of the great aviation pioneers and aircraft designers, formed the Columbia Aircraft Company. Bellanca, who had been associated with the Wright Aeronautical Corporation, had introduced the WB-2 - the Columbia - in 1925, and it, along with its predecessor the WB-1, easily won the efficiency contests at the 1926 National Air Races. Several other awards followed this. The Columbia was something special. Its fuselage, made of steel tubing, was covered with fabric. Its span was 46' 6", its length was 26' 9" and was powered by a 220-horsepower Wright engine. It came with special cabin fuel tanks built for endurance flying and had set additional records in 1927-29. However, in 1930, Levine suddenly lost interest in aviation. He was in financial trouble because of the Great Depression and, occupied with his own worries, paid no attention to his employee Boyd. As far as the Columbia was concerned, Levine was more than happy to rent it out for the right price.

On 29 June 1930, Boyd, who had accumulated some 6,575 flight hours, was part of a two-man crew that flew the Columbia on a record first nonstop roundtrip from New York to Bermuda. Total flight time: 17 hours, 3 minutes. It wasn't planned to be a nonstop flight, but there was no feasible landing strip in Bermuda at that time. They took off at 5:01am. By noon, Boyd had stripped down to his underwear because of the motor heat and the outside temperature. They dropped to 400 feet as they neared Bermuda, as they were flying into deteriorating weather. A tropical rainstorm drowned out their left magneto, making an emergency landing a definite possibility. Harry Connor, their U.S. Navy-trained navigator, struggled to plot their course and at 2:10pm he told Boyd to change course slightly. He noted they would reach Bermuda by 2:20pm. Connor was wrong by only three minutes. He had performed a brilliant navigational feat. The plane arrived over Hamilton harbor in a heavy downpour. Visibility was less than a half-mile and they were flying at altitudes of between 50 and 150 feet. The plane's motor was sputtering badly, but they still managed to drop the mail sack they were carrying to the desired location. At 2:44pm, thinking the sun would dry out their dead magneto, they set a course back to New York rather than risk a crash landing. They made it safely back, landing at 10:03pm. Their average southbound ground speed had been 72 knots (83 m.p.h.) and their average northbound speed was 94 knots (108 m.p.h.). Average fuel consumption was 12-gallons/hour southbound and 14 gallons/hour northbound. They were still carrying 10 hours of fuel

when they landed. On landing, they learned that bets had been placed at five to one that they would never return alive.

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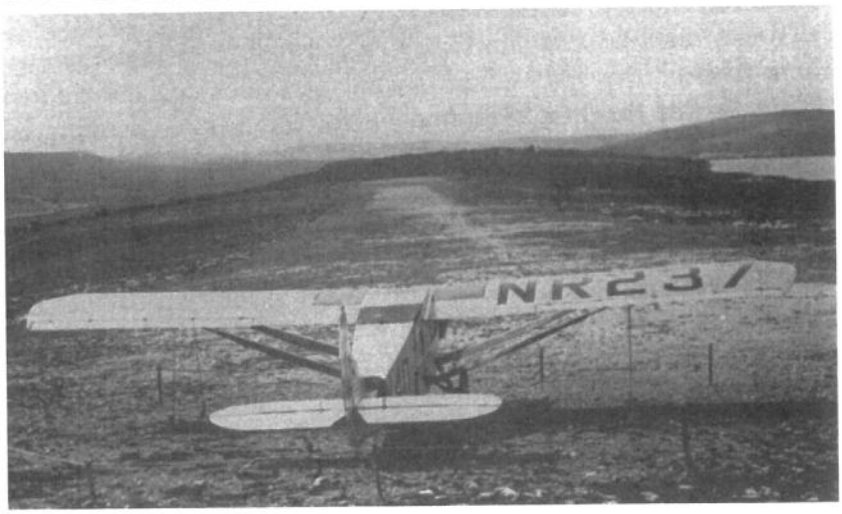
As early as 1916, Boyd had spoken of his dream to fly the Atlantic, and the Bermuda flight made this goal much more possible. Due to financial and legal problems, the Columbia had been moved to a Montreal hangar in the summer of 1930, about the same time Boyd began to work at raising money in Canada for his transatlantic flight. The American flag was painted over the Columbia's rudder and the plane was re-christened the Maple Leaf, a symbol long associated with Canada. This was done to appeal to Canadian investors. Even so, the Great Depression made it difficult to obtain funding. The delays because of financing were compounded by weather delays. However, everything finally came together. Ninety-five minutes after takeoff, the freighter Quaker City reported the Maple Leaf, "flying due eastward only 200 feet above the water." While the afternoon weather remained good, they were making only 68 m.p.h. ground speed against an air speed of 93 m.p.h.. By sunset, their ground speed was 70 m.p.h. and they flew at "a low altitude of between 600 and 1,000 feet in order to take advantage of a better 'pull' and less head wind." Vibration during takeoff had damaged the earth-inductor compass and Boyd had to rely on the two magnetic compasses. When night came, Harry Connor, who had been the navigator on the flight to Bermuda, had to climb over the main fuel tank and hold a sextant out of the plane's observation hatch to check their position with the stars. In the darkness, the Sperry artificial horizon proved to be an important aid. Boyd later claimed that this night flying was like, "piloting a car in a coal mine."



Top: Erroll Boyd (left) and Harry Connor.
Above: The Columbia/Maple Leaf poised on the airstrip at Harbour Grace, Newfoundland.

Using dead reckoning navigation, they calculated that at 3:30 Z-Time, they had reached 35 degrees west longitude. They changed to a northward course to allow them to come in over Swansea, Wales, and Bristol in Southwest England, and then land at Croydon Airport, London. While climbing through the clouds, Boyd saw the plane's thermometer drop to the freezing level. With the aid of a flashlight, he could see that the black strip he had painted on wing's leading edge was beginning to be covered with ice. Before the introduction of de-icing equipment, ice sparkling on the black strip served as an alert for danger. Boyd quickly descended and turned south toward a warmer temperature, but the weather continued to be rough throughout the night.

Connor was not a pilot so Boyd had to fly the plane on his own. The strain from the hours of flying was starting to show. He kept dozing off so Connor had to keep him awake him awake by holding a sponge soaked in water to the back of his neck. Boyd flew through ten and a half hours of darkness before the first hints of dawn appeared in the Eastern sky. By 9:40am, the sky cleared enough for Connor to take a reading. They were at 47 degrees north and 18 degrees west and the predicted end of their flight seemed close—until they discovered that the 100 gallons of fuel in the reserve tank would not pump into the gravity tank in the right wing. Boyd was forced to reduce his airspeed and rely on the vagaries of the southwesterly winds to push them toward England.

They reached the Scilly Islands, just off the southwest tip of England, at 16:02 Z; Connor plotted a course for Plymouth. They were only twenty-three miles from England but Boyd didn't want to take the risk of having to ditch into sea after traveling so far. He decided to land on the Scilly Isles. Tresco, the largest island, was about two miles long and a mile wide. There was a sloping beach on the island; Boyd landed on it. They jettisoned the 100 gallons of fuel from the reserve tank, as a precaution against fire should they crash on landing. Connor crawled to the rear of the plane to give it a better center of gravity. As they came down to land, the two airmen

saw that the tide was coming in and the beach they had available for landing was lessening with each incoming wave. They had only a few gallons of fuel left and about 200 feet of beach, but Boyd sat the Maple Leaf down in the soft sand. It halted just a few inches from the incoming waves. Boyd was the first Canadian to fly the Atlantic and while his Trans-Atlantic flight was second to Lindbergh's, it was the first flight that did not take place in the spring or summer. He had flown 3,740 statute miles in 36 hours and 10 minutes. Boyd and Connor were heroes. Workers from a nearby farm dragged the Maple Leaf to safety, to higher ground. Boyd became a celebrity.

Boyd's flying career was not over. He set another record. On 11 June 1933, together with co-pilot Robert G. Lyon and observer Harold P. Davis, flying the now eight-year-old Maple Leaf, the "old crate," as it was now being called, he attempted the first non-stop flight from New York to Haiti. It proved to be a harrowing flight. The plan had been to complete the flight in twenty-four hours. They would fly southward along the east coast to Florida, and then over Cuba to Haiti, and returned via Washington. The plane covered an over-water distance greater than that from Newfoundland to Ireland. About 5,000 spectators cheered Boyd's takeoff from New York. Carrying 400 gallons of fuel, the plane took off after a run of about 2,700 feet. For food, they carried two broiled chickens, two gallons of water, two quarts of coffee and a quart of lemon juice. Boyd also carried a pet turtle named Boozie, a good luck token given to him by his two youngest daughters.

Everything went well until they were about sixty miles from their destination, Port-au-Prince. They were climbing to clear some small mountains when the engine sputtered and quit. This was probably caused by water in the gasoline, but whatever the reason, the plane was forced down and landed in some mudflats. It was a remarkable landing; Davis later reported, "An error of twenty-five feet would have resulted in wreckage of the plane in a deep ditch."

The flight was a success in spite of this. A rescue was arranged and the Maple Leaf was pulled to higher ground. A path was cleared for takeoff through the jungle, and on the late afternoon of 5 July, they took off and started for home. The flight back was the roughest flight of Boyd's career. Boyd took off in thirty-two seconds, from a 1,500-foot runway. The Maple Leaf was carrying 300 gallons of gasoline and had to fly through mixtures of thundershowers and electrical storms. Their altitude varied from 50 to 7,000 feet, but they completed the first flight from New York to Haiti and back in twenty-four hours and 8 minutes in the air. On their return flight, Boyd carried gifts from Haiti's president to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Boyd became the first airman to have two countries issue special stamps for his flights (Canada and Haiti).

Boyd was now almost forty-two years old and, both his flying career and the life of the Maple Leaf were ending. A fire at the Bellanca factory destroyed the Maple Leaf in 1934. Boyd found it difficult to get work as the Great Depression continued. However, no matter what his problems, Boyd remained committed to aviation. In 1938, he founded the Aviation Scouts of Canada, a forerunner of the air cadet movement. He was too old to fly during World War Two, but served on various committees to help the war effort. He was also involved with other activities, which he hoped would promote peace after the war ended. He applied for U.S. Citizenship in 1939; he lived in America in his latter years. His health deteriorated as he grew older and he died in 1960, five days after his sixty-ninth birthday.•

The Wright Bellanca WB-2 was used not only by Boyd and Connor but had also been earlier used by Clarence Chamberlin and Charles Levine. The pair flew from New York to Eisleben, Germany in June 1927, one month after Lindbergh's flight.

The Wright Bellanca WB-2 "Columbia." This was the aircraft that Charles Lindbergh tried to buy from Bellanca, then head of the Columbia Aircraft Corporation, but was refused. History would show that Ryan Aircraft would ultimately benefit from this refusal.

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