

## This Day in History... August 8, 1908

# Wright Brothers' First Public Flight

On August 8, 1908, the Wright Brothers conducted their first public flight at the Hunaudières racecourse near Le Mans, France. The flight, and the others that followed, helped the brothers earn international recognition as the inventors of the airplane.

The brothers had made history five years earlier with the first flight of their self-propelled, heavier-than-air aircraft on December 17, 1903. Despite that historic event, the brothers knew they had a long way to go before they could produce a practical flying machine. They continued to improve on their design and by 1905 had designed a plane that could fly several miles and remain in the air for over an hour at a time. However, they feared someone might steal their idea and were hesitant to display their plane publicly without a patent and an official sales contract.

Finally, by the summer of 1908, the brothers had sold some planes to the French and were working out a deal with the US Army. However, many aviators

in Europe, particularly France, doubted the brothers' claims of successful flights. So in 1908, Wilbur traveled to France to silence their critics. On August 8, 1908, he made his first public flight at the Hunaudières racecourse five miles south of Le Mans, France. His flight lasted a minute and 45 seconds. But he impressed spectators with the plane's maneuverability, banking turns and flying in circles.

The flight was the first of many Wilbur flew in Europe over the next few weeks. Each successful flight helped to silence their critics and cement the Wright Brothers' claim as inventors of the airplane. He also demonstrated that their plane was more capable of making tight turns and offered more control than other aircraft of the time.

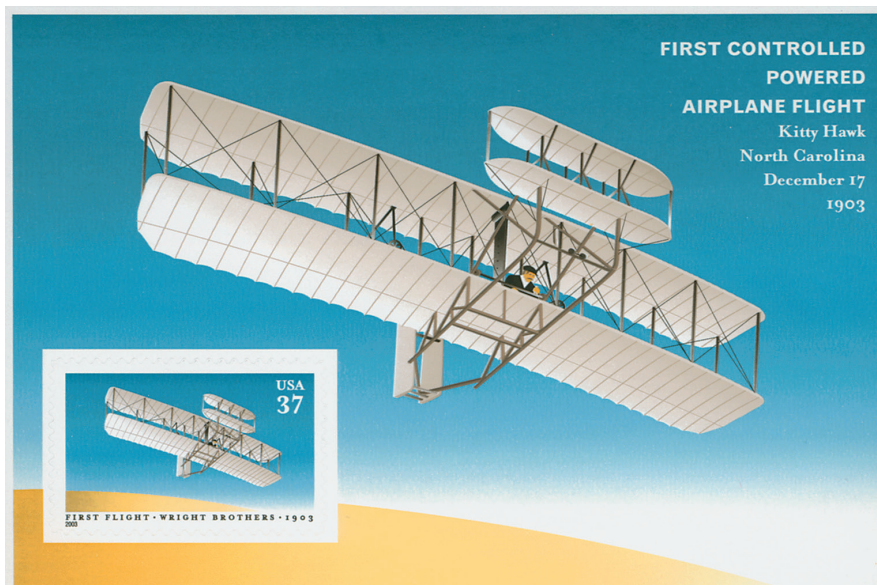
*Issued for the 46th anniversary of the brothers' flight.*

On September 3, 1908, Orville made his first public flight at Fort Myer, Virginia. He too flew several more flights in the coming weeks, and even carried passengers on many of them. However, his flight on September 17 crashed and killed his passenger.

Later in the year, Orville joined Wilbur in Europe and they continued to stage flights that attracted larger and larger crowds that included political leaders, royalty, businessmen, and ordinary citizens. Then on December 31, Wilbur flew over 76 miles in 2 hours, 18 minutes. The flight earned him the Michelin Cup for best flight of the year.



*Issued for the 25th anniversary of the brothers' 1903 flight.*



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

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

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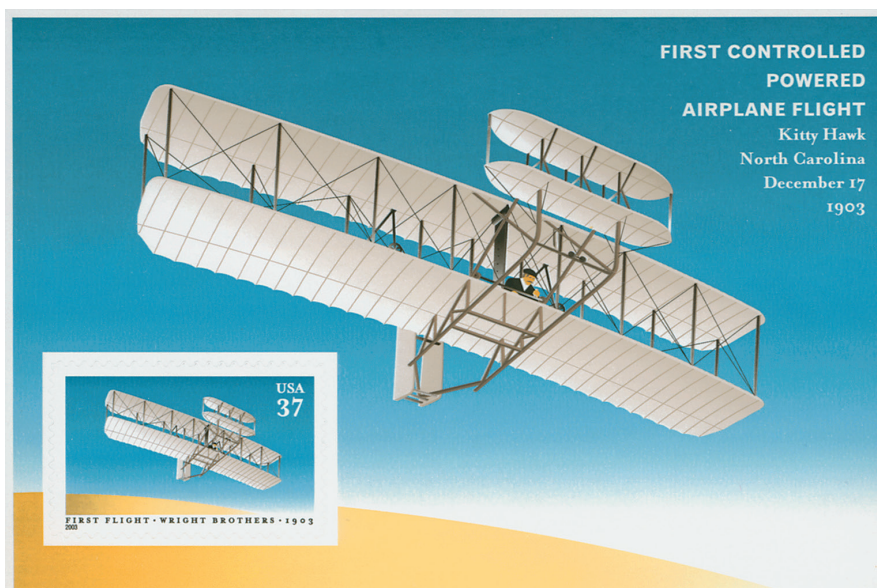
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