

OBITUARY

Lincoln Ellsworth, 1880-1951

Lincoln Ellsworth, a pioneer in arctic and antarctic exploration by air, and first to fly completely across both polar regions, died on 26 May 1951 following a heart attack. He was in his 72nd year.

A restless desire to see new lands, cross new seas, and to expand earth's frontiers was the expressed motive in all that Ellsworth did. Born of wealthy parents, he decided early in life to devote himself to exploration, and gave up a life of leisure to fit himself to lead expeditions by aircraft, ship, canoe, submarine, dirigible, and on foot to Alaska, the Canadian Northwest, the Andes, and both polar regions. His expeditions were not mere stunts for fortune or self glory, but, in spite of the quiet way in which he organized them, they were often spectacular and in total added much to geographical science and to the record of courageous leadership.

After brief periods at Yale, Columbia, and McGill universities, Ellsworth left college to become an axman on the first Canadian transcontinental railroad survey. Later he was a prospector and mining engineer in Alaska and the Canadian Subarctic. Going to France as a volunteer in the First World War, he qualified as a flier only to have his service curtailed by pulmonary illness. In 1924 he led a geological expedition across the Andes from the Pacific to the headwaters of the Amazon. In 1925, with Amundsen and Riiser-Larsen he attempted a North Pole flight from Spitsbergen, but was forced back after one of the two aircraft was lost. On the return Amundsen stated that Ellsworth with almost incredible hardihood and personal risk had saved the lives of the entire expedition.

In 1927, with Amundsen and Nobile, Ellsworth flew across the North Pole in the dirigible Norge. In 1931, as representative of the American Geographical Society, he flew in the Graf Zeppelin on its arctic flight. For a time he supported Sir Hubert Wilkins' early attempts in the field of arctic submarine exploration. Although the submarine venture was unsuccessful, the association of these two explorers, when directed to the Antarctic, brought geographical results of the highest order. From 1933 to 1939, Ellsworth made numerous flights with Balchen, Hollick-Kenyon, and Lymburner in which he discovered nearly 400,000 square miles of the Antarctic Continent.

His books include: 'The last wild buffalo hunt', 'Our polar flight', 'Search', and 'Beyond horizons'. He collaborated with Amundsen in 'The first crossing of the Polar Sea'.

Although awarded high honours by his own and foreign governments and by scientific and exploring groups, Lincoln Ellsworth remained a sincerely modest man, quick to seek and act on the counsel of his expeditionary associates, whom he chose with care, but yielding to no one his unequalled leadership in courage and determination.

An Appreciation by Sir Hubert Wilkins

There has probably never been a man associated with polar and other exploration at once more fortunate and unfortunate than Lincoln Ellsworth. Much of his good fortune was thought to lie in the fact that he was financially well provided for. His father, believing Lincoln

to be dead, left his many million dollar fortune to Lincoln's sister, but she, when Lincoln with Amundsen unexpectedly returned from a long delayed sea plane take-off from the arctic pack ice, shared her fortune with him. Thus Ellsworth was able to afford almost

everything an explorer hopes for, but usually has to beg or earn. Perhaps his greatest misfortune was that very fact.

From his earliest boyhood Lincoln wanted to be a sturdy, bold adventurer, demanding by sheer physical strength, superior skill, and power of mind whatever he desired. That spirit led him, in youth, to an outdoor life in which he developed exceptional physical endurance in spite of indifferent health. In later life, until a fall over a cliff in the Grand Canyon resulted in a head injury from which he never recovered, he would think nothing of taking an afternoon walk of twenty miles to develop an appetite for dinner.

His was, to the end, a lovable, boyish character; shy and reserved, with high ideals, yet somewhat vain, petulant, possessive, and with an enjoyment of notoriety, as is the case with most boys.

Time after time, as much perhaps because of his likeable personality as for his financial aid, he was associated with hyphenated expeditions to the polar regions, with his name behind the hyphen. There was the Amundsen-Ellsworth Expedition to the Arctic, the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Expedition to the North Pole, and others. At last, it was possible to have The Ellsworth Expedition.

It was on four such expeditions which took place between 1932 and 1939, only

two of which were successful, that he alone was headlined. Twice, with Bernt Balchen as his pilot, his plans for various reasons were frustrated. Then, with Herbert Hollick-Kenyon as pilot and navigator, he flew across the Antarctic Continent to within a few miles of his destination and with the physical endurance he had acquired, walked the rest of the journey, pulling an emergency sled behind him.

That flight of 2,100 miles, accomplished according to plan, included landings and stops on the lonely, virgin snowfields to avoid flying under cloud and in stormy weather. Because of it he claimed with the consent of the U.S. State Department, but not as an appointee or under direction of the State, some 300,000 square miles of Antarctica and established the name of Ellsworth conspicuously on the map. Later, in the summer of 1938-9, with J. H. Lymburner as pilot, he flew inland over the Indian Ocean sector of the Antarctic and, recognizing Australia's claim to the foreland, claimed the inland area which no Australian had seen for the United States.

Whether the two Antarctic claims mentioned will be upheld either by the United States Government or by international agreement is for future decision, but they remain a monument to Lincoln Ellsworth's courage and fortitude.