

# This Day in History... November 22, 1898

## Birth of Wiley Post

Wiley Hardeman Post was born on November 22, 1898, Van Zandt County, Texas.

Post's family moved to Oklahoma when he was five. It was in Oklahoma that Post first saw an airplane (a Curtiss-Wright Pusher-type), at the county fair in Lawton. That event began his love of flight, leading Post to enroll in the Sweeney Automobile and Aviation School in Kansas City.

After seven months at the school, Post returned to Oklahoma and worked at a construction company. When World War I broke out, he wanted to become a pilot in the US Army Air Service. He joined a training camp at the University of Oklahoma and studied radio technology. However, the war ended before he completed his training. After that, Post worked in an oilfield, but the work was irregular and he briefly resorted to armed robbery. Post was arrested and spent over a year in jail, before being released in 1922.

Post began his flying career as a parachutist for a flying circus at age 26. In 1926, he lost his eye in an oilfield accident but used the monetary damages to buy his first plane. It was around this time that Post met fellow Oklahoma native Will Rogers when he flew him to a rodeo. They developed a close friendship that lasted a lifetime.

Post piloted a Lockheed Vega airplane for a wealthy oilman. In 1930, Post flew the plane, nicknamed *Winnie Mae*, in the National Air Race Derby from Los Angeles to Chicago and won the race. He gained national attention and fixed his sights on bigger feats.

On June 23, 1931, Post and his navigator Harold Gatty took off from Long Island, New York, for a flight around the world. They finished their 15,474-mile trip in less than nine days. The previous flight in a *Graf Zeppelin* airship took 21 days.

In spite of this great accomplishment, Post often heard suggestions that Gatty had directed the effort, and earned more acclaim. Post set out immediately to prove his critics wrong. Equipping his plane with new technology – an early form of autopilot and a radio direction finder – he left Floyd Bennett Field in New York on July 15, 1933.

Post experienced some issues with the autopilot, but it did help him stay on course. And the radio direction finder allowed him to locate any radio station's transmitter. Stopping in Berlin and the Soviet Union before returning to North America, Post completed the trip in 7 days, 18 hours, and 49 minutes – 21 hours faster than his previous record.

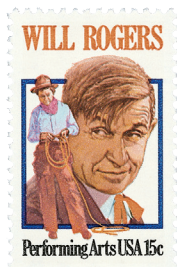
In 1934, Post began stretching the limits of human and airplane capability by experimenting with high-altitude flight. Because the cabin of *Winnie Mae*, which he owned by this time, wasn't pressurized, Post worked with the B.F. Goodrich Company to develop the first pressure suit. It consisted of a layer of long underwear, a black rubber air pressure bladder, and an outside layer of parachute fabric. Rubber boots and a diver's helmet completed the outfit. On his first flight, Post flew 40,000 feet in the air.

On August 15, 1935, Wiley Post and Will Rogers were flying in Alaska. Post was exploring the possibility of an airmail route to Russia. Rogers went along to gather material for his humorous newspaper column. They encountered bad weather near Point Barrow, Alaska, and crashed, killing both men instantly. Two monuments were later placed at their crash site, and the nearby Wiley Post-Will Rogers Memorial Airport was named in their honor.

There's also an airport in Oklahoma named for Post and in 1997 he was inducted into the International Air and Space Hall of Fame at the San Diego Air and Space Museum.



*These stamps were issued two days before Post's 81st birthday.*



*Stamp issued the same month as the Wiley Post stamps above.*

# This Day in History... November 22, 1998

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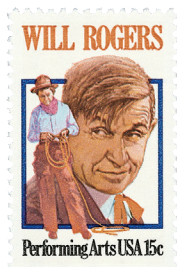
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