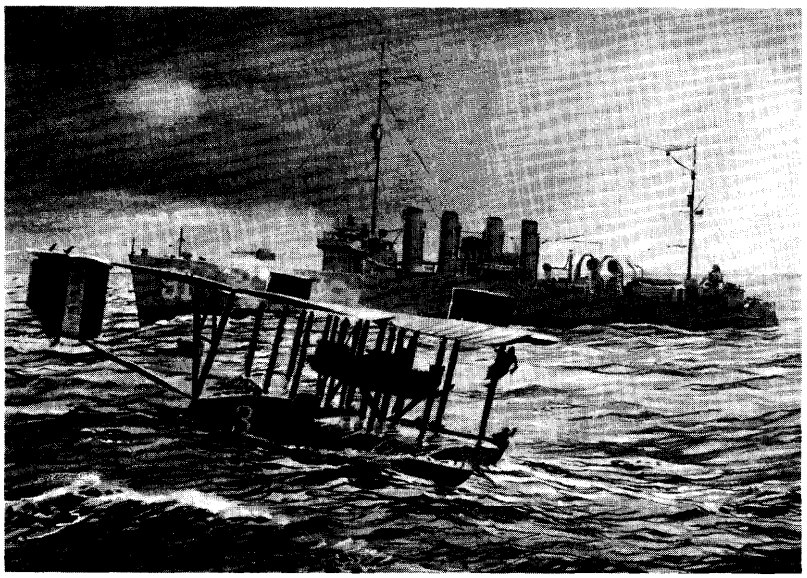
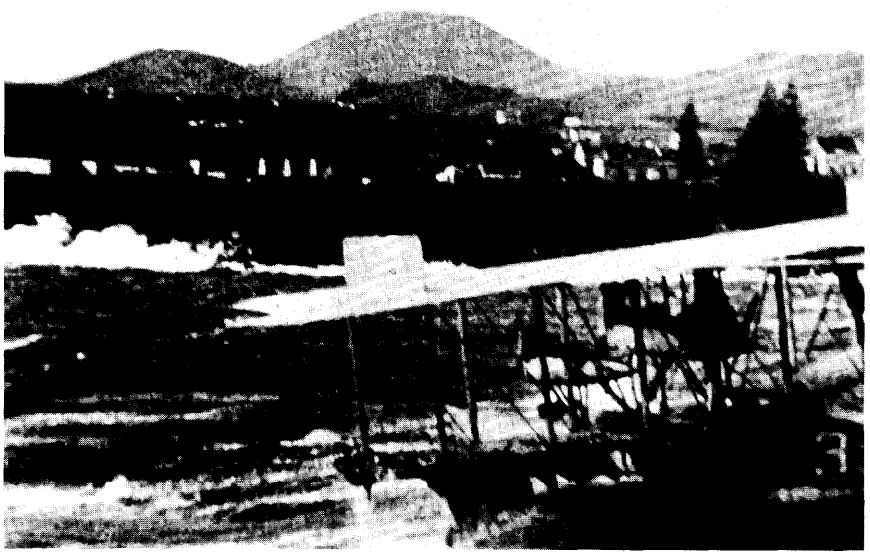
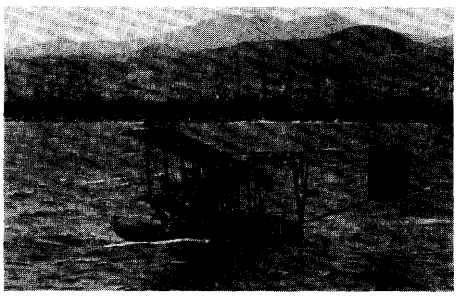
Cdr. Ted Wilbur

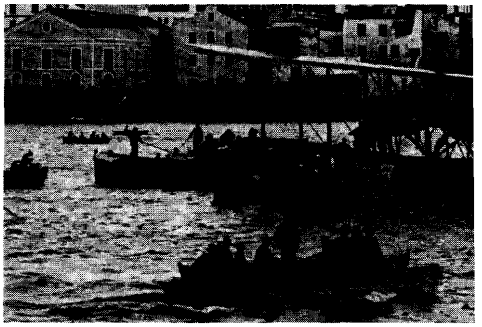


STAND OFF! *We're going in under our own power!" shouts Towers to the USS Harding off Ponta Delgada. Commander Towers had been, since 1914, the driving force and guiding genius of the plan to cross the Atlantic in an American airplane.*



NC-3 *entered harbor of Ponta Delgada in the Azores on May 19, 1919, after Towers and his crew had sailed 205 miles through varying sea conditions.*



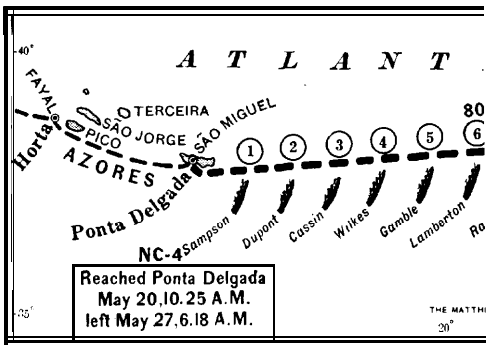


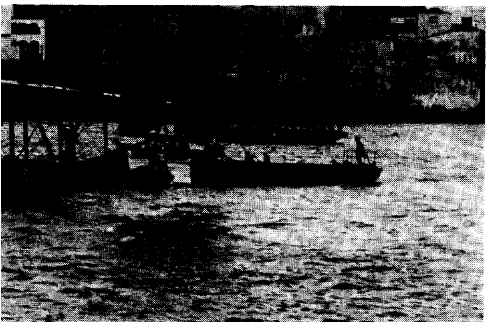
ON THE 18TH, weather was still so bad that Read and his men were forced to stay in Horta. In spite of gala celebrations and congratulatory messages from around the world, Read was concerned. There had been no word of Towers. On top of that, disturbing news came through from Canada. The British had made their move.

Stampeded by Read's successful flight to the Azores, Hawker and Grieve set out to head off the Americans. During the afternoon, they had taken off from St. John's, jettisoning their Sopwith's landing gear to gain speed for the run to Ireland. An hour later, Raynham and Morgan tried to follow but their Martinsyde couldn't make it off the field. They crashed and Morgan was seriously injured.

By the next day, Hawker and Grieve had vanished over the North Atlantic. In view of the gallant effort, all England mourned and Lord Northcliffe donated the $50,000 as a consolation prize to the flyers' widows.

On the 19th of May, a U.S. Marine battery stationed in the hills west of Ponta Delgada sighted something out to sea. As the destroyer *Harding* moved to lend assistance, John Towers stood in the heaving remnants of the





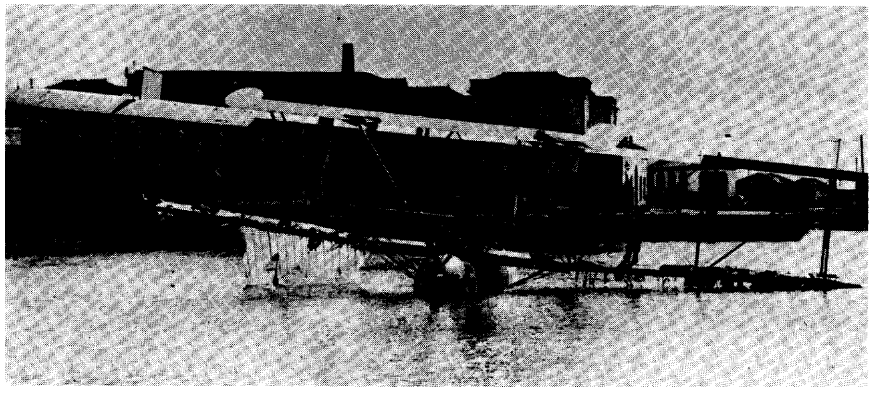
COMMANDER TOWERS *and his men show weariness in photo below, taken upon their arrival in the Azores. From left to right are CMM L. R. Moore, LCdr. R. A. Lavender, Lt. D. H. McCulloch, Cdr. H. C. Richardson and Cdr. Towers. The NC-3 was disassembled and shipped to the Naval Aircraft Factory, Philadelphia to be restored to operational condition.*

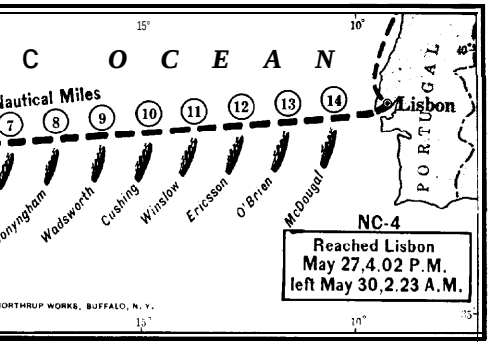
NC-3 and shouted, "Stand off! We're going in under our own power!" He and his crew had sailed the cracked and broken boat 205 miles, backwards, through violent seas to their destination. He didn't need help now.

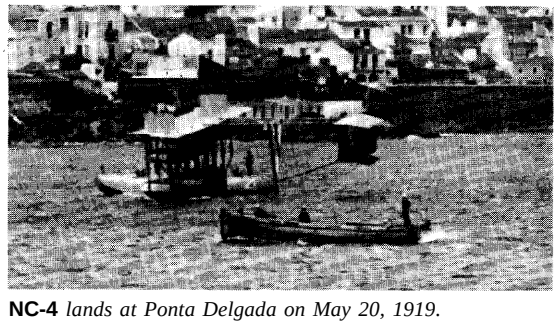
In spite of Towers' fantastic achievement, LCdr. Read was the popular hero. And so it came to be that when the NC-4 continued on to Lisbon and thence to England, Towers was not on board.

Now, when a fleet commander has his ship shot out from under him, he transfers his flag to another. The circumstance was parallel in Towers' case. Roosevelt thought so. But Josephus Daniels did not agree. Even when the question was raised on the floor of Congress, Secretary Daniels stood fast in his conviction that since Read had made it to the Azores in the NC-4, he should continue as her sole commander. Towers was forbidden even to ride along as a passenger; he was ordered to proceed to Plymouth aboard a destroyer.

It was a bitter pill for the man who was Commander of U.S. Seaplane Division One, a chief planner and organizing genius of the expedition, and it was a keen disappointment to the other members of the group, including Albert Read.







NC-4 *lands at Ponta Delgada on May 20, 1919.*