



The

# Flyer

[www.firstflight.org](http://www.firstflight.org)

September/October 2007

## LESSONS IN FLIGHT

### GOALS, GUMPTION & GOOD WORK BRING MEMORIAL TO LIFE

by Bill Harris

*This is the first in a series of columns documenting the history of the First Flight Society and the Society's dedication to preserving and celebrating the history of flight and the Wright brothers contribution to flight as we know it. If you have photos and/or stories you would like to contribute, contact president Bill Harris at 252.441.1903.*

This year, the First Flight Society (the direct successor of the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association and later Kill Devil Hills Memorial Society), is celebrating its 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Through the years, the Society has played an important and significant role in honoring the memory of one of mankind's fondest dreams – manned flight – at the actual site of the epoch event!

W. O. Saunders, editor-publisher of the Elizabeth City weekly newspaper, *The Independent*, is generally credited with originating the idea of a memorial to Wilbur and Orville Wright at the site of the world's first heavier than air powered flight, and in encouraging Congressman Lindsay C. Warren, the representative in the U. S. Congress from the district, to seek legislation for the project. Congressman Warren worked very closely with Senator Hiram Bingham of Connecticut in getting the legislation through Congress. President Calvin Coolidge signed the act authorizing the memorial on March 2, 1927.

Construction of the memorial could not begin immediately as there were no funds for the project; a design for the memorial structure had not been considered or approved by the Fine Arts Commission and the Joint Committee on the Library; the site was virtually inaccessible because of a lack of bridges and hard surface roads; and the land at the site was still in private ownership. Realizing that grassroots public input and pressure was needed, Saunders organized a meeting of business and civic leaders in Elizabeth City to consider ways of promoting the project. The meeting was held August 16, 1927, at the Christ Episcopal Church Parish House in Elizabeth City. In the course of this meeting, the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association was formed with W. O. Saunders as the founding President. All 46 people in attendance joined the Association that evening.

In addition to promoting the erection of a suitable memorial, the stated purpose of the Association was *to preserve the site of the first flights and to commemorate annually or occasionally the December 17, 1903, achievements of Wilbur and Orville Wright at the site.* A related purpose, though not generally mentioned in public, was to have Currituck Sound bridged and for the State to finish paving the road systems from Elizabeth City to Manteo, thus opening the area for access and future development.



P.O. BOX 1903 • Kitty Hawk, NC • 27949 • 252.441.1903

## Calendar

**Oct. 27** - 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual FFS Gala  
-- Diamonds & Pearls.

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**Dec. 17** - 104<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
First Flight Annual Program.

## Did You Know...

**Between September 19 and October 24, 1902** (105 years ago and a year before their famous flight on December 17, 1903), The Wrights made 700 - 1,000 glides, increasing their record for distance to 622 1/2 feet, for time to 26 seconds, and for angle of descent to 5 degrees for a glide of 156 feet.

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In 1966, the First Flight Society established the **Paul E. Garber First Flight Shrine**, a portrait gallery that surrounds the Wright Flyer replica displayed in the Wright Brother's National Memorial Visitor Center. Garber was the first director of the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum. The Shrine honors those individuals and groups that have achieved significant "firsts" in aviation's development.

In 1967, **Charles A. Lindbergh** was the second inductee (the Wright Brothers were the first, of course) for the first non-stop solo flight from New York to Paris (1927). This feat electrified the world and directly impacted American aviation, air transport and popular attitudes toward flying.

## LESSONS IN FLIGHT

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For additional support and influence, the Association established both a Regional Advisory Council, composed of representatives from each of the eleven northeastern North Carolina counties, and a National Advisory Council with Congressman Lindsay C. Warren of North Carolina, chairman, and Senator Hiram Bingham of Connecticut, vice-chairman. The National Council became quite prominent as it included the Vice President of the United States, leaders in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, then current and former Secretaries of several Federal Departments, three state Governors, most of the North Carolina Congressional Delegation, heads of a number of major U. S. corporations, national media personalities, and noted aviators, including Charles A. Lindbergh. It was an impressive Council if for no other reason than having their names listed as Association supporters. The strategy worked, as support in both houses of Congress and the Administration grew and resources and financial backing for developing an impressive monument rather than a simple plaque marking the spot of the flight.

The Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association took the lead in planning, organizing and executing the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ceremonies at the site of the first flight. The ceremonies included the laying of a cornerstone atop Kill Devil Hill, as symbolic of the future construction of a monument there, and the dedication of a granite boulder given by the National Aeronautic Association marking the spot where the Flyer first left the ground.

Logistically this was a major undertaking for the Association because of the need to provide food and transportation for attendees in an area without bridges, paved roads or food accommodations, but it was accomplished. In spite of the many difficulties and obstacles several thousand people attended the ceremonies, including Orville Wright, North Carolina Governor Angus W. McLean, Senator Hiram Bingham, Congressman Lindsay Warren, Amelia Earhart, Igor I. Sikorsky and many others from Federal, State and local governments, the aviation industry, and local citizens from northeastern North Carolina. The ceremonies were a monumental success and set a pattern for future events honoring the Wright brothers.

By early 1931, the design of the memorial monument was approved, the land secured, funding authorized, and construction bids received and awarded. The U. S. Army Office of Quartermaster General took on the task of supervising the construction. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held atop Kill Devil Hill on February 4, 1931, to formally signal the beginning of construction of the 60-foot tall granite shaft. The Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association assisted the Department of the Army with these ceremonies and also participated with the Department when construction of the monument was completed and the shaft formally dedicated on November 19, 1932. Orville Wright was there to enjoy the occasion!

In slightly less than six years, a proposal to honor Wilbur and Orville Wright at the site of their most famous achievement had been realized. Also, the initial goals and objectives of the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association had been fulfilled with the preservation of the site of the world's first powered flight, bridging of Currituck Sound, completion of paved roads from Manteo to Murphy, and the construction of a national memorial *"In commemoration of the conquest of the air by the brothers Wilbur and Orville Wright. Conceived in genius, and achieved by dauntless resolution and unconquerable faith."*



# RICHARD WHITCOMB HONORED

## “AREA RULE” & “WINGLETS” IMPACT US TODAY

by Tom Halfhill

FFS president Bill Harris and Tom Halfhill, past president and chair of the FFS Shrine Committee, attended an award ceremony at the Virginia Air and Space Museum for retired NASA engineer Richard T. Whitcomb. Whitcomb is also the 2007 honoree for the FFS annual December 17<sup>th</sup> celebration and will be memorialized in the Shrine (See “Did You Know” on page 2).

A graduate of Worcester Polytechnic Institute with a BS in mechanical engineering (high distinction) in 1943, Whitcomb went to work for NACA - now NASA - at Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory from 1943 until his retirement in 1980. During his 37 years at NASA, he celebrated *many* accomplishments. One that most of us can relate to is the “area rule” that allowed aircraft to break the sound barrier, which earned him the 1954 Collier Trophy. Another is “winglets” seen on many aircraft today (tips of the wings point up) that increase their lift-to-drag ratio.

In addition to the Collier Trophy, Whitcomb is the recipient of the Air Force Exceptional Service Medal, the



*Tom Halfhill and Bill Harris meet with 2007 Shrine honoree, Richard T. Whitcomb, at Virginia Air & Space Museum in Newport News, VA.*

NACA Distinguished Service Medal and the NASA Scientific Achievement Medal.

**RICHARD T. WHITCOMB  
INDUCTION TO WRIGHT  
MEMORIAL SHRINE &  
CELEBRATION OF THE WRIGHT  
BROTHERS FIRST FLIGHT**

**DECEMBER 17, 2007  
WRIGHT BROTHERS  
NATIONAL MEMORIAL**

**UNVEILING AT MORNING  
CEREMONY 10 A.M.  
LUNCHEON IS AT 12:15**

**FOR TICKETS TO LUNCHEON  
CALL THE FIRST FLIGHT  
OFFICE AT 252.441.1903**

The First Flight Society is proud to honor a man who literally changed the shape of the airplane, and altered the course of the history of flight in the process.

Join us for the FFS 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration on December 17, 2007 at Wright Memorial and learn more about Whitcomb’s amazing career. For more information on the

annual celebration visit [www.firstflight.org](http://www.firstflight.org).

## Park Briefs

### Volunteers in the Park Program

To volunteer at the Wright Brothers National Memorial contact the park at 252.441.7430 or go on-line at [www.nps.gov/volunteer](http://www.nps.gov/volunteer). Volunteering is an American tradition that has made immeasurable contributions to our communities, organizations and individuals nationwide.

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### Monument Restoration Project

The monument at Wright Brothers National Memorial will receive a maintenance facelift beginning this fall. The restoration project includes cleaning of the interior and exterior of the granite pylon, repointing the exterior mortar, painting the stairs, as well as electrical and mechanical renovations.

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### December 17 Anniversary

The ceremony at the monument is inspiring. Dignitaries, military commanders, school children and others who are passionate about flight witness a spectacular aircraft fly-over at precisely 10:35 a.m., the moment of the historic flight, with scores of military and civilian aircraft making low passes over the monument. For more details, read the Whitcomb article on this page. We would love for you to join us!

# FORE!!! FUN & FUNDS

## 1<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL FFS GOLF TOURNAMENT



FFS' first-ever golf tournament helped us soar into our 80<sup>th</sup> year in a spectacular way! The May 29 Better Ball/Captain's Choice tournament was an 18-hole, shotgun start at the Sea Scape Golf Links in Kitty Hawk, NC. The weather was ideal as eleven teams vied for the trophies for the first five spots.



*First Place team (l to r) Jeff Shumate, Bob Woodard, Dan Ottavio, and David McGlaughon take home bragging rights from the inaugural golf tournament. Photo by Lola Hilton.*

The team of David McGlaughon, Dan Ottavio, Jeff Shumate and Bob Woodard took *top honors* in the Florida Best Ball scramble event with an 18 under par round. *Second place* went to the Pepsi Cola Team of Phil Johnson, Ricky Bew, Bill Pitts and Cory Schneider. The event had 17 hole sponsors and 25 donors -- all of whom contributed to the event's success. Victory Chevrolet and Harley-Davidson sponsored a car and a motorcycle respectively for a hole in one on Par 3's, but no golfer had what it took to drive one away this year. "Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the day - the weather was perfect and the tournament was a huge success,"

says tournament chairman Zene Fearing.

During the post match meal, awards for the *Longest Drive* went to Jeff Shumate and *Closest to the Pins* on the four Par 3's went to Ricky Bew, Tony Sylvester, Dan Ottavio and Ed Colbourn. The Society earned \$4,000 in proceeds that are earmarked for the Society's goals and mission.

*Photos by Lola Hilton and Bill Harris*



# PASSION FOR FLIGHT IS IN HIS BLOOD

## -- MELVIN DANIELS, JR. IS PART OF WRIGHT HISTORY

by Robert Trivette

The five-year old boy stood in the yard of his home in Wanchese, NC, and looked anxiously toward the northern tree line. An ominous, metallic noise he had never heard before came closer and closer. As the growling motor grew louder and scarier, young Melvin Daniels, Jr. raced to his mother's side. He reached her just as the large Curtiss seaplane roared by overhead. "What was that," the boy asked his mother. "It's an air machine," she explained, "like the one those boys flew in Kitty Hawk. Get your dad to tell you about it."



The Curtiss that roared over Roanoke Island about 1927 was the first airplane Melvin Daniels, Jr. had ever seen, and that sight ignited a long and dedicated involvement to flight, flying, and the events surrounding the historic accomplishments of the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk 24 years earlier.

Melvin did ask his dad about "those boys" – the Wright brothers – and Melvin R. Daniels, Sr. told Melvin Jr. one of his cousins, John T. Daniels, actually witnessed the first flight by Orville and Wilbur Wright in 1903. Cousin John assisted the Wright brothers during many of the early flights, steadying the Wright Flyer's wings prior to and during take offs. John suffered one of air flight's first injuries associated with the Wright brothers' efforts to fly. Just after the fourth Wright brothers' flight a wind gust grabbed the Wright Flyer off the ground, and slammed it down on John, causing a permanent back injury.

Melvin Daniels' second encounter with airplanes came in the 1930s, when the National Park Service built an airstrip in Skyco just north of his home in Wanchese. Young Melvin would regularly ride his bicycle to the airstrip just to watch the purple and yellow single-engine Fairchild land and take off. He never flew in that plane, but he became close friends with the pilot and helped care for the plane every chance he could.

Melvin Daniels first flew in a plane at age 14, and he soloed at 19 while enrolled in a ROTC flight-training program at North Carolina State University during World War II. He joined a volunteer Civil Air Patrol program in the war, and flying from Norfolk and Manteo, he flew

Stenson L5s, escorting tankers and flying anti-submarine patrols up and down the east coast. He tried to join the Royal Canadian Air Force eight months before the United States entered WW II, but his father refused to sign the necessary papers. Melvin Sr. never wanted Melvin Jr. to fly, reminding him each time the subject came up about cousin John T. Daniels' back injury.

Despite his father's refusal to fly, he loved flight. Melvin Sr., who was the Register of Deeds for Dare County for 54 years (a longevity record that held until just recently), was a member and President of the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association, a predecessor to the First Flight Society. "Dad would not fly, but he was enthusiastic about flight. He had a vision about it, and he was a natural leader and promoter," said Daniels.

Like father, like son, Daniels inherited his father's enthusiasm for flight and his leadership skills. Eighty years later, Melvin Daniels Jr., who has served on the board of the First Flight Society longer than anyone, still has a vision for the Society. "I still have dreams," he said in a recent interview. "I just don't have as much energy as I use to. For that I must rely on others."

Daniels dreams of a permanent home for the Society on the grounds of the Wright Brothers Memorial Park, and of a permanent Executive Director to guide the group. "For that," however, he notes, "we need to generate a permanent source of funding."

As for the National Park Service, he said, "We (the Society) have a wonderful relationship with them. We give and they give, and we both win." Nevertheless, he believes the National Park Service needs to dream too. "They've outgrown their present building, and desperately need a larger, permanent facility. This (the Wright Brothers National Memorial) is a world-class site," he says. "There is no place like it in the world," he noted, and he would like to see the Park Service broaden its activities at the site.

Having an international-class facility at the Wright

Brothers National Memorial is important for the First Flight Society, the National Park Service, and for Dare County, Daniels said. “Without The Lost Colony and the Wright Brothers Shrine,” Daniels emphasizes, “Dare County is just another beach.”

Melvin Daniels Jr. was born into an economically depressed, but idyllic environment for a young boy in 1922. Isolated on Roanoke Island, Wanchese was a sleepy fishing village, a long way from everywhere. “We had no money, no television, no radio,” he said. A neighbor had a radio, and some nights Melvin and his pals would go over and listen to the Jack Dempsey fights. There was a movie house in Manteo, but more often he and a pal would sneak into the schoolhouse in Wanchese, crawling up through the floorboards, and read books – mostly Tom Swift.

The boys would hunt, fish, play in the creeks and sounds, build boats, and live every day by the Wanchese philosophy of “freedom and independence.” “Growing up during that time, we had complete freedom,” Daniels boasts. “We had a freedom that youngsters today will never know. We weren’t bad, but if we did today what we did back then, we would be in somebody’s courtroom.”

After attending North Carolina State, Daniels enrolled in an aeronautical engineering program, and received a degree in “Aircraft Drafting and Detail Design” from Virginia Tech in 1942. But the only job he could find was in Baltimore. Daniels wanted to stay in eastern North Carolina. So he took a job as a field agent for the NC Department of Revenue, and in the late 1940s was transferred to Elizabeth City, NC.

He married Gladys, a girl from the nearby community of Weeksville, and had three children. He switched over to banking, and watched over the decades as his original bank, the Industrial Bank, merged and transformed itself five times into the present-day RBC Centura Bank. Daniels still does consulting work from his office in the bank located at Main and Water Streets in Elizabeth City.

For 10 years, from 1974 to 1985, Mr. Daniels served in the North Carolina Senate, and may be the person most responsible for first prodding Senator Marc Basnight into the political arena. Senator Basnight replaced Daniels in the state Senate after he retired, and still represents northeastern North Carolina. Daniel’s only advice to the laid-back young protégée, known for casual beach attire of shorts and flip-flops as he geared up for his first political

run, was to wear shoes and socks while in the Senate. Twenty-five years ago in the Senate, Mr. Daniels said the arguments were about a state lottery and the Equal Rights Amendment. During his tenure, he sponsored the legislation to establish the Wanchese Seafood Park, and to buy the land for Jockey’s Ridge State Park in Nags Head.

Daniels was a charter member and perhaps the first member of the First Flight Society. He’s been the Society’s president twice. He is also a member of the North Carolina Aeronautical Council, an advisory body overseeing airports throughout the state. He’s on the board of the College of the Albemarle Board, the regional community college, and the Salvation Army. He’s a long-time member of the Lions Club, the Masonic Lodge, the Scottish Rite Lodge, and the Elks Club.

His political wanderings and connections have led Mr. Daniels to shake the hands of two Presidents – Jimmy Carter and Franklin Roosevelt. The latter came to Roanoke Island in 1937. Mr. Daniels met President Roosevelt while he was attending The Lost Colony. A U.S. Senator and family friend, who favored his mother’s fried chicken, was sitting with the President and spotted young Melvin in a group of young boys. The President sent over a Secret Service agent to retrieve him, and when Melvin approached, the President reached out his hand and said, “I hear you’re the best checker player on Roanoke Island.”

Numerous photographs bearing the faces of local, state and federal politicians; plaques of recognition and thanks; and photos of family and friends adorn the walls of Melvin Daniels’ office. He points to several as he talks, but one brings a particular twinkle to his eye as he takes it down. It is a laminated plaque from “Wick” Wright, a descendant of the Wright Brothers and it’s presented to “Melvin R. Daniels, Jr.” Underneath one corner of the lamination is a small square piece of fabric, and the plaque is titled: “Original Fabric 1903 Wright Flyer.” The plaque reads: “This piece of fabric is from the section that covered the lower left wing of the first Wright aeroplane on December 17, 1903.”

You can see by the look on his face Daniels has a huge appreciation for this tiny gift. And it is perfectly fitting that such a priceless object is in the hands of a man who has worked tirelessly to keep alive the significance of the events that occurred in Kitty Hawk 104 years ago.



# FLIGHT RANGER PROGRAM TAKES OFF

## -- FFS GIVES \$4,000 TO FUEL THE PROGRAM

“Our youth are our future,” boasts FFS president Bill Harris. What better way to carry out the Society’s mission of promoting the future of flight than by contributing to the Flight Ranger program.”

*l to r: Treasurer Zene Fearing, Superintendent Mike Murray, & FFS President Bill Harris.*

Outer Banks Group Superintendent Mike Murray agrees as they, along with FFS treasurer Zene Fearing proudly announced a First Flight Society donation of \$4,000 to support the Wright Brothers National Memorial Flight Ranger Program.

By providing valuable educational opportunities like the Flight Ranger Program, the Society is helping the National Park Service to develop a legacy of stewardship for the Memorial through actively engaging young people and their families in the history of the first flight and lessons learned from the Wright brothers; hard work, dedication and persistence.

“The Flight Ranger Program is a primary way that we reach out to visiting youth,” stated Murray. “This generous support will allow us to increase the number and types of activities we offer as well as increase the number of children participating in the program.”

The Flight Ranger Program, offered year-round to children ages 5 – 13, has been in place at Wright Brothers National Memorial for 15 years. Over 4,000 children participate in the program annually, earning a Flight Ranger patch through completing workbook activities and attending ranger-led programs. For more information about the Flight Ranger Program contact Wright Brothers National Memorial at 252-441-7430.

The First Flight Society, one of aviation’s oldest organizations, works towards memorializing the accomplishments of Wilbur and Orville Wright and promoting aviation in all its forms. For more information about the First Flight Society, go to [www.firstflight.org](http://www.firstflight.org) or call 252.441.1903.

The Flight Ranger Program is part of the National Park Service National Junior Ranger program, a youth education program series that engages children and their families in learning about the natural and cultural history found in each National Park. Since its creation in the early 1960’s, the Junior Ranger program has grown, now serving 362,000 children annually in more than 286 parks.

## FUN RESOURCES FOR KIDS

### **Wright Brothers Memorial**

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/wrbr/indepth/>

### **Smithsonian Air & Space Museum’s Classroom Activities**

<http://www.nasm.si.edu/wrightbrothers/classroomActivities/>

### **Smithsonian Air & Space Museum’s Reconstructing History: The Wright Brothers’ First Flight Interactive website**

[http://www.nasm.si.edu/wrightbrothers/classroomActivities/8-12\\_intro.html](http://www.nasm.si.edu/wrightbrothers/classroomActivities/8-12_intro.html)

### **University of Georgia Kids DO Science Paper Airplanes & The Methods of Science**

<http://www.uga.edu/srel/kidsdoscience/kidsdoscience-airplanes.htm>

### **San Diego Air & Space Museum Coloring Page of Wright Flyer**

<http://www.aerospacemuseum.org/education/images/wright.jpg>

### **The Franklin Institute Flights of Inspiration**

<http://www.fi.edu/flights/>

# 2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL GALA “DIAMONDS & PEARLS” SET FOR OCTOBER 27

## -- FFS CELEBRATES 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

This 2<sup>nd</sup> annual First Flight Society Gala, soars to new heights this year, celebrating the Society’s 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Sponsor tables are \$2,000 and individual tickets are \$100, which includes a fabulous dinner, wine reception, dancing, drawings and more. (Last year was a sell out so reserve your seats early.)

### Exclusive Features:

- ◆ Free **wine reception** 6 to 7 p.m.
- ◆ Live **entertainment & dancing** by “Society’s Best”
- ◆ **Live Auction** – A one-of-a-kind special commemorative “Diamonds & Pearls” necklace commissioned for this special occasion.
- ◆ **Silent Auction** – many special and unique items from the fields of art, sport, vacation package, dinners, trips, etc.

*This fund raiser supports the FFS annual December 17<sup>th</sup> Celebration at Wright Brothers National Memorial and related programs at the Memorial. If you can not attend but would like to contribute call 252.441.1903.*

### *Diamonds & Pearls Gala*

*October 27, 2007*

*6 p.m. - midnight*

*Hilton Garden Inn*

*Kitty Hawk, NC*

*Attire: Formal Option*

*For Tickets call*

*252.441.190-*

[www.firstflight.org](http://www.firstflight.org)



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**“CONCEIVED BY  
GENIUS AND  
ACHIEVED BY  
DAUNTLESS  
RESOLUTION AND  
UNCONQUERABLE  
FAITH.”**

*Inscribed on the Wright  
Memorial, Kill Devil Hills, NC*