

Seattle to Seattle: The First Aerial Circumnavigation of the Globe (Part 1)

By Phil Dougherty
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On April 6, 1924, four airplanes lifted off from Seattle's Sand Point Aerodrome in a quest to be the first to fly around the world. The adventure-filled saga was closely followed by many across the globe, especially those who were on the planes' flight path. One aircraft crashed in Alaska and another sank in the Atlantic Ocean, but almost miraculously, there were no serious injuries. The airmen battled bad weather, illness, exhaustion, and mechanical problems, but after a nearly six-month journey, they prevailed. Two of the original planes returned to Seattle on September 28, joined by a replacement plane for the one that sank. The world rejoiced.

Planning the Flight

The first successful manned flight occurred in 1903, but it took World War I (1914-1918) to kick-start the development of the airplane and air travel. This accelerated after the end of the war, and perhaps inevitably, nations began competing to determine who could be the first to fly the farthest. By the early 1920s, several countries were vying to be the first to circumnavigate the globe. Great Britain tried unsuccessfully in 1922 and France the following year, and by then other countries, including the United States, were getting into the race. In the spring of 1923, the U.S. Army Air Service (a forerunner of the U.S. Air Force) began planning its own flight. The service saw that the odds of success would be higher if a small squad of planes flew instead of just one, and it decided to send a fleet of four planes aloft, each with two crewmembers. However, there was no aircraft then in existence that could make such a flight.

The Air Service considered both the Fokker T-2 Transport and the Davis-Douglas Cloudster as potential candidates, and approached Donald Douglas (1892-1981), the owner of the Davis-Douglas Aircraft Company, about the Cloudster. Douglas suggested another plane – a modified DT-2, a torpedo bomber that he had recently built for the U.S. Navy. It was a well-built and reliable aircraft that could use both wheels and pontoons for landing. Pontoons were a must for the trip, since the airmen would be flying over large parts of the world where the only place to land was on water. In August 1923, the Air Service approved the proposal.

The biggest modification necessary was to make the DT-2 capable of long-distance flights of 800 miles and more. Douglas worked with another Davis-Douglas employee, Jack Northrop (1895-1981), to make the

necessary modifications. The biggest was to increase the plane's fuel capacity. All the provisions for torpedoes were removed and the fuel tanks were enlarged, which multiplied the plane's fuel capacity roughly four-fold, from 115 gallons to approximately 450 gallons. A prototype proved successful, and Douglas was subsequently awarded a contract for four more planes. The new aircraft was named the Douglas World Cruiser. The last one was delivered on March 11, 1924, only six days before the planes departed from Santa Monica, California, to Seattle for the final preparations for the round-the-world flight.

The Planes and Crews

The Douglas World Cruiser was built from Sitka spruce. The open-cockpit plane could accommodate two crewmen, and measured 36 feet, 6 inches in length, 14 feet, 7 inches in height, and had a wingspan of 50 feet. It weighed 4,299 pounds when empty but could take off with a weight up to 6,900 pounds. Equipped with a 420 hp Liberty V12 engine, the aircraft's maximum speed was 103 miles per hour, though it generally cruised between 70 and 80 mph. Its ceiling was 10,000 feet. There was no radio on the plane, no parachutes, no life preservers, and each machine was limited to carrying 300 pounds of supplies.

The planes were each numbered and named after one of four major cities in the U.S., and each carried a crew of two. The *Seattle's* pilot in plane No. 1 was Major Frederick Martin (1882-1954), the designated flight commander for the journey. He was accompanied by flight mechanic Staff Sergeant Alva Harvey (1900-1992). The pilot of the *Chicago*, plane No. 2, was Lieutenant Lowell Smith (1892-1945) and the co-pilot was First Lieutenant Leslie Arnold (1893-1961). The *Boston's* pilot in plane No. 3 was First Lieutenant Leigh Wade (1897-1991), while Staff Sergeant Henry "Hank" Ogden (1900-1986) was flight mechanic. The pilot of the *New Orleans*, plane No. 4, was Lieutenant Erik Nelson (1888-1970), and its co-pilot was Lieutenant John Harding Jr. (1896-1968). The team first trained at Langley Field in Virginia before traveling to the Douglas factory in Santa Monica in February 1924.

The original plan called for the flight to begin in Washington, D.C., but this was changed to make Seattle the starting point. Caches of supplies, including 35 replacement engines, other spare parts, and thousands of gallons of gasoline, were distributed at points where the flight would cross on land. On the seas, American cruisers and destroyers, as well as Coast Guard cutters, were scheduled to be placed at strategic locations at preset times as the aviators passed by to provide help if needed. Three of the four planes left Santa Monica on March 17, while the *New Orleans* left two days later, but they all landed at Seattle's **Sand Point Aerodrome** on March 20, where they were fitted with pontoons and tuned up for the upcoming journey. The team set the departure date for Wednesday, April 2, but bad weather and mechanical issues pushed this back three days. On April 5 a crowd of Seattleites gathered hopefully to watch the departure but Martin, in the *Seattle*, accidentally damaged his plane while preparing to take off. Though minor, the incident was enough to delay liftoff one more day.

On to Alaska

A crowd of 300 or so returned to Sand Point the next morning, Sunday, April 6, and this time they were not disappointed. Shortly after 8:30 a.m. the *Seattle* **lifted off** into cool, cloudy skies, followed by the *New Orleans* and, minutes later, the *Chicago*. Then came a pause. The *Boston* raced down the lake at least three

times in a vain attempt to lift off, but the plane was too heavy. It returned to the staging buoy near the airfield, where pilot Wade hastily unloaded some supplies and gasoline. By this time it was passing 10 a.m. and he was more than an hour behind the other fliers. But his effort paid off and Wade soon soared into the skies, accompanied by delighted cheers from the crowd.

The planes were bound for Prince Rupert, British Columbia, a roughly 600-mile flight. The first three arrived shortly before 5 p.m., while Wade landed about half an hour later. Although the flight was without incident, the landing proved to be anything but for the *Seattle*. Martin had the misfortune to land in the middle of a snow squall and misjudged his altitude as he approached the waters of Seal Cove at the eastern edge of Prince Rupert. Puzzled observers watched his unusually steep angle as he descended toward the water, and he landed with such force that he broke two of the plane's struts and several brace wires. He and his crewmate quickly made repairs, and the planes departed for Sitka, Alaska, on April 10, where they remained for three days.

The flight from Sitka to Seward on April 13 provided an unexpected challenge. As they followed the shoreline along the southern coast of Alaska, the planes flew into a blizzard. Visibility dropped to the point that the pilots were forced to fly less than 100 feet above the water so they could see the shoreline and the breakers. On the hop from Seward to Chignik two days later there was a scare when the *Seattle* briefly went missing. Two nearby destroyers were alerted, and the plane and its crew were found safe and sound the following morning. The aircraft had been forced down by an oil leak but landed safely off Cape Igvak. It was taken to the nearby native village of Kanatak for an engine change, while the other three planes flew ahead to Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands on April 19. There they waited for the *Seattle*, which finally left Kanatak on April 25 and flew to Chignik, where weather delayed its departure to Dutch Harbor until April 30.

The *Seattle* Crash

Martin and Harvey left Chignik in the *Seattle* about 11 a.m. that morning and were expected in Dutch Harbor around 6 p.m. Instead, reports began coming in during the afternoon that the plane had not been seen passing any of the checkpoints along the route. As the hours went by with still no sightings reported, growing concern changed to fear. The Coast Guard cutter *Algonquin*, which was patrolling the route between Chignik and Dutch Harbor, radioed a request for aid. Local salmon boats took up the search, and more U.S. ships were called to the area to assist. In Martin's absence, the Air Service named Lowell Smith, pilot of the *Chicago*, interim commander.

The remaining three planes continued their journey through the Aleutian Islands, battling snow, fog, and williwaws. Williwaws are sudden bursts of icy, capricious winds that rush down from coastal mountains to sea level and can reach 80 mph or more. It made takeoff and landing a special challenge, and even in midflight a plane could get caught by a gust of wind and suddenly soar – or drop – hundreds of feet. On May 9 the planes reached Attu Island, the westernmost island in the Aleutians, where they paused for repairs and to wait out another storm. On May 11, they received news that Martin and Harvey had been found unharmed, but their plane was destroyed.

The *Seattle* had left Chignik on April 30 in good weather, but about an hour after its departure a heavy fog descended, reducing visibility to near zero. The men tried to climb out of the fog but instead flew into the side of a small mountain. They were fortunate; the plane struck on a gentle upslope that was nearly parallel with the angle that the machine was flying. Several feet of snow was on the ground, helping cushion the impact, and the plane skidded for about 200 feet before coming to a halt. Martin and Harvey were unharmed, but the *Seattle* was damaged beyond repair. They were about 30 miles northeast of Port Moller, where a cannery was located, and though they needed to get their bearings, they had a general idea where they were.

They struck out on foot on May 2, traveling northwest, but concluded that it was the wrong direction and returned to the plane the next day. On May 4 they left again, this time moving southwest. The men battled snow blindness, thick forests, and snow up to four feet deep, and their meals consisted of liquid rations that they brought from the plane. Finally, on May 7, they found a trapper's cabin – vacant, but there was flour to make pancakes, some pickles, and salmon. They ate and slept for nearly three days and regained their strength. On May 10 they struck out again, following the beach toward Port Moller, approximately 20 to 25 miles away. At midafternoon they saw the cannery in the distance. Soon after, a nearby boat picked up the two men and took them the last four miles.

The Far East

While Martin and Harvey awaited their return to the U.S., the remaining fliers continued the journey. They crossed the International Date Line on May 15/16 and touched down off Bering Island east of the Kamchatka Peninsula in the Soviet Union. The Soviets had not given the Americans permission to land, but the U.S. ship *Elder* was nearby and the men spent the night there. The following day they left for Japan, and in doing so became the first aviators to cross the Pacific Ocean. They landed offshore near Paramushiru in Japan's Kurile Islands (now under Russian control) and flew southwest over the next few days, arriving in Tokyo on May 22.

In Tokyo the men did extensive work on their planes and found some time to take in the sights of the city. They dutifully attended the many receptions put on by their hosts. Their stay was made more enjoyable by an unusual happenstance. Japan had been struck by a major earthquake the preceding September, and the water was still not considered safe for drinking. In its stead, the fliers drank beer. Prohibition was in effect in the United States, so this was a treat indeed. "God how we hate it," quipped the *Chicago's* mechanic, Leslie Arnold, in his daily report on May 29.

They left Tokyo on June 1 and flew southwest along Japan's eastern coast, arriving at their final Japanese destination, Kagoshima, late the next day. On June 4, the *Boston* and *New Orleans* flew across the East China Sea to Shanghai while the *Chicago* joined them the following day. Up to this point there had been talk of Martin rejoining the group in a replacement plane, perhaps in Europe, and resuming his command for the remainder of the flight. But more than a month had elapsed since his crash. Martin and Harvey did not reach the U.S. from Alaska until May 25, and the major himself put a damper on this talk soon after his arrival, pointing out that there wasn't another plane available (though the prototype plane could have been

made ready). He added, "I hope I'm not asked to crowd out one of the boys who have carried on this far. It wouldn't be fair" ("Major Martin May ..."). Moreover, interim commander Lowell Smith had proved his mettle time and again since taking over in Alaska, and his navigational skills had won the admiration of the rest of the team. It was June 3 in Washington, June 4 in Shanghai, when it was announced that Martin would not continue the flight and had asked that Smith become the permanent commander. He returned to his home in **Bellingham** and waited for the remaining crews to complete the trip.

The fliers left Shanghai on June 7 after encountering a problem that plagued them on much of their flight through Southeast Asia. The waterways used for takeoff were often crammed with native boats, making departures and landings tricky; in Shanghai, the *New Orleans* was forced to abort a takeoff attempt after being cut off by a boat. The planes proceeded southwest along the Chinese coast to Hong Kong, where they landed in a heavy rainstorm the next afternoon. There they made minor repairs to their planes, including replacing a pontoon and welding a leaky cylinder jacket on the *Chicago*.

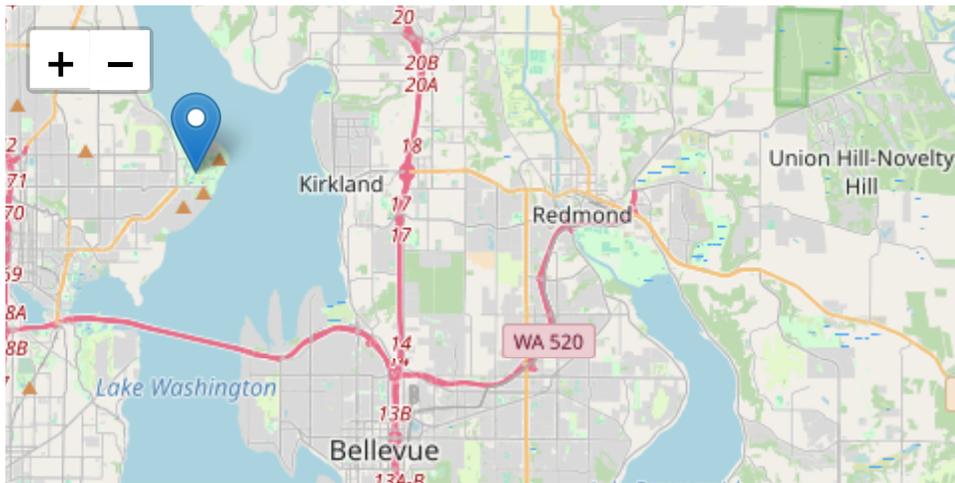
The planes continued southwest. The repairs to the *Chicago's* cylinder jacket proved to be temporary, and by June 11 it was leaking again. It suddenly worsened and the engine began smoking as the fliers neared Tourane (now Da Nang) in Annam, a French colony in what is now Vietnam. The *Chicago* hastily landed in the water near Hue, its motor ruined. The other two planes landed long enough to ascertain what had happened and to confirm the men were unharmed, then flew to Tourane and summoned help. In the meantime, Smith and Arnold were entertained, first by the natives and then by a couple of priests who happened by and plied them with wine and water. The water was not purified, and Smith soon developed a stubborn case of dysentery, which lasted off and on for more than a month. The *Chicago's* fliers were rescued early the following morning and towed by native canoes to Hue. A new engine was shipped from Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City), and Smith and Arnold joined their fellow travelers in Tourane on June 15.

Halfway Point

On June 16 they flew to Saigon, where they struggled with the heat and calm waters that hindered their ability to get aloft. (The pilots developed a technique where a lead plane would generate a wake sufficient to give other fliers enough lift to take off, but this didn't always work. Even when it did, it still left the lead plane in the water.) They lightened their planes by cutting back on their fuel load, but this meant more refueling stops as the planes turned west, flying first to Bangkok and then to Rangoon, Burma (now Yangon, Myanmar), where they were delayed for several days. Smith suffered an attack of dysentery and was forced to rest for a few days, and the *New Orleans* needed repairs after a native boater accidentally clipped the plane's right wing. On June 26 the aviators reached Calcutta (now Kolkata), India, and took up quarters at the city's Great Eastern Hotel. It wasn't quite the halfway point of the trip, but psychologically it felt like it.

Further reading: In **Part 2**, the fliers successfully complete their circumnavigation of the globe.

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"Around the World" fliers during their training in Virginia, February 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



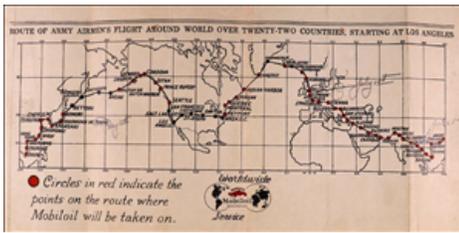
"Around the World" fliers pose in Santa Monica, California, before flying to Seattle to begin the first aerial circumnavigation of the globe, March 1924

San Diego Air and Space Museum Archive



Grace Martin christens the *Seattle*, spraying her husband, Maj. Frederick Martin, with champagne, before takeoff from Santa Monica, California, March 17, 1924

San Diego Air and Space Museum Archive



Map of planned route of the first aerial circumnavigation of the world with red dots marking Mobiloil fuel stops, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook

Excerpts from silent newsreel coverage of the first aerial circumnavigation of the globe, 1924

National Archives and Records Administration 1924 - ARC Identifier 65317



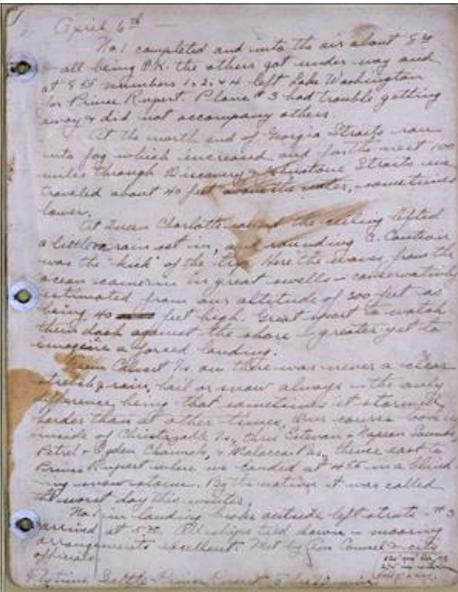
Two Douglas World Cruisers on Lake Washington preparing for takeoff, Seattle, April 6, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



After takeoff from Sand Point, a Douglas World Cruiser flies over Seattle, April 6, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



First entry in *Chicago* co-pilot Leslie Arnold's diary, describing their departure from Seattle and arrival in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, April 6, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Diary



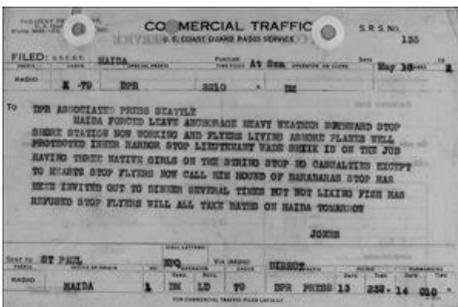
"Around the World" fliers approach Seward, Alaska, April 13, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



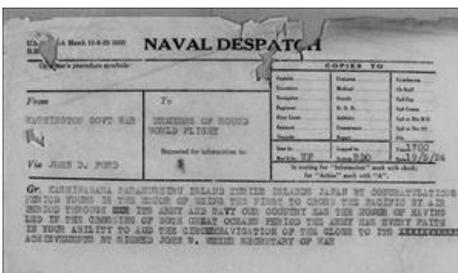
Frederick Martin (left) and Alva Harvey in Port Moller, Alaska, after rescuing themselves from the crashed *Seattle*, May 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



Coast Guard Radiogram from Haida, British Columbia, describing the weather and Lieutenant Leigh Wade's interactions with the locals

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Diary



Message from U.S. Secretary of War John Weeks congratulating pilots for being the first to cross the Pacific Ocean by plane, upon their landing in Paramushiru, Japan, May 19, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Diary



"Around the World" fliers arrive in Tokyo, May 22, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



Douglas World Cruisers anchored near Amoy, China, ca. June 4, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook, James Maloney collection

Sources:

"Martin Breaks Struts as Hop Ends," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 7, 1924, pp. 1-2; "Interesting Facts Tersely Told About First Round World Flight," *Ibid.*, September 29, 1924, p. 2; "Repairs Made to Flagplane After Accident," *The Seattle Times*, April 6, 1924, pp. 17, 22; "Lead Plane Damaged at First Stop," *Ibid.*, April 7, 1924, pp. 1, 3; "U.S. Flyers Begin Their Around-the-World Trip," *Ibid.*, April 7, 1924, p. 3; R. J. Brown, Jr., "U.S. Flight Progress Detailed," *Ibid.*, May 11, 1924, p. 13; Frederick J. Martin, "Flight Commander Tells of Hardships After Plane Crash," *Ibid.*, May 12, 1924, pp. 1, 3; Alva L. Harvey, "Sergeant Harvey Tells Story," *Ibid.*, May 13, 1924, pp. 1, 3; Robert J. Brown, Jr., "World Record Set by Flight," *Ibid.*, May 18, 1924, pp. 1, 20; "Major Martin May Never Rejoin U.S. Flight," *Ibid.*, May 27, 1924, p. 9; "Heat Hazard Faced by Flight," *Ibid.*, June 1, 1924, p. 11; "Martin Gives Up His Command of U.S. World Flight," *Ibid.*, June 3, 1924, pp. 1, 3; "A Generous Act" (editorial), *Ibid.*, June 4, 1924, p. 6; "U.S. Airman Must Await New Engine," *Ibid.*, June 12, 1924, p. 1; "U.S. Flight at Saigon," *Ibid.*, June 16, 1924, p. 1; R. J. Brown, Jr., "Flyers Combat Terrific Heat," *Ibid.*, June 22, 1924, pp. 15, 17; R. J. Brown, Jr., "U.S. Planes Conquer World," *Ibid.*, June 29, 1924, pp. 15, 16; "Martin Reviews Plane Crash," *Ibid.*, August 17, 1924, pp. 1, 5; "On This Date: The First Round the World Flight," September 28, 2020, Aerotechnews website accessed October 1, 2023 (<https://www.aerotechnews.com/blog/2020/09/28/on-this-date-the-first-round-the-world-flight/>); "Douglas World Cruiser," Aviastar website accessed October 1, 2023 (https://www.aviastar.org/air/usa/douglas_wc.php); "Davis-Douglas Cloudster," Military Factory website accessed October 1, 2023 (https://www.militaryfactory.com/aircraft/detail.php?aircraft_id=1954); "1924 World Flight Chronicle: March 17, April 13, April 17, May 11, May 15-16, June 4, June 7, June 8, June 11, June 12, June 26, June 28, June 29, 1924," The Seattle World Cruiser Project website accessed October 5, 2023 (<https://www.seattleworldcruiser.org/1924-world-flight-chronicle>); L. P. Arnold, "Daily Report," May 29, 1924, The Seattle World Cruiser Project website accessed October 8, 2023 (<https://www.seattleworldcruiser.org/may-28th-1>).

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On April 6, 1924, four airplanes lifted off from Seattle's Sand Point Aerodrome in a quest to be the first to fly around the world. The adventure-filled saga was closely followed by many across the globe, especially those who were on the planes' flight path. One aircraft crashed in Alaska and another sank in the Atlantic Ocean, but almost miraculously, there were no serious injuries. The airmen battled bad weather, illness, exhaustion, and mechanical problems, but after a nearly six-month journey, they prevailed. Two of the original planes returned to Seattle on September 28, joined by a replacement plane for the one that sank. The world rejoiced.

Sunburned Knees

In **Part 1**, the fliers overcome a series of mishaps to reach the midway point of their journey.

After landing in Calcutta on June 26, the world fliers spent the next five days there. It was their main supply and repair base in Southern Asia, and here they switched the planes' pontoons to wheels and did other work on the machines. The men spent some of their evenings at receptions and dinners, and it was at one of these dinners on June 29 that Lowell Smith fell and broke a rib. By then the planes were nearly ready to go, and he insisted that he could continue. There was one task outstanding: There were plans to change the motors in the planes, but this would delay the departure another two days. The fliers decided to change them in Karachi (then still part of India, now in Pakistan).

This decision nearly cost the *New Orleans*. The planes left Calcutta on July 1, and most of the 1,700-plus mile flight west to Karachi was uneventful, though the aviators grappled with temperatures exceeding 110 degrees. There was some excitement on July 3 when they encountered a sandstorm and were forced to fly just above the ground and follow a railroad track west; it was reminiscent of the snowstorms in Alaska when the pilots dropped below 100 feet to follow the shoreline. The next day they were over uninhabited desert roughly 60 miles east of Karachi when a valve broke in the *New Orleans's* motor, causing one of its 12 cylinders to fail and briefly spewing parts out of the engine, much to the consternation of Nelson and Harding. Landing in the desert likely would have seriously damaged the plane, but it was able to keep flying to Karachi on slightly reduced power, though it touched down covered with oil.

The men left Karachi on July 7 and enjoyed a mostly-problem free flight to Europe. With pontoons now replaced by wheels, they flew faster and farther between stops. There was one unanticipated problem. Because of the heat, the crews had begun wearing lightweight shorts on their flights, and by the time they reached Iraq, most had sunburned knees. Making excellent time, they reached Baghdad on July 8 and Constantinople (now Istanbul) on the 10th. Continuing northwest, the fliers crossed into Europe and reached Vienna – and cooler weather – on the 13th. The next day they flew to Paris, taking a short detour to pass over the battlefields of the Great War (later known as World War I) in eastern France. Though the conflict had ended nearly six years earlier, the airmen noticed how little many of the battlefields had changed, and at least two of them remarked on it in their daily reports. They were met by an escort of French planes as they approached Paris, where the Americans made a celebratory run over the Arc de Triomphe before landing at the Le Bourget Airdrome.

France and England

It was Bastille Day in France, and a large, enthusiastic throng was on hand to greet them. All the men were exhausted, and Smith was visibly ill. Reporters noticed he was covered in sweat, and when congratulated, he responded only in monosyllables. His broken rib was painful, and he continued to be plagued by dysentery. "Smith is a sick man. Any doctor examining him now would forbid him to fly for weeks, but he refuses to see a doctor," reported the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ("Get Welcome ..."). Yet the men dutifully accepted invitations from their hosts to see the city that evening, where one report claimed they were so tired that each of them fell asleep during a vaudeville performance. (Though this particular account may have been exaggerated, there are other stories of individual airmen nodding off during the official functions they were expected to attend at their stops.)

The next day they lunched with U.S. General John Pershing (1860-1948), a hero from the Great War, and flew to England on the 16th. After overnighing in London the men flew to Brough, about 160 miles north of London, where they remained for the next 13 days. They spent much of the time working on their planes, including removing the wheels and reinstalling the pontoons for the upcoming trip across the North Atlantic. They also fielded friendly questions and ribbing from their hosts about their British competitor, Archibald Stuart Charles Stuart-MacLaren (1892-1943), in the race to be the first around the world.

The Americans weren't the only ones trying to circle the globe in 1924 – Argentina, France, Great Britain, and Italy also sent fliers aloft that year – but the most serious competition came from the British. However, this was a gentlemen's race. MacLaren and two crewmen took off from southern England in late March, flying east in a Vickers Vulture amphibious biplane. When the plane crashed on takeoff from Aykab (now Sittwe) Island in present-day Myanmar in late May, the American government arranged to ship the Englishmen a replacement Vulture that the English had in Tokyo. The British effort ended for good on August 4 when heavy fog caused the aircraft to make a forced landing in the Bering Strait off the Soviet Union's Kamchatka Peninsula. Though the passengers were rescued, the plane was damaged beyond repair.

The *Boston* Is Lost

The American airmen left England on July 30 and flew north to the Orkney Islands off Scotland's north coast. The *New Orleans* flew on to Iceland on August 2, and the *Boston* and the *Chicago* left the Orkneys the next day. Optimism abounded. On August 3 *The Seattle Times* predicted that the three planes would be back in Seattle on August 19 and in time for Fleet Week. But the paper was wrong. That same day, as the *Boston* flew between the Orkney and Faroe islands, its oil pressure suddenly dropped to zero. Soon Wade and Ogden could hear the unlubricated engine parts grinding. Knowing that an engine failure was imminent, the men were forced to land in rough seas. The plane was not seriously damaged, and the fliers were rescued by a U.S. cruiser, the *Richmond*, several hours later. The ship attempted to hoist the craft aboard, but the stormy seas caused the vessel to roll, and the ship's boom dropped on the plane. It damaged the left pontoon, punched holes in the machine's center section and left wing, and broke the propeller.

At first the men tried to repair the plane, but worsening weather made this impossible. They decided to tow it to the Faroes, but the 12-hour ride was too much for the damaged craft. It became waterlogged and sank the following morning, and the crew of the *Boston* continued to Reykjavik, Iceland, where they rejoined the men of the *Chicago* and the *New Orleans* on August 5. There they got some good news. The prototype of the airplane was still available for use as a replacement, and on August 7, the plane – already christened the *Boston II* – took off from Langley Field (now Langley Air Force Base) in Virginia, for Pictou, Nova Scotia, where Wade and Ogden later rejoined the flight.

Meanwhile, the remaining airmen were stuck in Reykjavik, working on their planes and enjoying the 24-hour summer daylight of the Far North. There was still considerable ice in the harbors at their next destination in Greenland, which delayed the departure and eventually forced the fliers to pick a new landing area. A week passed, then 10 days, and they were still in Iceland. On August 17, they received a surprise when the Italian aviator, Antonio Locatelli (1895-1936), landed in Reykjavik on a stopover in the Italian global quest. Flying in a Dornier Do J Wal flying boat, Locatelli and his three-man crew joined the *Chicago* and the *New Orleans* when they took off for Greenland on the morning of August 21, bound for Fredriksdal (now Narsarmijit), 800 miles distant on the country's southern tip.

There was the usual convoy of prepositioned supply ships along the route, partly to provide help in case of an emergency, partly to serve as locators to help the fliers confirm their position, and partly as spotters to confirm the planes' passage. The weather was flawless for more than half the flight, but then a thick fog and rain descended. The men were forced to fly just above the water and head due west until they reached Greenland, where they followed the coast to Fredriksdal. Dodging icebergs of all sizes, the planes became separated. Locatelli ran out of gas and was forced down off the coast. He and his crew were rescued three days later by an American supply ship (once again the *Richmond*), but their plane was heavily damaged and left to sink in the ocean. The *Chicago* and *New Orleans* successfully landed in Fredriksdal and flew on to Ivigtut (now Ivittuut) three days later, where they spent a week tuning their planes and changing the motors.

The *Boston II* Joins the Flight

On August 31, they struck out for the North American continent. Less than halfway into the flight the fuel pump failed on the *Chicago*, and Smith and Arnold quickly discovered that the backup pump didn't work.

Arnold was forced to use an emergency hand pump to feed fuel to the engine for the next four hours until they landed in Ice Tickle (now Black Tickle), Labrador. They quickly made repairs, and on September 3 the *Chicago* and *New Orleans* arrived in Pictou, Nova Scotia, where the *Boston II* and its crew awaited them. The team resumed its journey on September 5, bound for Boston, but heavy fog forced the planes to land offshore near Mere Point in southeastern Maine. Still, they were back in the United States. They arrived in Boston the next day, changed their pontoons for wheels, and continued south along the East Coast. They reached New York on September 8 and Washington, D.C., on September 9, where President Calvin Coolidge (1872-1933) and members of his cabinet met the men at Bolling Field. The president asked Smith to show him the *Chicago*, and the pilot was happy to oblige.

From there it was a victory cruise across the country, with stops in more than a dozen cities at places as diverse as Chicago and Muskogee, Oklahoma. In the larger cities, the aviators were alarmed by the ever-increasing crowds on hand to greet them. In some places there were so many people that they could not be controlled. After having survived so many scares on the flight, the men worried that the overly enthusiastic masses would damage their planes just when they were almost in sight of their goal. But the crowds behaved, and the victory lap continued across the Midwest and then to California. On September 23 the airmen reached Clover Field in Santa Monica. A rowdy throng estimated at 175,000 was on hand to welcome them, and crowded around the airplanes to such an extent that the fliers were unable to refuel them. After a short delay in San Francisco to replace the engine in the *Boston II*, they **reached Seattle** on Sunday, September 28.

Home At Last

It was a warm and sunny day. The anticipated arrival had been closely monitored by the press, and by early afternoon at least 40,000 persons were gathered at **Sand Point**, while an eager audience on hundreds of boats watched from Lake Washington. Elsewhere in the city people found time to do something outside or kept a hopeful eye out their windows, looking to catch a glimpse of the fliers. Just before 1:30 p.m. an escort of seven planes appeared, followed by the three world cruisers. The crowd erupted in a roar. The planes circled the field twice, took a celebratory lap over Lake Washington, then swooped in to land. The *Chicago* landed first, quickly followed by the *Boston II*, and a minute later, the *New Orleans*.

The public was forbidden from walking onto the landing field until the assembled photographers had finished their work, but the *Seattle's* pilot, Frederick Martin, was having none of it. He stepped over the ropes separating the crowd from the field. Several guards tried unsuccessfully to stop him but, perhaps recognizing Martin, they stepped back as he strode up to the *Chicago*. He swung up on a lower wing and shook Smith's hand. "No words were spoken – there was nothing to be said – but the crowd sensed the emotion behind the silent greeting of the former commander and his successor in that brief moment," recounted *The Seattle Times* ("Major Martin..."). He then climbed on the other two planes and repeated the handshake with the two other pilots.

It had taken the fliers 175 days to circle the globe, 66 which were spent in the air. In the process, they visited 22 countries. The total flying time was 363 hours and 7 minutes, with 76 individual flights made from location to location. They traveled a total distance of 26,345 miles with an average speed of 72 mph.

The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* said that the planes had consumed 22,260 gallons of gas and 1,026 gallons of oil, and the paper boasted that the pilots had set three new records: first to cross the Pacific Ocean, first to cross the South China Sea, and the first successful around-the-world flight. Of the attempts by a total of five countries to fly around the world in 1924, the American team was the only one that succeeded.

After the photographers had had their fill, the crowd was allowed to swarm the field and greet the fliers. After a few minutes the men were spirited away to the yacht *Aquilo* just offshore, where they were served a splendid lunch enroute to **Madison Park**. From there they were driven to **Volunteer Park** for a welcoming reception. The press commented that Wade, pilot of the *Boston* and *Boston II*, stayed in the background during the ceremony, as well as during the other ceremonies given the aviators upon their return. "He seemed to feel he had not fully earned the storm of greeting given the birdmen," explained the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ("Loss of ..."). Smith presented each of his fellow travelers to the crowd as the program ended, but the crowd responded by chanting "We want Martin" ("City Gives ..."). Fighting back tears, the major gave a brief speech but refused to take the spotlight from the men who had successfully completed the flight. "They did all of the repairing, overhauling and mechanical work on their planes with their own hands. They met and overcame almost insurmountable difficulties," he explained ("City Gives ..."). The crowd answered with three cheers.

A Poignant Ending

The fliers were feted at a public luncheon at the Hippodrome the next day, then headed to Sand Point for a 3 p.m. ceremony marking the dedication of a monument in their honor. The granite tower was located immediately to the west of the landing field and described in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* as 15 feet high, three feet wide at its base, and tapering to two feet at its top. A pair of soaring bronze wings atop the memorial symbolized an eagle alighting, and a plaque on its base identified each of the men and the dates of the flight. It was created by **Alonzo Victor Lewis** (1886-1946), a Seattle painter and sculptor who created several monuments throughout Western Washington in the 1920s and 1930s. The World Flight Monument still stands a century later, now located at the main entrance to **Magnuson Park**.

The fliers were visibly touched by the sight. "I never thought that a monument ever would be erected to me while I was living," explained Lowell Smith ("Flyers Ordered ..."). A crowd of 2,000 listened patiently through a speech or two and watched silently as Frances Cole, sister of Leslie Arnold, slowly removed a large American flag that covered the monument and read the plaque from start to finish. U.S. Senator Wesley Jones (1863-1932) then spoke, and he left the audience with a thought: "We dedicate this shaft to tell the ages of their achievement. Will we add to the glory they have brought by developing all the possibilities they have shown us?" ("Flyers Ordered...").

After the ceremony, the men walked down their field to unpack their planes. It was a poignant moment. They quietly removed their belongings and packed them away in trunks. They silently walked around their planes, clearly reluctant to leave, looking the machines up and down, and touching them here and there. Erik Nelson, pilot of the *New Orleans*, summed up what most of them were feeling. "This separation hurts

more than anything connected with the flight so far. I think many, many thoughts as I look over these wings"
("Flyers Take ...").



Douglas World Cruisers after landing at Le Bourget Airdrome, Paris, July 14, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



The USS *Richmond* tows the *Boston* off the Faroe Islands, August 3, 1924

San Diego Air and Space Museum Archive



Douglas World Cruiser *New Orleans* under repair, Reykjavik, Iceland, August 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



Italian aviator Antonio Locatelli and his crew in Reykjavik, Iceland, where they visited with the U.S. world fliers, August 17, 1924

San Diego Air and Space Museum Archive



Residents of Greenland greet the world fliers, Ivittuut, Greenland, August, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



Douglas World Cruisers flying over New York City, September 8, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



Seattle Times headline about the return of the "Around the World" fliers to Seattle, September 28, 1924

Seattle Public Library Special Collections



A Douglas World Cruiser landing at Sand Point after the first aerial circumnavigation of the globe, Seattle, September 28, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



U.S. Army Air Service fliers on the ground after completing the first aerial circumnavigation of the globe, Seattle, September 28, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook



Dedication of the monument to the world fliers, Sand Point Naval Base, Seattle, September 29, 1924

National Air and Space Museum, United States Army Around the World Collection, Leslie Arnold Scrapbook

Excerpts from silent newsreel coverage of the first aerial circumnavigation of the globe, 1924

National Archives and Records Administration 1924 - ARC Identifier 65317



World Flight Monument, Magnuson Park, Seattle, November 22, 2023

Photo by Phil Dougherty

Sources:

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