

Before 1903 people had flown in hot-air balloons and in motorless gliders, but—leaving aside one or two claims that are not officially accepted—until that year no one had ever flown in a power-driven, heavier-than-air machine, or aeroplane. Two American brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, invented and tested the first practical aeroplane. On December 17, 1903, Orville Wright made an initial flight of 12 seconds at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Within a year the brothers had built a craft that could stay aloft, and turn and bank. Other aircraft soon followed, and within a few years aeroplanes were carrying mail, crossing the English Channel, and fighting in World War I.