



The Flyer

First Flight Society Newsletter

2010-2

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Member Focus: Bill Dyer, Jr. - 18,000 hours in the Air!

By Joe Hardman

An "Aviator's Aviator" is how Bill Dyer (Willard M. Dyer, Jr.) is known to his fellow directors of the First Flight Society. A Board member for over two decades, Bill still serves on the nominating group that selects the Society's honoree, cited each year at the observances at the Wright Brothers National Memorial. He also served as the 2nd Vice President from 2005 to 2008 and continues to serve on the committee that selects the First Flight Shrine honoree each year.

Concealed beneath his modest, unassuming and matter-of-fact manner, Bill reluctantly and with reticence, acknowledges that he has been a flyer for nearly 80 of his 85 years. Starting first with flights with his father and uncle before WWII, Bill won his pilot's wings with the U.S. Army Air Force in 1943. Since then he has continued as an active pilot, culminating in 67 years of flying.

In total, Bill has logged over 18,000 flying hours (the equivalent of nine work years), but he adds: "I've never bent an airplane yet." He has held licenses and ratings as pilot, instructor, instrument flyer, with multi-engine and commercial (Air Transport Rating) certifications as well as a meteorologist.

During WWII, Bill generated many hours flying Douglas DC-3 twin-engine transports (C-47, C-53), followed by transition training on the Boeing B-29 when the war ended. Returning home to Carolina after the war, Bill rejected opportunities for numerous ground jobs to return to his first focus: flying. Bill flew several years as a pilot on regional airlines, flying his old favorite: DC-3 type airplanes. In 1951, Bill joined ServAir Corp., serving as a flight instructor at one of nine civilian flight schools for the U.S. Air Force. For over six years, Bill flew at Kinston, N.C.'s Stallings Field training many classes of would-be Air Force pilots. Today, the Field continues developing and expanding aviation enterprises in the global jet age as the site of N.C.'s Global TransPark, and with its 11,500 feet main runway, it provides one of the nation's longest civilian facilities.

At Kinston, Bill trained some 125 individuals to qualify for USAF wings. He still maintains regular contact with his "graduates" through his extensive home files. As he reports, "I really loved to instruct people to solo and to enjoy flying."

The training regime ran two sections per day from 5am to 11pm using such aircraft as the Piper PA-18, North American T-6 (the fabled Texan), the North American T-28 and Beech T-34.

After leaving instructor status, Bill worked 25 years as manager for Tenneco Automotive Company specializing in serving industrial clients in automotive parts systems. Even during this period, Bill stayed active in aviation as pilot for the local Civil Air Patrol squadron for 18 years, logging another 2,400 hours in the air. Bill also served 25 years in the Air Force Association, rising to become



James "Red" Smith

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These businesses support us with their membership.

- ~ Kelly's Hospitality Group
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- ~ Outer Banks Visitors Bureau
- ~ Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce
- ~ Barrier Island Aviation

N.C. State President of the AFA.

Bill's personal devotion to flying continues unabated as he pilots his family's Cessna 182 four-passenger plane, for example flying for the past 20 years to Florida's annual "Sun and Fun" celebrations.



Bill's marriage to Elsie Bandy for 61 years has produced four daughters and two grand-children. Eldest daughter Leslie and her husband, Wayne, help maintain and fly the family plane, thus transmitting Bill's flying legacy to the next generation of aviators.

Bill Dyer's life and career in the air exemplify the ideals of the First Flight Society, not only to perpetuate the memory and accomplishments of the Wright brothers, but also to enhance the advancement and achievements of American aviation.

Bill will celebrate his 85th birthday on July 26th.

And the Honoree is...

When the portrait is unveiled on December 17th this year, our honoree's youthful good looks will be displayed for all the world to see. We are happy to announce the selection of Ms. Betty Skelton Erde as the 2010 honoree. She will be joining the festivities in Kitty Hawk for the unveiling of her portrait at the 107th celebration of powered flight on December 17th.

At the age of eight, she decided she wanted to fly and her very first solo flight came at the age of 12 when one of the pilots, Kenneth Wright, a Navy Ensign, took a special interest in the Skeltons and provided instruction to Betty and her parents. Wright allowed Betty to solo in his Taylorcraft airplane although it was not permitted. She soloed legally at 16 and earned her private license.

Ms. Skelton was US Female Aerobatic Champion in 1948, 1949 and 1950. Her last two championships made Betty and her plane, L'il Stinker, famous. After her third championship, she was frustrated because there were no other challenges in aerobatics, plus she was mentally and physically exhausted from the hectic, non-stop air show circuit. She retired from aerobatics and sold the plane in 1951, but she and first husband Don Frankman reacquired the airplane and donated it to the Smithsonian in 1985. L'il Stinker is now on inverted display at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center at Washington Dulles International Airport, part of the National Air and Space Museum.

She was born in Pensacola, Florida in 1926.

August 19th - National Aviation Day/Orville Wright's Birthday - MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW

Admission to the Wright Brothers National Memorial Park is free on August 19th. There are activities in the pavilion, and birthday cake during the afternoon. Stop by the First Flight Society exhibit and say hello.

How I came to know Wilbur and Orville Wright

By Phyllis Moses, First Flight Society member

Aviation has been a magical part of my life for 74 years. It all started at the age of ten, when I took my first airplane ride. My uncle, Phillip Fairless, dashing barnstormer and fearless crop-duster of the '30s, was my hero. He always wore a white silk scarf, old leather helmet and goggles. Of course, he was a hit with all the ladies.

As he often did, Uncle Phil made a low-pass over our farm house near Harlingen, TX to alert us he was

about to land for a visit. My younger siblings usually ran and hid under the bed when they heard that ear-splitting roar of the OX5 engine as he flew low across our pasture. I eagerly ran out to see him land, hoping this might be my lucky day when this "magnificent man in his flying machine" would take me up in the sky.

From my first ride, I was hooked on flying. Yet, like most kids my age I knew nothing about the beginning of this new means of transportation, nor did I care. What I did know was that I loved it and looked forward to more of this exciting adventure.

Yet, as I grew up, I learned other school children didn't know who invented the airplane, either. Ultimately I met and married my husband, a pilot, who made his career first in the military then in commercial aviation. As we entered the adult world my fascination with airplanes grew. Then it eventually came to my attention that little about the history of aviation was being taught to school children. It was then I knew I had to write a book about it. But where should I start?

My first call was to the Historical Society of North Carolina. They helped me connect with several people who knew about Kitty Hawk and the Wright brothers. One of the first calls I made was to the late David Stick, historian and legendary resident of Kitty Hawk. During our first conversation, David advised me to call Bill Harris. What a fortunate piece of advice that was! This was before Bill retired from the National Park Service.

He was exceptionally kind and willing to help me, a total stranger, learn all about his favorite subject: the first flight.

This led to a trip to Kitty Hawk, our first of three, where Bill and David met us for dinner. After a few days of touring the historical sites with Bill, he explained in detail about the miracle that occurred in Kitty Hawk.

All of this research material formed the basis of the book. We loved Kitty Hawk and the Outer Banks! We were inspired by the dedication and faithful adherence to the truth about the first flight, but above all, we were impressed with the fact it seemed almost everyone we met was a descendent of the eye-witnesses to this historical event. Consequently, this made Kitty Hawk a richer place for us to visit and research for the book.

There were a number of delays and interruptions in the writing process which had to be resolved before we were able to complete the book. After a long and frustrating time, early in 2003, boxes of books were delivered to me, just in time to take them to Kitty Hawk for the 100th Centennial and celebration of the Wright Brothers airplane.

All this time, however, Bill Harris and I kept up a constant dialog about the writing and marketing process. He was drawn into this whether he wanted to be or not. Yet, his faith in the project, and his own desire to see the book published was almost as intense as mine.

There have been many books published about Kitty Hawk and the Wright Brothers, yet it seemed there was room for one more. Since the book is fiction based on the historical facts of the first flight, I knew I must keep it meticulously accurate in its narrative while weaving in small human interest stories about the family of the young boy, Joshua Morgan, who became the central character of the book. I decided to style this teen-age boy after Elijah Baum, Bill Harris' grandfather. Yet, I wanted to expand the story further than the history books do. I wanted him to be involved in the actual flight, of course, but then to become a part of the Wright brothers' lives as they started out in the business of the manufacture and promotion of their world-changing invention. It seemed right that Joshua should continue his interest in airplanes and the Wrights, while maintaining his home ties to Kitty Hawk.

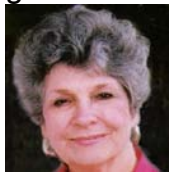
However, I ran into some opposition with this literary approach. Some said I shouldn't put a fictional character on a historically true stage. Yet, I stood my ground, and now I recommend that treatment of a story to other authors. If the author doesn't tamper with the actual story line, but gives some meaty and believable details, this method creates a more interesting back-drop for young people. And after all, the book was intended for young people.

The more we learned about the four-year journey of the brothers who did all possible to make this dream come true, the more we came to fully appreciate the part the people of Kitty Hawk contributed to this effort.

Because of the friendliness and generosity of the people of the Outer Banks and the First Flight Society, this experience has enriched our lives in countless ways. We are, indeed, honored to introduce this piece of history to schools, libraries and book clubs who invite us to tell the story.

The story of the invention of the airplane is carved into the sands of Kitty Hawk, and preserved by the people of North Carolina. The outcome of these efforts to bring the first powered aircraft to the world is known all over the globe. It's a powerful story, one of love, sacrifice and determination.

We think the story should become known to more young people everywhere; we are committed to that goal.



Phyllis Moses, the author of "Orville, Wilbur and Me: Magic at Kitty Hawk" is an Aviation Author and avid student of aviation history. She has written many articles and stories about airplanes and people who fly them. Many of these may be read at www.wingsandstars.com

Many thanks for the great picture!

Member Les Davis, of Wooster, Ohio, sent us this nicely framed photo, with this note on the back: "Photograph taken from around 800 ft. AGL with 80-200mm zoom lens on September 27th, 2006 by Les Davis."



9-27-2006

We are always happy to see pictures of the WBNM, and if you have taken an aerial shot during one of your flyovers and would like to send us a copy, we would love to have it - hard copy or digital!

Notes about The Flyer

Our email is Dec17@firstflight.org. If you have news and events of interest to the general membership, please let us hear from you.

CALENDAR EVENTS:

July 16 - Board of Directors' meeting, Chamber of Commerce Conf Rm, 1-3pm

Aug 19 - Orville Wright's birthday celebration and National Aviation Day - admission to the park is free - come celebrate!



Things to Know - Membership Information

\$35.00 - Individual Annual Membership

\$50.00 - Family Annual Membership

\$200.00 - Business Annual Membership

\$700.00 - Lifetime Membership

As a member of the First Flight Society, please take a moment to recruit other members who share our interests in honoring and promoting flight.

The website has a Join the Society page, and for added convenience for our members, PayPal is now an option to pay membership renewals.

Contact Info

The First Flight Society office is located on the upper level of the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce building in Kill Devil Hills. The mailing address is: PO Box 1903, Kitty Hawk, NC 27949. Visit our website for more information: www.firstflight.org

Phyllis K. Miller, Executive Assistant to the Board, First Flight Society
252-441-1903 dec17@firstflight.org

The First Flight Society

On April 16, 2010, in celebration of Wilbur Wright's birthday, and Founders' Day, members, guests and descendants of the witnesses of the first flight gathered at Pamlico Jack's Restaurant in Nags Head for lunch and a presentation by Bill Harris which showed the history of the First Flight Society which started as the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association in 1927.



