

0. THE FIRST FLIGHTS - Story Preface

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2. HOW POWERED FLIGHT WORKS

3. THE FIRST FLIGHTS

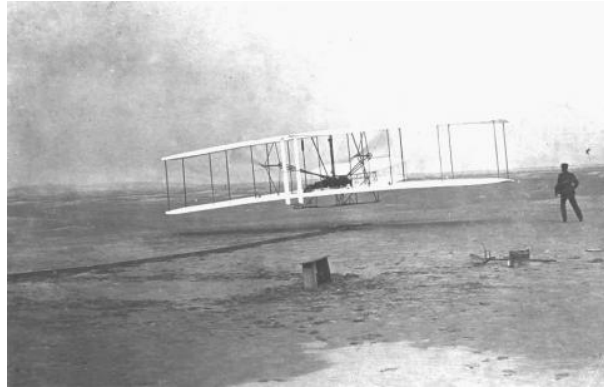
4. AMERICANS FLY FOR FRANCE

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The world's first flight of a motor-driven, heavier-than-air machine took place at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on the 17th of December, 1903. Orville Wright was at the controls of the first flight which lasted 12 seconds and covered 120 feet. Image online, [U.S. Air Force Historical Research Agency](#).

On the 17th of December, 1903, two normally cautious, deliberative, methodical, bicycle-shop-owning brothers did something surprising. They disregarded every aspect of safety to attempt the world's first powered flight.

The wind was strong that morning - gusting between 20 and 30 miles per hour. The Wright brothers had many reasons to delay their flight:

- The wind chill over the ocean would be about 4 degrees Fahrenheit - pretty cold for someone flying, outside and unprotected, on *Flyer 1*.
- Just three days before, Wilbur (who had won the coin toss determining the first to fly) took control of *Flyer 1* only to make a launch "misjudgment."
- Will's telegraph describing the misadventure, recorded by his father on December 15, reflects his great disappointment.

Even though weather conditions were extremely unfavorable on the 17th, the brothers wanted to be home for Christmas. In an uncharacteristic action, which has amazed historians ever since, the Wrights put safety second and passion first.

It was time to fly their new airplane. John Daniels, a member of the Wrights' crew, recalled those tense moments:

After a while they shook hands, and we couldn't help notice how they held on to each other's hand, sort o'like they hated to let go; like two folks parting who weren't sure they'd ever see each other again.

At about 10:30 a.m. Orville, who had lost the earlier coin toss to Wilbur, took the controls. The wind was gusting at about 27 miles per hour. Launching from a homemade track apparatus (which the brothers called their "Grand Junction Railroad"), Orville flew 120 feet in 12 seconds.

Since no one had ever flown before, the Wright brothers knew they were taking a chance. They had their life-saving crew standing by.

The crew witnessed the first time a human being ever flew a plane, under his control, from the ground, through the air, and back safely. But the short flight was jerky and unsteady. Orville, like his brother three days before, didn't have a good "feel" for the controls. Inventing a plane was one thing; actually flying it in real time was something else. They wanted to test *Flyer 1* again:

- Wilbur flew next. His flight took him 175 feet.
- Orville was pilot-in-command of the third flight, traveling 200 feet.
- The last flight - ever - of *Flyer 1* was amazing. Wilbur had a good feel of the controls. He flew 59 seconds and

covered 852 feet before he landed, breaking the rudder frame, after he lost control in a wind gust.

Hand-carrying *Flyer 1* back to the launching point, the brothers nearly lost the plane and one of their helpers, John Daniels (who had photographed the first flight). With the wind continuing to blow, the men put the plane down so they could rest. A sudden wind gust picked up one wing and, with Daniels caught in the bracing wires as he tried to protect the plane, it rolled again and again.

Daniels escaped without injury, but *Flyer 1* looked like a heap of kindling wood and torn cloth. It was later put back together and donated to the Smithsonian Institute where it is today - in the National Air and Space Museum.

The test flights (check out this simulation) proved Orville and Wilbur Wright had conquered the initial problems of flight. They had filed an application for their new invention with the U.S. Patent Office nearly nine months before.

But ... they had more work to do before they could make a practical airplane. *Flyer 1* was underpowered and hard to control. It would only fly in a straight line for about a minute.

For the next two years the brothers improved their designs. They set up the world's first test flight facilities at Huffman Prairie, today the site of Wright Patterson Air Force Base.

By the end of 1905, with *Flyer 3* still including parts which looked like they belonged on a bike, Will and Orville were flying figure-eights over Huffman Prairie until their fuel ran out. They had solved the practical problems of flight.

In 1908, Wilbur went to Europe where his flight demonstrations astonished previously skeptical audiences. (Follow this link to a movie of a flight in France. Be patient with the load time - it's worth it.)

By the following year, the Wright brothers had developed their first military flyer. Five years later, when planes were still in their infancy, Europe was embroiled in "the great war."

The Wright brothers' invention of powered flight would play a significant role in that conflict.

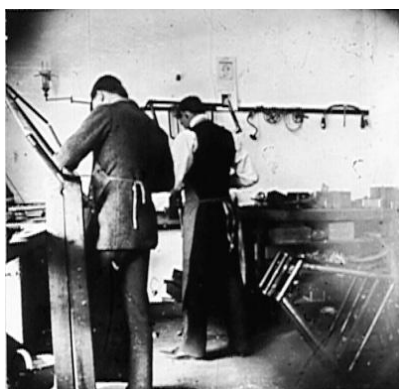
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-FIRST-FLIGHTS-Fly-Boys>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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Media Stream



Wright Brothers - Working in their Shop

Image online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

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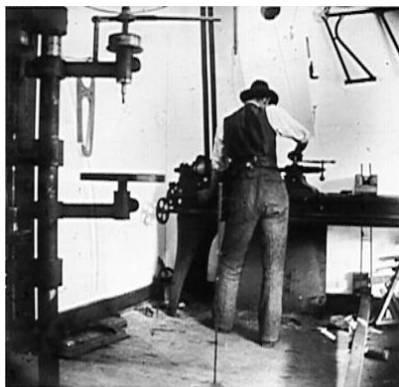


Photo - Working in the Shop

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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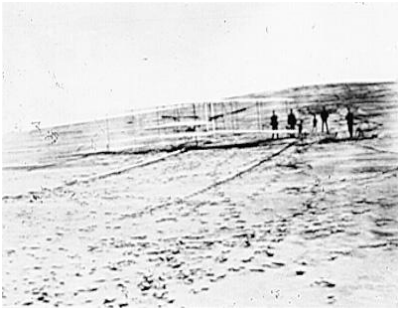


Photo - at Kitty Hawk

Image online, courtesy wright-brothers.org website.

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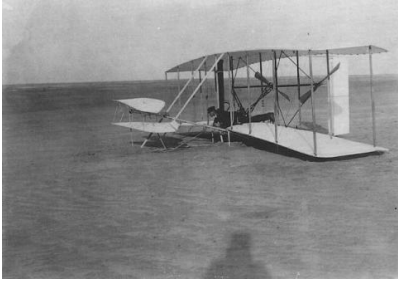
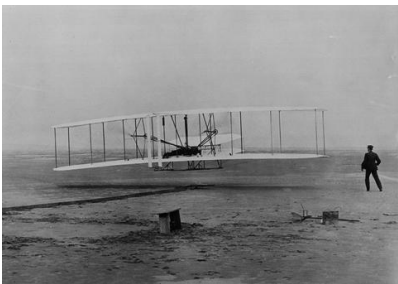


Photo - On the Ground at Kitty Hawk

Image online, courtesy wright-brothers.org website.

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Orville Wright - The Historic First Flight

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Wright Brother's - Their Life Saving Crew

Image online, courtesy wright-brothers.org website.

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Bicycle Parts on the Airplane

Image online, courtesy wright-brothers.org website.

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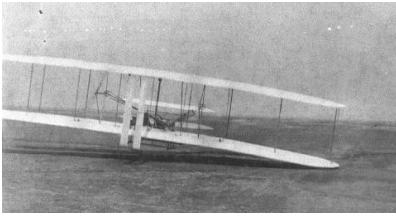
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Flyer - The Controls

Image online, courtesy wright-brothers.org website.

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Flyer - The Third Flight

Image online, courtesy wright-brothers.org website.

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Flyer 3

Image online, courtesy wright-brothers.org website.

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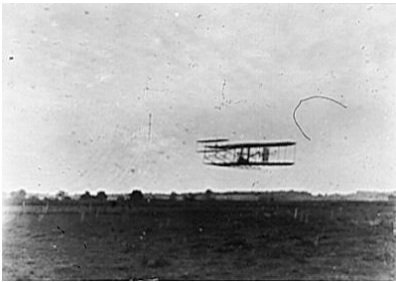


Photo - Flying Over Huffman Prairie

Image online, courtesy the wright-brothers.org website.

View this asset at:

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Photo - Man's First Powered Flight

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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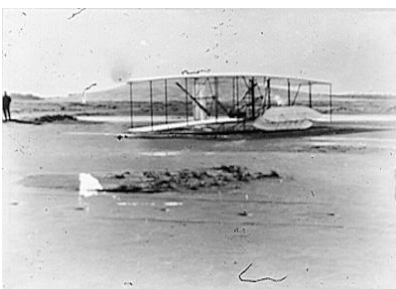
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Rear View of Flyer

Image online, courtesy the wright-brothers.org website.

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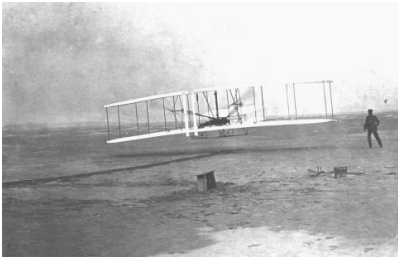
Third Flight Damage at Landing

Photograph, described above, online courtesy Library of Congress.

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THE FIRST FLIGHTS

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