

**Wright Brothers: The Birthday of
Powered Flight - I**

Lead: In 1903 Orville and Wilbur Wright, bicycle mechanics from Akron, Ohio, solved the problem of powered flight.

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

Content: At the dawn of the twentieth century men and women were still tied to the earth. Except for those short trips that could be achieved using gliders and the limited flight time of heat-fired balloons, the sky was an unwelcome place. These

scant incursions into the air above served only to tantalize scientists and others who dreamed of a day when the sky would play host to a new and swift way of escape and transport. Samuel P. Langley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Museum, had been conducting experiments in powered flight. His aerodrome tests in the Potomac River seemed to be going nowhere in 1903 when word came that two obscure inventors from Ohio had breached the wall and achieved powered flight. Without government help, with little scientific training, the two had isolated and solved the basic problems associated with manned flight and put the thing in the air.

The site of their achievement were the Outer Banks of North Carolina, a place where nature displays its awesome beauty and power with little care for those who choose to live and recreate there. For several seasons the Wright brothers had migrated to the desolate but beautiful Kill Devil Hills near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina to experiment with their gliders. The wind swept sands there provided lift for their wings, soft landings in the case of emergencies and privacy. The Wright brothers, after all, were businessmen who sensed they were on the threshold of a spectacular and potentially lucrative breakthrough. No need to let competitors in on the secrets they had solved or the ideas

they had birthed.

Not a secret, however, were the conditions under which they worked. Orville wrote his sister in the early fall that the camp had survived the winter but that the rain was coming in torrents, the mosquitoes were so thick that they turned day into night, and the lighting so terrible that it turned night into day. After eighty-four days of experiments the weather was turning bitterly cold and their diet was reduced to mostly beans. Next time: The wall is broken.

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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