

**Wright Brothers: The Birthday of
Powered Flight - Part II**

Lead: Living in cramped quarters on the wind swept coast of North Carolina and existing on short rations, Orville and Wilbur Wright brought their years of experiments to climax. The thing actually flew.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: For several years the Wrights, inventors and bicycle mechanics from Akron, Ohio, had been toying with the idea of powered flight. They achieved their goal by first

experimenting with gliders. The Outer Banks of North Carolina afforded them an excellent place to do this work. In 1903 during their annual fall trip to Kitty Hawk, they worked on a previous year's machine on good wind days and in the shop on a new machine on rainy and calm days.

The gasoline engine used was of a home-made variety and was not a very good one. Oil had to be squirted on the bearing surfaces by hand before starting it and then it would run not much more than a minute before it would seize up. The pilot for the new machine had to lie down as in the past but the engine had to be to one side of him. The motor weighed more than either of the pilots so they calculated

that four inches had to be added to the left wings to balance the plane.

Finally, after eighty-four days of experiment, they were ready to try it out. It was the middle of December and unseasonably cold. The winds were good and the Wrights had not been discouraged by a disappointing 60-foot flight on Monday. Thursday, December 17, 1903, with a camera poised to record the takeoff, Orville revved up the two home-made propellers and the double-winged airplane moved slowly down the guidance rail. It began to lift. The picture was taken just as it began the first of four flights that day. 100 feet in 12 seconds. The fourth flight was most successful. With Wilbur at the controls

the Wright brother's strange contraption flew 852 feet in 59 seconds. Powered flight had been achieved.

Despite the event's importance, most of their fellow countrymen were only mildly interested in the Wright's break-through. Initial interest was most enthusiastic in Europe and it would be some years before the airplane proved itself a valuable means of transport for goods and people, but the ingenuity demonstrated by two small town inventors, working on their own, remains a testimony to the value of an idea in the human mind and the limitless potential of the human spirit.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

**Harris, Sherwood. *The First to Fly: Aviation's Pioneer Days*.
New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Publishing
Company, 1970.**

**Schirra, Walter M., Jr. "A Raw December Day at Kitty
Hawk," *Smithsonian* 1(3, June, 1970), 28-33.**

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