# Aviation Anniversary Recalls Romance In Reporting

## Virginian-Pilot Staff Member Tells Story Of His Biggest "Scoop"

### Harry P. Moore Looks Back Over 25 Years of News Writing At Great Event

### MAINTAINS SECRECY AS TO INFORMANT

By HARRY P. MOORE

**Who, 25 years ago, as a member of the Virginian-Pilot staff, scooped the world on the first story of the first flight made by man in an airplane.**

Twenty-five years ago tomorrow six persons saw a lone, daring man fly over their heads in a strange contrivance that resembled a box kite, while another man—the brother of the man in the strange aerial craft—stood on the sand at Kitty Hawk, N. C., waving his hands and shouting with joy.

Tomorrow thousands of persons will gather at Kitty Hawk to pay tribute to these men, one of whom has since died. His brother will be present to receive the honors that will be heaped upon him.

Representatives of numerous States, this nation, and others, and perhaps 300 notable airmen of the present time from America and foreign countries will be among the vast throng which will assemble at the scene of the first airplane flight, on the wind-swept coast of North Carolina.

**Orville First To Fly**

It was Orville Wright who made the first flight in an airplane, and it was his brother, Wilbur, who stood on the ground and shouted with joy as the machine they had invented at their own modest little workshop soared over these strange hills of sand.

Orville will be present at the celebration. Wilbur will be there in spirit.

But while the twenty-fifth anniversary of a great achievement is being celebrated, it will be well to turn back to the actual day—December 17, 1903—when Wilbur and Orville Wright proved to the world that man could fly.

The writer of this article, not through any great ability of his own, managed to get the first information that the two young Ohio inventors had actually solved the problem of aerial navigation. No other newspaper man, excepting Keville Glennan, then city editor of the Virginian-Pilot, knew anything about the history-making event that had occurred on the sand dunes at Kitty Hawk.

Few newspapers believed that such an event had actually occurred, when they were offered the opportunity of printing the story. Several managing editors of Western newspapers actually refused to pay the tolls on a telegraphic query in which the event was outlined and which offered the story.

**Refused To Pay Query**

The managing editor of one newspaper in Ohio, the home of the inventors, not only refused to pay for the query which amounted to only 22 cents, but he sent a sharp reply by wire to this writer in which he stated, "We do not want any such wild cock and bull story as that."

The story was offered [redacted] number of papers, but only one in each city. A price averaging from $10 to $35 was put on the story, but only a bare half dozen newspapers bought it.

Among the papers, whose editors saw the possibility that aviation was not a dream and perhaps the story of the first flight was genuine, were the Virginian-Pilot, Washington Post, New York American, Cincinnati Enquirer, Chicago Inter-Ocean and the Philadelphia Record.

Because of the confidential way in which the story was obtained and my inability to secure more than meager details, there were some inaccuracies in it. But the essential facts were correct. A man had successfully flown in an airplane—a power-driven heavier-than-air machine—and regardless of the few inaccuracies the story was correct in the main.

I obtained the story by keeping tab on Orville and Wilbur Wright. I had worked on them, followed their movements, kept in touch with what they were doing or trying to do, for more than three months.

When the two young inventors first went to Kitty Hawk, they were looked upon as "nuts." The natives said they were "crazy as loons" and after they had made several attempts to fly and failed, I, myself, was beginning to think that I was just as "looney" as the Wright brothers.

I got my first "tip" that the inventors were at Kitty Hawk by hearing them called "looney" by a beachcomber who made a visit to Norfolk. He entered a restaurant in this city one September morning at 5 o'clock in 1903 and purchased a barrel of oysters.

He said there were "two looney Yankees down at Kitty Hawk trying to learn how to fly and they want to eat some Lynnhaven oyster before they die."

"The only chance these loons have of flying, is if they should happen to get to heaven and get a pair of wings," he said.

I asked the man the nemes of these "loons" that wanted to fly and he said it was Wright.

"They are as crazy as a dog with the mange," he said. "They have already busted two crazy-looking flying things and the next thing they bust will be their heads," he said.

I managed to obtain from the man the information that there were two men at Kitty Hawk who had come down from Ohio with several big wooden boxes in which they had packed their "crazy-looking flying things."

I was acquainted with a number of Coast Guardsmen who, in those days, were called life savers. I had helped them in obtaining recognition from Congress through publicity and I communicated with them. They all replied that they would do anything I wanted done.

"I will tell you if these birds happen to get up in the air or get killed," one of them wrote me. He kept his word.

On the afternoon of December 17, 1903, I got word from my friend that the Wrights had "gone up" in their machine.

"One of them flew around just like a bird," my informant told me.

"I never did think they would fly, but darned if they didn't do it. They put a gasoline engine in the thing and after chasing it down the hill along a wooden track, it went up and flew all around the place. Everybody here thought Orville Wright would be killed before he could get down from the thing, but he landed on the sand and is all right.

"How far did the machine fly?" I asked my informant.

"It flew all over the place and around the hills down by the water. They must have flown three miles. I got out of breath trying to keep up with the thing. I ran for a mile and then I had to stop."

Only half a dozen persons, including three life savers and the two inventors, witnessed the actual flight, but perhaps a dozen others, living in widely scattered homes at Kitty Hawk, heard the buzzing of the one-horsepower motor in the machine and they rushed out into the open.

There was much excitement. Women shouted that the daring men in the strange thing would be killed and they waved their aprons and shouted with horror. When the machine started to make its descent the people rushed back into their homes and closed the doors. They were certain the man in the strange contrivance had been killed and they did not want to witness his death when the machine came back to earth.

The small number of spectators that witnessed the first flight were not enthusiastic like the crowds that gather today to witness the hop-off of a daring aviator on a long flight or to welcome one who has returned from such a flight. They wanted to have the Wright brothers case their attempts to fly. They honestly believed the two young inventors were crazy and they did not want them killed in their neighborhood.

**Owned The Hills**

But the Wright brothers were temporary owners of practically all of Kill Devil Hills. They had leased more than 600 acres of the land which is nothing but sand. They did this, they claimed, in order to keep "busy bodies" away from them. They wanted to protect their invention if it was a success and they did not want people prying around and chiding them if it proved a failure.

Orville and Wilbur Wright were excited after the first flight. They did not know how far the machine had flown.

One of them thought it was four miles and the other said three. They laughed and cried at the same time while they talked to the life-savers who had helped them take the machine from its hangar and they swore them all to secrecy.

Despite the fact that word of their success had come to me from alifesaver, they refused all requests from newspapers for information or details after I had sent a brief story to half a dozen newspapers. Wilbur Wright even denied that a flight had been made.

It was about 9 o'clock the night of the flight before the Wright brothers confirmed the story I had obtained from a life-saver. They sent a brief message to their sister in Dayton. That message read something like this:

"Flew mile and a half today. Everybody well and happy. Don't tell anybody anything."

When the few newsppaers to which I had sent the story of the first flight printed the meager details on the morning of December 18, they caused a sensation all over the country. Newspapers in practically every city in America either wired the Wright brothers or their own correspondents to get them all the news they could on the fight of the young inventors had made.

**Had to Perch in Trees**

Some newspapers sent their own staff men to Norfolk and to Kitty Hawk, but they might just as well have remained away because the Wright brothers would not permit them to come within a mile of their invention. They had posted all the land with warnings to stay off under penalty of the law and they also let it be known that any person caught prowling around would be shot. The correspondents who went to Kitty Hawk had to content themselves with climbing trees a mile away from the spot where the Wright brothers were conducting their experiments.

William Hoster, a staff man of a New York newspaper, who was one of those who spent the better part of two days in a tree trying to learn something about the inventors and their inventions, stated after his experience that it was the first time he had ever been "treed" while trying to get news.

One of the most amusing incidents in connection with the breaking of the story on the first flight was the change of attitude on the part of the newspapers that had refused the story the night before, several even refusing to pay for the query.

A newspaper in Ohio, which had turned back the query for me to pay and had sent along a sharp telegram, telling me they did not want "and cock and bull yarn like that," sent a very polite message asking me to get something on the experiments being conducted by two natives of the State, in which the publication was located.

I had so many requests for additional news of the history-making event, that I could not supply all the papers that wanted my services. I did serve those that took the original story, but did not take on any of the publications that had refused my offer of the night before.

The publication of the first story, however, was not relished by the Wright brothers. They had planned to conduct other experiments, but with the printing of the success of their first flight and the coming of so many newspaper men to their isolated station in the sand hills, they abandoned all their plans. They even refused to attempt a second flight with the newspaper men looking on.

**Wires Cluttered**

They were besieged with telegrams from newspapers everywhere, some of them offering considerable sums of money for their own story on what had been accomplished. Kitty Hawk has only one telegraph wire. It is a Government-owned seacoast wire. There were so many messages addressed to the Wright brothers that were intended to be transmitted over this lone wire that the Government operator at Norfolk said he could not handle them.

Wires were sent to Manteo which is about 20 miles from Kitty Hawk and were delivered to the inventors by life-savers who patrolled the beach. None of the messages brought an answer from the inventors. They were angry because the outside world had learned of their initial success. To safeguard their invention and to prevent reporters from learning anything about it, they dismantled the machine, packed it in big wooden boxes and left Kitty Hawk.

Reporters were waiting for them, however, and the Wright brothers knew it, so they adopted a scheme to outwit them. They sent two men to Manteo with boxes that resembled those in which the flying machine had been packed. The reporters did not know who the two strangers were. They thought they must be the Wright brothers so they sought interviews, and they got them. The two inventors remained behind until the reporters had disappeared and then they loaded their machine on a little scooner which bore the name, "Nancy Hall." This tiny craft brought the inventors and their invention to Elizabeth City, N. C. The Wrights came on to Norfolk and their machine was shipped by express to Dayton.

I saw the two inventors when they arrived here because I had kept in touch with their movements. I did not tell them I was the man who had broken the story of their first flight to the world, because I had been told that they were angry enough with me to "break my neck."

I asked them to tell me about their invention and they said they had nothing to tell. I told them that I knew they had made a flight and then Orville Wright said:

**Predicted 100 Miles An Hour**

"Yes, we made a flight. We are not prepared to say just what we have done or how be did it. We believe it will be possible for man to fly in a machine heavier than air. We are not telling the world that we have solved aerial navigation because we may not have done it.

"We do believe that it will be possible for a flying machine to fly through the air at a rate of 100 miles an hour, if our invention proves the success we hope it will."

Just how true that statement proved to be does not need confirmation. The fact that airplanes have made more han 300 miles an hour since the first day that the Wrights made their initial flight and proved the practicability of flying in a motor-driven plane, proves also that Orville Wright 25 years ago knew what he was talking about when he said it would be possible to fly through the air at the rate of 100 miles an hour.

Despite the fact that the Wright brothers had proven that it was possible for man to fly in an airplane, the United States Government offered them no assistance or encouragement. While they were being proclaimed by the entire world sa the inventors of probably the greatest contribution to aerial navigation, the officials of their own country practically discouraged every attempt to have their invention recognized by the Government.

Just prior to December, 1903, Prof. Samuel Langley, of the Smithsonian Institute, had met with failure in an attempt to fly a heavier-than-air machine. He received the financial backing of the United States Government, about $60,000 having been supplied him to carry on the experiments with his flying machine.

Professor Langley named his flying craft the "Buzzard." He conducted his experiments on the Potomac below Mt. Vernon. When the "Buzzard" attempted to fly it fell into the river and was wrecked.

The success of the Wrights, coming so soon after the wreck of the "Buzzard," caused politicians and others who had been supporting the Langley invention to speak in disparaging terms of the contrivance invented by the Ohioans. It was even intimated that the Wrights had obtained their ide from the Langley machine, but this was proven to be false as the Wright plane was distinctively different from the "Buzzard." Political influence, however, prevented the Wrights from obtaining the recognition they were entitled to in America.

**Foreign Nations Alert**

Two foreign countries, however, were quick to recognize the merits of the machine and the young inventors were invited to Italy and France to conduct further experiments with a promise of financail backing if they were successful.

The inventors accepted the invitation from Italy and went to Rome in 1905 where they gave a demonstration of what their machine could do. They were only in the air for about two minutes, but the Italians were satisfied that they had solved the problem of aerial navigation.

But the young inventors did not sell any of their rights to Italy and returned to America much encouraged with the support they had received in Rome and the prospect of developing their invention until all possibility of doubt as to its ability to fly was removed. They built a new machine, an improvement on the old one and returned to the scene of their first success.

They came back to Kitty Hawk in 1908 and on May 6 of that year made the first flight in the improved machine. This was only a short flight but it was a flight just the same. On May 7 rain and easterly winds prevented them from attempting another flight but on the following day, May 8, two flights were made, the inventors taking turns on going up.

Because of stormy weather no further experiments were conducted until May 14 and on that day their machine was wrecked after it had flown for about two miles. Several American and foreign newspapers sent special men to Kitty Hawk to watch the Wrights during their 1908 experiments, but like in 1903 they were able to obtain only meager information. Among the correspondents present that I can recall were Bryon R. Newton, representing the New York Herald, a Mr. McGowan, of the London Daily Mail; Arthur Ruhl, of Colliers Weekly, and William Hoster, of the New York American.

Bruce Salley, a member of the staff of the Norfolk Landmark and later of the New York Herald, was the first newspaper man to obtain a story of the 1908 flight. He was at Kitty Hawk and he sent his story to the New York World and other papers.

**Built Other Planes**

After the wreck of their machine in 1908 the Wrights set out to build others and from that time on they continued to improve each one they made.

President-elect Hoover, as Secretary of Commerce, visited Kitty Hawk about two years ago in search of a suitable place on which to erect the proposed Government memorial to aviation.

Because of the complete isolation of the place, he said, it was remarkable that the outside world ever learned of the first flight until the inventors were ready to tel lthe story.

"How in the world did Mr. Moore obtain information of the first flight when he was in Norfolk and only half a dozen people witnessed it in this isolated spot?" he asked A. W. Drinkwater, Government telegraph operator at Manteo, which is about 10 miles from Kitty Hawk.

Mr. Drinkwater said he did not know, but he did know that the story went out to the world on the very day the flight occurred.

"I think the story of the first flight, as meager as it was, is one of the best examples of journalism that has come to my attention," said Mr. Hoover. "I think a story on how the story of the first flight was obtained would make interesting reading."

Orville Wright declared that he did not know that anybody knew about the first flight except his brother and himself and the few natives of Kitty Hawk.

"I am glad, however, that it was known so soon now, although when we heard the news had gone out we were very much chagrinned and angry," he said.

"We had tried so hard to keep our invention a secret, but at that nothing was said until the flight had been accomplished. Mr. Moore had a perfect right to use the story after he got it, but we tried to keep him or anybody else from getting it."

**Virginian-Pilot's Story**

"Under the caption, "Flying Machine Soars Three Miles in Teeth of High Winds Over Sand Hills and Waves at Kitty Hawk on Carolina Coast," the Virginian-Pilot, that time one of two newspapers published in Norfolk, printed on the morning of December 18, 1903, the following account of the first successful flight ever made in an airplane.

"The problem of aerial navigation without the use of a balloon had been solved at last.

"Over the sand hills of the North Carolina coast yesterday, near Kitty Hawk, two Ohio men proved that they could soar through the air in a flying machine of their own construction, with the power to steer it and speed it at will.

"This, too, in the face of a wind blowing at the registered velocity of 21 miles an hour.

"Like a monster bird the invention hovered above the breakers and circled over the rolling sand hills at the command of its navigator and after soaring for three miles, it gracefully descended to earth again and rested lightly upon the spot selected by the man in the car as a suitable landing place.

"While the United States Government has been spending thousands of dollars in an effort to make practicable the ideas of Professor Langley, of the Smithsonian Institute, Wilber and Orville Wright, two brothers, natives of Dayton, Ohio, have quietly, even secretly, perfected their invention and put it to a successful test.

"They are not yet ready that the world should know the methods they have adopted in conquering the air, but the Virginian-Pilot is able to state authentically the nature of their invention, its principles and its chief dimensions.

"The idea of the box kite has been adhered to strictly in the basic formation of the flying machine.

"A huge framework of light timbers, 32 feet wide, five feet deep and five feet across the top, forms the machine proper. This is covered with a tough, but light canvas.

"In the center, and suspended just below the bottom plane it the small gasoline engine which furnishes the motive power for the propelling and elevating wheels.

"These are two six-bladed propellers, one arranged just below the center of the frame, so gauged as to exert an upward force when in motion and the other extends horizontally to the rear from the center of the car, furnishing the forward impetus.

"Protruding from the center of the car is a huge fan-shaped rudder of canvas, stretched upon a frame of wood. This rudder is controlled by the navigator and may be moved to each side, raised or lowered.

"Wilbur Wright, the chief inventor of this machine, sat in the operators car and when all was ready his brother unfestened the catch which held the invention at the top of the slope.

"The big box began to move slowly at first, ecquiring velocity as it went, and when half way down the hundred feet the engine was started.

"The propeller in the rear immediately began to revolve at a high rate of speed and when the end of the incline was reached the machine shot out into space without a perceptible fall.

"By this time the elevating propeller was also in motion and, keeping its altitude, the machine slowly began to go higher and higher until it soared 60 feet above the ground.

"Maintaining this height by the action of the under wheel, the navigator increased the revolutions of the rear propeller and the forward speed of the huge affair increased until a velocity of 8 miles an hour was attained. All this time the machine headed into a 21-mile wind.

"The litle crew of fisher folk and coast guards, who had been watching the construction of the machine with unconcealed curiosity since September 1, were amazed. They endeavored to race over the sand and keep up with the thing of the air, but it soon distanced them and continued its flight alone, save the man in the car.

"Steadily its pursued its way, first tacking to port, then to starboard and then driving straight ahead.

"It is a success," cried Orville Wright to the crowd on the beach after the first mile had been covered.

"But the inventor waited. Not until he had accomplished three miles, putting the machine through all sorts of maneuvers en route, was he satisfied.

"Then he selected a suitable place to land, and, gracefully circling, drew his invention slowly t othe earth, where it settled like some big bird in the chosen spot.

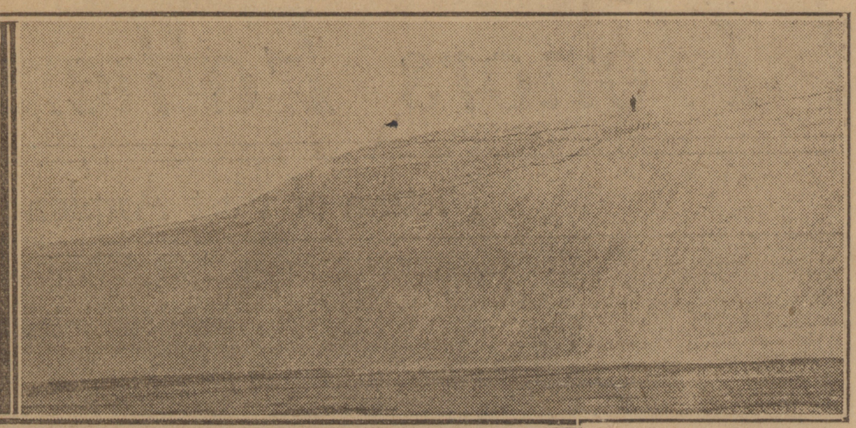
"Eureka," he cried, as did the alchemist of old.

"Success After Failure"

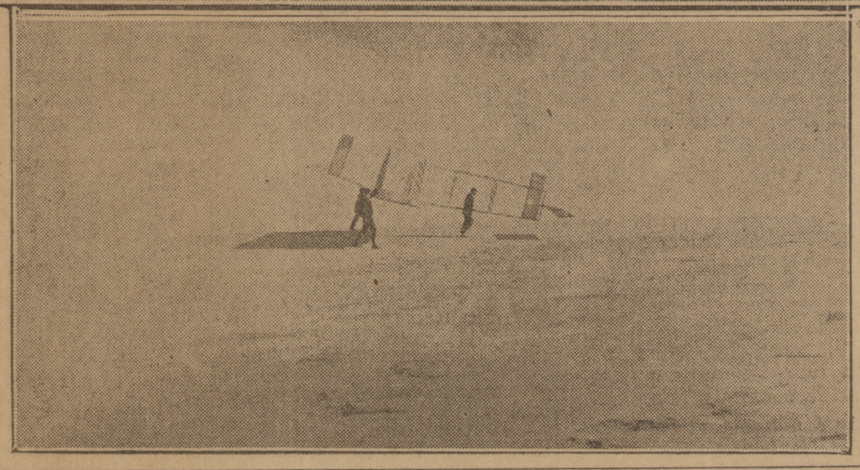
"The success of the Wright brothers in their invention is the result of three

(Continued on Page 8)

## Where Man Became Master of Winged Flight



At the left, the summit of the highest of the Kill Devil Hills, where the silver anniversary celebration of the Wrights' flight will be held tomorrow and where a huge monument will be erected by the Government. The picture was taken from an airplane by the U. S. Army Air Corps, Second Photo Section, Langley Field. At the right is a view of Kill Devil Hill from near its base. It is 92 feet high. Note the man standing on the summit. Below, early type of Wright glider used to determine balance at Kitty Hawk. Equipped with motor, this type of machine evolved into the power-driven airplane. The reproduction is from an original photograph belonging to A. W. Drinkwater.



## "Scooped" World

Harry P. Moore, who, 25 years ago, "scooped" the world on the first flight of the Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk. He has served continuously as a member of the staff of the Virginian-Pilot 27 years.

## At Telegraph Key

Alpheus W. Drinkwater, of Manteo, N. C., who sent out the first story of the Wrights' flight over telegraph.

## The First Page In Aeronautical History

12 Pages In Two Parts

Virginian-Pilot.

Democratic Party IN VICTORY OR DEFEAT

VOL. XIX. NO. 68. NORFOLK, VA., FRIDAY DECEMBER 18, 1903. TWELVE PAGES. THREE CENTS PER COPY.

FLYING MACHINE SOARS 3 MILES IN TEETH OF HIGH WIND OVER SAND HILLS AND WAVES AT KITTY HAWK ON CAROLINA COAST

TALLY SHEETS WILL DECIDE CONTEST

Chairman Dey Forced to Return From Richmond to Get Sheets For Committee

FREHY FACTION HAS ADVANTAGE THUS FAR

All Proxies Ruled Out of Meeting by Decisive Vote Before Fight Began

BOTH SIDES TO ABIDE BY FINAL DECISION

U. S. LANDING PARTY FINDS STRONG CAMP OF COLOMBIAN TROOPS

Natives Obey Orders of American Flag Hauled Down on Cutter But it Stays Put

TO DEEPEN THE HARBOR AT NORFOLK

Secretary of War to Report Plan to Congress For Making Ship Channel Here 35 Feet Deep to Float Big Warships

SENATOR MARTIN INTRODUCED MEASURE

"WANTS CANAL BUILT WITHOUT SUSPICION OF NATIONAL DISHONOR"

Senator Hoar and Gorman in Fiery Debate on Floor of the Senate

NO BALLOON ATTACHED TO AID IT

Three Years of Hard, Secret Work by Two Ohio Brothers Crowned With Success

ACCOMPLISHED WHAT LANGLEY FAILED AT

With Man as Passenger Huge Machine Flew Like Bird, Under Perfect Control

BOX KITE PRINCIPLE WITH TWO PROPELLERS

COTTON TRADE TO DEFEAT COTTON GAMBLING

English Spinners to Meet In Manchester to Discuss Curtailing the Production—International Movement Possible

SCARE OF SHORTS ADVANCES COTTON

THIRTY MILLION FOR RUNNING RISK

SENSATIONAL INCIDENT IN THE OYSTER FIGHT

Above is a photograph of the front page of the Virginian-Pilot 25 years ago Tuesday. It was one of a half-dozen newspapers in the United States to print the story of the Wright brothers' flight the morning after the memorable event at Kitty Hawk

## Has Priority, Too

John T. Daniels, of Roanoke Island, N. C., who was the first victim of an airplane accident. It was he who grabbed the plane on December 17, 1903, after several flights by the Wrights when a sudden gust of wind hit it and toppled it over and over. Holding on, he was bruised and bumped considerably, but not seriously injured.