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English Course B2.2

Famous Historical Figure

The Wright Brothers

At the turn of the 20th century, the problem of sustainable flight has caught the attention of various inventors. The idea of a man flying as freely as a bird had been a man’s dream since the dawn of time. Most people are familiar with the Myth of Daedalus and Icarus, and how Daedalus flew using wings made of wax and feathers, which tells us people even in the ancient times have been asking themselves a question: “What would it be like if a man could fly as a bird does?”. It is now known, not only the pople of Ancient Greece were asking themselves this question, but the people of Ancient China, India and the the Medieval Europe as well. The famous Renaissace inventor, Leonardo Da Vinci has been credited with many inventions but among a few that stand out are flying machines. This has powered the imagination of inventors to come, and once the technology of the 19th century had enabled the man to rise to an altitude and glide for a period of time, the problem of controlling a flight emerged. This was known as “the flight problem”.

To solve this problem, many inventors of the time tried numerous approaches, mostly basing their inventions on the way the birds fly. However, this hadn’t given any results. Two brothers, Orville and Wilbur Wright, set their minds to solve this problem. During childhood they moved a lot because their father worked as a bishop. Eventually the family settled in Dayton, Ohio. They were troublesome in school, often earning themselves disciplinary measures. In their teens, a father gave them a present, a toy helicopter, made out of bamboo, which they played with until it broke. Then they built one of their own. This sparked their interest in flying. In that period, the need for bicycle repair was high, so the brothers opened a bicycle repair shop, which eventually helped them earn valuable skills needed for building airplanes. Between late 1890s and early 1900s they experimented a lot with their ideas of flight, basing their ideas on ideas of other aviation inventors. Because of the events leading to deaths of some inventors, the brothers were more and more confident a reliable and controllable flight system is neccessary for the flight problem to be solved. One of the ideas they had was to build a tail rudder, and embedd the ailerons into wings, and in their testing it proved to be the solution they were looking for for many years. They iterrated on the protypes, improved their design, and made many tests. Around the same period, a combustion engine was invented, and the idea of having a flying machine powered with an engine was not difficult to imagine. This fueled the interest of the military, and the military contract was to be awarded to the first person who proves they solved the flight problem – meaning they can prove control over the aircraft for a specified amount of time. The Wright Brothers knew they had solution to this problem, but due to their concern of their patent being stolen, they didn’t want to demonstrate their invention without a signed contract. The military wanted the demonstration first. Years passed, and in this time, the brothers flew by themselves in secrecy, for their own enjoyment. They broke all existing records in this period but no officials were there to record it. The military was growing desperate from numerous failed attempts at assigning a contract. The brothers’ achievements were difficult to hide. So the military gave up and the brothers had a demo at the same time, one brother in France, and another in the U.S.

After the demonstration, everyone was delighted and their solution was now officially accepted as the solution to the flight problem. The measurement data they published was invaluable to later aircraft designs. The part of the Dayton Ohio, where brothers Wright made a controllable flight, for their own enjoyment before anyone in the world could accept that a man could fly in a controllable manner, was near the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base where the Dayton Peace agreement was signed.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wright\_brothers