

# This Day in History... August 19, 1871

## Happy Birthday Orville Wright

Aviator and inventor Orville Wright was born on August 19, 1871, in Dayton, Ohio.

Orville was one of seven children born to a bishop in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Wilbur, with whom he'd build the first successful airplane, was four years older, born in April 1867.



*Issued for the International Civil Aeronautics Conference and pictures the Wright Brothers plane. Orville was among the guests at the conference.*

Orville was a curious child with a habit of getting into trouble. However, his parents greatly encouraged his curiosity. As he later wrote in his memoir, "We were lucky enough to grow up in an environment where there was always much encouragement to children to pursue intellectual interests; to investigate whatever aroused curiosity."

Orville's father traveled quite a bit for his church work. During one of his trips in 1878, he bought a toy helicopter for his boys. The device fascinated Orville and Wilbur and it sparked an interest in aeronautics that would last a lifetime.

In 1881, the Wright family moved to Richmond, Indiana.

While there, Orville became fascinated with kites and began making his own. The family's stay in Richmond was short-lived, and they returned to Ohio in 1884. Though he was bright and curious, Orville had little interest in school – he preferred to explore his hobbies. So during his senior year, he dropped out of high school and opened his own print shop. He'd worked in a print shop the previous summer and used that experience to design his own printing press. By 1889, he was publishing his own weekly newspaper, the West Side News, with his older brother Wilbur as the editor.

By the 1890s, Orville and his brother joined in the bicycle craze that was sweeping across the country. In 1892, they opened their own bicycle shop where they sold and fixed bikes. Four years later, they started building bikes of their own design. Their bikes used a self-oiling wheel hub that Orville invented.

Over the years, Orville and his brother remained interested in flight, keeping up-to-date on the latest aviation news. Then, in 1896, famed German aviator Otto Lilienthal died in a glider crash. The brothers were convinced that safer flight was possible and finally decided to dedicate their attention to aviation. They chose to move to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, which was known for its heavy winds that were helpful for flight.

Working together, Orville and Wilbur experimented with wings, having observed the way birds angled their wings to balance their bodies while flying. They developed a concept of "wing warping" and used a movable rudder for their first plane. On December 17, 1903, they made their historic first flights. Each of them flew the plane twice, with the longest flight lasting 59 seconds across a distance of 852 feet.

Word of their achievement made the brothers famous, though many were skeptical if their claims were true. The US government had been interested in flying machines, but all the ones they'd funded previously had failed. So while Wilbur traveled to Europe, Orville went to Washington, DC. In July 1909, he put on demonstration flights for the Army and sold their plane for \$30,000.

Soon, the brothers had contracts in the US and Europe and they quickly became successful businessmen. On May 25, 1910, Orville flew a plane for six minutes with Wilbur as his passenger. It was the only time they ever flew together, as their father requested they didn't for fear of losing them both in an accident. That same day, Orville took his father on the only plane ride of his life.

After Wilbur died in 1912, Orville was left to take over the presidency of their company. He had little interest in running a business and sold it in 1915. For the next 30 years, he served on various aeronautics boards and committees, including the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (the precursor of NASA).

In 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt declared Orville's birthday to be National Aviation Day. Orville later died from a heart attack on January 30, 1948.



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



*Issued for the 46th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first flight.*



*Issued for the 50th anniversary of powered flight.*



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

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