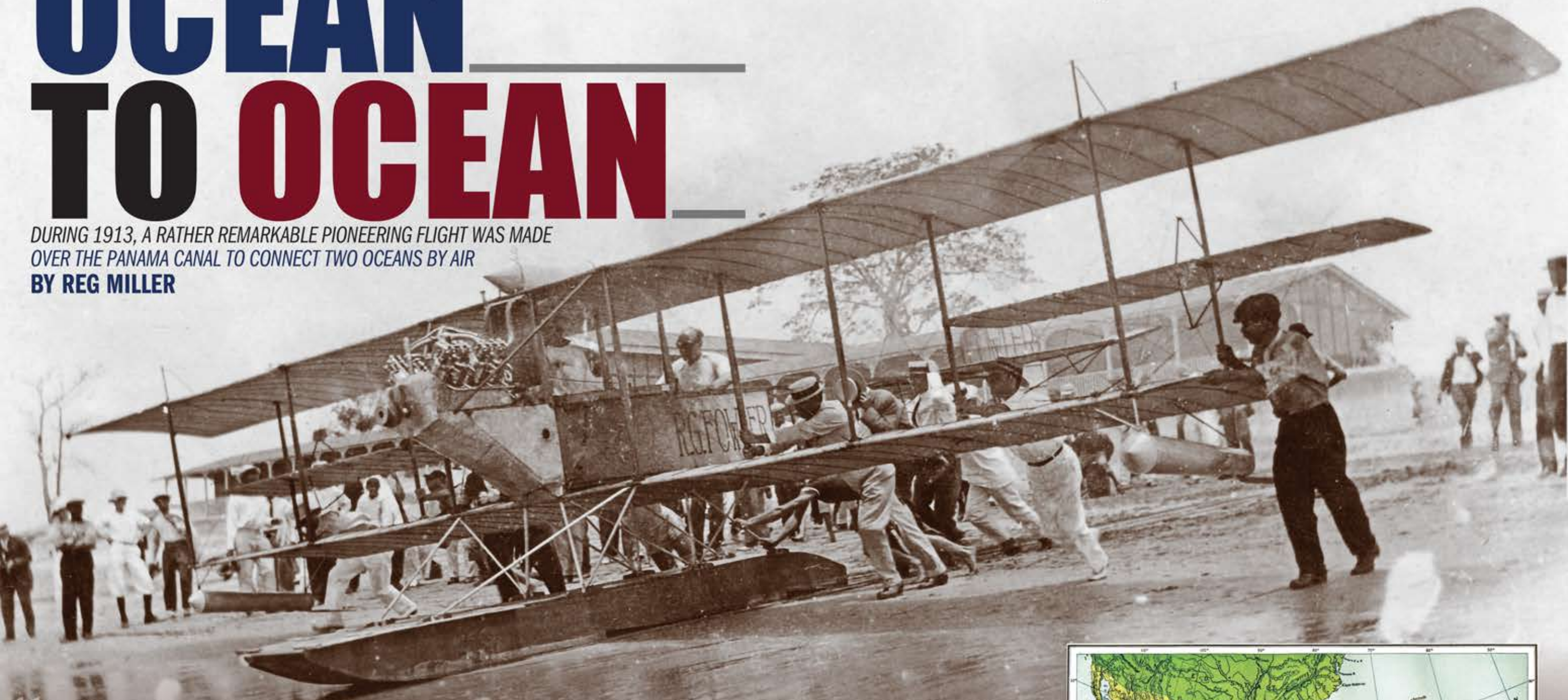


OCEAN TO OCEAN

DURING 1913, A RATHER REMARKABLE PIONEERING FLIGHT WAS MADE
OVER THE PANAMA CANAL TO CONNECT TWO OCEANS BY AIR
BY REG MILLER

Fitted with its large wooden pontoon and smaller wing tip floats, the Fowler-Gage Tractor Biplane is pushed into the water for its historic Panama flight. It should be noted that two other attempts were made to fly over the Canal. Al Welsh, O.G. Simmons, and James H. Hare were sponsored by *Collier's Weekly* while Jesse Seligman also proposed a crossing. Neither actually took place and we have not been able to determine what type of aircraft they would have utilized. *Collier's* said their "no go" decision came about from a lack of suitable landing grounds. Also, severe cross-currents and winds were cited as main problems.



I could hear the wooden structure creaking and feel it bending. I thought the aeroplane was going to come apart." With those words, Robert G. Fowler expressed his thoughts to a reporter shortly after the pioneering ocean-to-ocean flight that took place back in 1913. Piloting the primitive Fowler-Gage Tractor Biplane, the pilot had encountered turbulence that he felt could damage the fragile craft as he attempted to "steer" his contraption over very hostile terrain.

And what was this ocean-to-

ocean record flight? Basically, it is something completely forgotten today but Gage, along with cameraman Ray Duhem, flew across the Isthmus of Panama to become the first aircraft to cross from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean. The flight comprised a distance of just 52 miles but it took the groaning Fowler-Gage biplane all of one hour and 45 minutes to complete the short journey. Who was Robert Fowler and how did this record flight come about?

Bob Fowler was born during 1883

in San Francisco, California, but his father soon moved the family south to Gilroy — the self-proclaimed "garlic capital of America" — where the father's enterprising spirit led not only to farming but also to owning the local hotel and auto garage. Automobiles were the new-fangled creations that seemed to fascinate the general public and those that could afford the vehicles needed someone to fix and maintain them. Fowler senior soon found his business expanding and young son Bob developed a fascination

for all things mechanical.

Soon, Bob was not only fixing and driving the early autos, but also racing them and the love for speed and performance seemed to be in his blood. He also exhibited a lack of fear and, because of his growing list of accomplishments, at age 23 he was hired on as a chauffeur to drive a wealthy owner throughout Europe. It was an eye-opening experience and he was even able to see a dirigible fly while driving through France. That singular event sent him on an entirely



This 1910 map shows the position of Panama at the bottom center.