



Smithsonian
National Air and Space Museum

Orville Wright Early Flight
Description Letters [Kahler]

2015

National Air and Space Museum Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Air and Space Museum Archives
Title:	Orville Wright Early Flight Description Letters [Kahler]
Identifier:	NASM.2015.0024
Date:	(bulk 1908-1909)
Extent:	0.05 Cubic feet ((1 folder))
Creator:	Kahler, Armin Adolphus
Language:	English
Digital Content:	Image(s): Orville Wright Early Flight Description Letters [Kahler]

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

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Preferred Citation

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Restrictions

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Biographical / Historical

The Wright brothers inaugurated the aerial age with the world's first successful flights of a powered heavier-than-air flying machine. After building and testing three full-sized gliders, the Wrights' first powered airplane flew at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903, making a 12-second flight, traveling 36 m (120 ft), with Orville piloting. The best flight of the day, with Wilbur at the controls, covered 255.6 m (852 ft) in 59 seconds. By 1908 the Wrights were demonstrating their machines in Europe. The U.S. Army Signal Corps advertised for bids for a two-seat observation aircraft and in September 1908 and June and July 1909, the Wrights flew at official Army trials at Fort Myer, Virginia. (It was here that powered flight's first fatality occurred: the tragic death of Lieutenant Thomas Selfridge.) A number of other demonstration

flights were made, and records set, during this time period. On September 9, 1908, Orville Wright set three new endurance records at Fort Myer, two for flights with pilot only (57 minutes, 31 seconds and 62 minutes, 15 seconds respectively) and one for flight with passenger (6 minutes, 24 seconds with passenger Frank Purdy Lahm). The flight with Lahm was also probably the first night airplane flight. On July 30, 1909, Orville Wright made the first cross country trip from Fort Myer to Alexandria, Virginia and return with Benjamin Delahauf Foulois acting as passenger-observer. Armin Adolphus Kahler was an optical instrument maker residing in Washington, DC during the time of these flights.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of four letters written by Armin Adolphus Kahler, an optical instrument maker residing in Washington, DC, during the time of these flights, to Lenore E. Sartor (later his wife) which include first-hand descriptions of flights made by Orville Wright in the time period of 1908-1909. One letter pertains to the endurance flights on September 9, 1908; one letter describes the 1909 Fort Myer Trials; and two letters mention the first cross country trip from Fort Myer to Alexandria on July 30, 1909, including an unsuccessful attempt made on July 29, 1909. Some of the letters note the presence of President William Howard Taft. The collection also contains a letter dated June 3, 1941 from then-Secretary of the Smithsonian Charles Greeley Abbot to Kahler regarding Kahler's birthday wishes to him and enclosing sermons (not included in the collection). Finally, the collection includes a black and white photograph (approximately 2.75 by 4.5 inches) of Kahler.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Aeronautics

Types of Materials:

Correspondence

Names:

US Army Signal Corps
Wright, Orville