

## This Day in History... July 27, 1909

# Wright Brothers Set Flight Record

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Born in 1867 and 1871, Wilbur and Orville Wright had been interested in science and technology from a young age. After receiving a flying toy as a gift from their father in 1878, they became fascinated with flight. They sought to develop a heavier-than-air flying machine that could carry a man.

Beginning in 1899, the Wright brothers initially experimented with gliders. Within four years, they had built their first airplane. With a wingspan of 40 feet and a 152-pound, 12-horsepower engine, this plane was unlike anything seen before.



*Issued in conjunction with the 1928 International Civil Aeronautics Conference.*

The first historic powered airplane flight took place in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903. Orville flew for 12 seconds and traveled 120 feet. Later that day, Wilbur flew for 59 seconds and covered 852 feet. The Wright brothers continued to improve their design.

Despite the Wright brothers' successful demonstration of powered flight, their innovation remained largely unknown for five years. This was due in part to them being somewhat reluctant to display their plane over concerns of patent theft. Plus, many simply didn't believe their claims, and when the brothers invited the press to come to watch their flights, no one came. Many believed that the mystery of flight had yet to be solved.

As the years passed, Orville and Wilbur improved their machines and flying techniques. In 1904, they made a total of 104 flights but spent only about 45 minutes in the air. However, on October 5, 1905, their machine flew 24.2 miles, remaining airborne for 38 minutes and 3 seconds. The flight was only cut short by the airplane running out of fuel. In 1906, they received a patent for the first airplane.

When the Wrights approached the US military about their invention, they were met with skepticism. The brothers were relatively unheard of, and the military had just spent \$50,000 attempting to create a flying machine, only to fail. Then in 1908, the Wrights staged successful test flights in France. These flights finally convinced the Department of War that their machine had value. They received a contract and were commissioned to build the first army airplane, Signal Corps No. 1, the Wright Military Flyer.

The brothers built the plane and tested it on July 27, 1909, at Fort Myer in Arlington County, Virginia. A crowd that included President William Howard Taft and his wife was present. Wilbur assisted from the ground while Orville piloted the plane. A lieutenant in the Army Signal Corps, Frank P. Lahm, rode as a passenger. The test flight was a success, lasting one hour, 12 minutes, and 40 seconds, setting a record at the time. They flew at an average of 40 miles per hour, showed the plane could be maneuvered in any direction, and landed without damage.

The brothers successfully met the flight requirements for the Department of War contract and received a bonus for exceeding the speed specifications. They also had to teach the first two Army pilots to fly the new planes, which they did that October. The Wright brothers played a major role in getting America's Army airborne.



*Issued for the 46th anniversary of the Wright brothers' first successful flight of a heavier-than-air powered aircraft.*



*Issued for the 100th anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight.*



*Issued for the 75th anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight.*

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