



# THE Flyer

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Spring 2000

## 96th Anniversary Of Powered Flight *by Tom Halfhill*

This past December 17th celebrants enjoyed good weather -- the sun was bright, the sky was blue and it was a little on the chilly side. The First Flight Society joined with the Centennial Foundation in planning a great program. James "Red" Smith, a past president of the Society, secured the key speakers and the cooperation of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in coordinating one of the finest fly-overs. As our last newsletter detailed, *Women In Aviation* was the theme and the WASP ladies had many of their members in attendance. The portrait for the WASP group featured Ann Carl and Jean Hixson with their WWII wings and the other honoree, Harriet Quimby's portrait showed her decked out in her famous purple flying suit with her airplane in the background. Our thanks to the Icarus artists for doing another fine job.

General Ralph E. Eberhart, Commander of the Air Combat Command, spoke about the Wright Brothers' achievements and the Under Secretary of the Air Force, Carol A. DiBattiste talked about the importance of Women in Aviation. Welcoming remarks were made by the Mayor of Kill Devil Hills, Sherry Rollason, Stan White of the Dare County Commissioners and Mary Doll of the

Park Service. Darrell Collins, Historian of the Wright Brothers National Memorial, gave another of his interesting talks about the Wright brothers. Music entertainment was provided by the Northeastern High School Band from Elizabeth City who has a rich history in participating in our annual celebrations. Posting of The Colors were done by the Air Force Junior ROTC, also from Northeastern High School. And at 10:35 sharp the airplanes began to appear. Thad Woodard, Chairman of the First Flight Centennial Commission, was just finishing a tribute to Wick Wright when the first aircraft silently appeared and fittingly, it was the "Spirit of Kitty Hawk", one of the stealth B-2's. The timing could not have been better for a farewell to a fine gentleman. Many other aircraft put on a spectacular show and when the flyover was finished, a stunt plane gave a fine performance.

The annual meeting of the Society and the luncheon began at 12:30 hours with a different group of VIP's. Ann Carl, the only living honoree this year was introduced along with the many other WASP ladies, Brigadier

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## New FFS President,

Rex Peters became the new President of the First Flight Society during the annual meeting and luncheon held December 17, 1999 on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

Peters, a graduate of the University of Missouri, flew A-4 Skyhawks for the Marine Corps and was the briefing officer for the AV8A Harrier Combat Readiness Group under the direction of the General of the 2nd



**Rex Peters**  
**FFS President**

Marine Air Wing. After his military service, he owned and operated Air Raid Crop Dusting on the Eastern Shore of Virginia for several years. He later relocated to the Outer Banks where he engaged in real estate sales and construction before launching Cable Ad, the first cable advertising company on the Outer Banks. He also conceived and published *The Beach Book*, which he sold in 1997, and *The North Beach Sun*, which he continues to own and publish along with his wife and partner, Tori. The Peters live in the Martin's Point area of Kitty Hawk, where they are raising three children, Brandon and Brittany, twins aged 15, and Catherine, aged 9.

"Aviation is still a large part of my life," Peters, stated recently. He has been a member of the First Flight Society for almost 20 years, and is a licensed airline transport

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### *New First Flight Society Officers in 2000*

#### **First Vice President Ken Mann**

*Ken Mann is a popular Outer Banks radio personality, country singer and recording artist, owner of a video production company, and private pilot. The father of two sons, Ken and his wife Paula live in Wanchese, North Carolina.*

#### **Second Vice President James E. "Red" Smith**

*A retired Air Force Colonel and always active member of the FFS, Red is currently serving on the First Flight Centennial Commission. Red and his wife Norma reside in Princeton, North Carolina.*

#### **Third Vice President Rick Young**

*Writer, historian, builder and pilot of reproduction Wright gliders and the Flyer. Rick is currently serving on the First Flight Centennial Foundation board. He and his wife Sue own and operate the historic Halfway House, a restaurant, in Chester, Virginia*

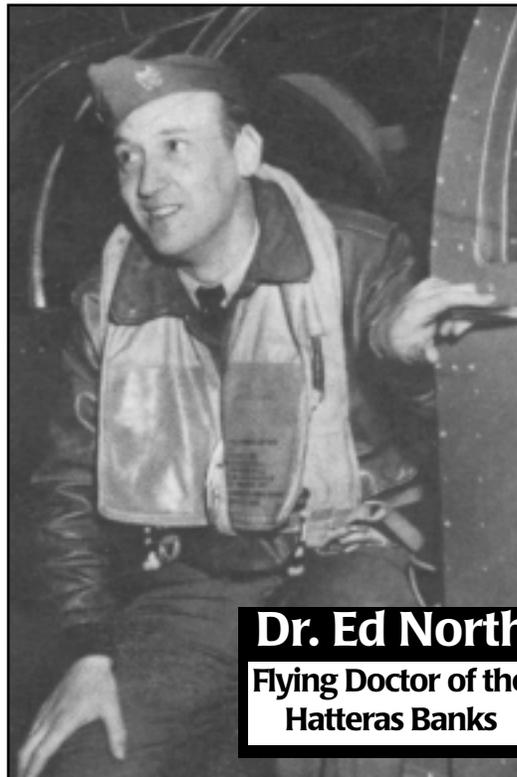
#### **Secretary/Treasurer Pamela Merritt Nance**

*Daughter of the late Coast Guard Capt. Fred Merritt, a past president and historian of the First Flight Society, Nance has an extensive background in marketing and public relations here on the Outer Banks. She and her husband, Bill will soon be residents of Pinehurst, North Carolina where she can pursue her ambitions in the equestrian world.*

# Farewell to a friend

by Tom Halfhill

Dr. Ellsworth H. "Ed" North was a co-founder and the driving force in the Man Will Never Fly Society known to many of you. He was also a longtime member of our Society and on the Board of Directors. Dr. Ed died December 31, 1999 at the age of 83. Needless to say, he will be missed by his family and the thousands of lives that he touched during his life. Most of us only knew Ed through his involvement with the satirical MWNFS that was held each December 16 to give some fun and surprises on the eve of the more somber annual ceremonies honoring the Wright brothers for their accomplishment of the first successful powered flight. His group swore that "Birds Fly; Men Drink" and every year lampooned someone or something related to aviation. When asked why he formed his society, Ed would usually reply that the many aviation enthusiasts that came for the official ceremony each year had nothing to do on



**Dr. Ed North**  
**Flying Doctor of the**  
**Hatteras Banks**

the night of the 16th and years ago there were not enough people on the Beach to have a good party. So-o-o, why not make life more interesting.

An example of Dr. ED's humor several years ago was the induction of Chuck Yeager into his Hall of Infamy for literally BREAKING the sound barrier. The First Flight Society of course inducted Yeager into their Shrine for being the first to break the sound barrier. Ed had announced last summer that he was closing the MWNFS. Fortunately, a group of retired Navy aviators talked to him and got his permission to continue the annual affair. That was appropriate, I believe, because during his career of being a medical doctor, he spent some time with the Coast Guard, Navy and the Army. That was "pay-back" time as the government had paid his expenses in medical school to become a M.D.

Dr. Ed was featured in an extensive and exciting story published in the May 29, 1948 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*, "The Flying Doctor of Hatteras Banks" by Harold H. Martin. A good library should have it available or you may view it on our website in the near future as Rex Peters hopes to initiate a library and archive beginning with this article on Dr. North.

## A Tar Heel Astronaut

**Col. William Surlis "Bill" McArthur, Jr. visits the Outer Banks**

by Lisa Holian

"When you circle the earth every 90 minutes, it means you can enjoy about 16 sunrises a day," Col. Bill McArthur replied to one of the dozens of questions by the 8th grade class at First Flight Middle School recently.

McArthur's casually-styled yet highly informational presentation was perfectly suited for his audience who remained attentive and interactive with the NASA astronaut for more than an hour. Always in motion, McArthur strolled about and used a laser pointer to emphasize his descriptions of the stunningly visual presentation on the large screen television.

The students were particularly interested in the astronaut's remarks on the construction of the International Space Station, which McArthur described as being, "the size of two football fields and will be the brightest thing you see in the night sky except for the moon."

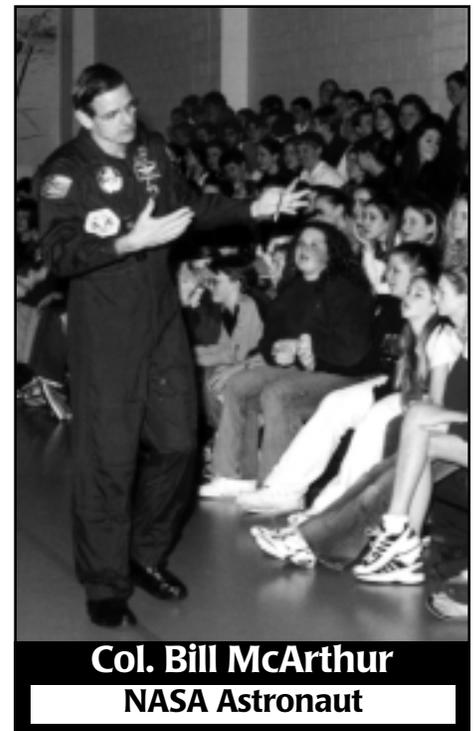
Before introducing the Colonel, FFS President Rex Peters recognized Mary Doll of the National Park Service for hosting the program and ranked her job, for the benefit of

the students, at Wright Brothers National Memorial as something akin to their school principal, Gary McDonald. Peters then spoke to the students about the huge scope of the centennial of flight, invited their participation by encouraging them to share their pride in their "first flight" heritage and that they should consider themselves ambassadors of the Outer Banks and the memory of the Wrights.

In addition to his First Flight Middle School program, Col. McArthur also gave presentations at Manteo and Hatteras Schools and for the general public at Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kill Devil Hills.

McArthur served as mission specialist aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia on a life science research mission and NASA's second space shuttle rendezvous mission with the Russian Space Station MIR. Later this year he will join the crew of the Atlantis as they continue assembly of the International Space Station, which he predicts will be operational in less than two years.

Born and raised in North Carolina, Col. McArthur and his wife, the former



**Col. Bill McArthur**  
**NASA Astronaut**

Cynthia Kathryn Lovin, have two daughters. A West Point graduate, he holds a master of science degree in aerospace engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology and is the recipient of more than a dozen awards including the Defense Superior Service Medal.

# 1902

By Wick Wright

On Monday August 25, 1902, Wilbur and Orville left home for North Carolina, reaching Elizabeth City on August 26 and finally arriving in Kitty Hawk on Thursday, August 28. They spent the next ten days repairing and improving their camp buildings. It had been undermined by the winter storms and had sunk about two feet at each end, "...giving the roof a shape like that of a dromedary's back", Wilbur wrote to Octave Chanute. They expanded their building to accommodate a larger glider and made a number of improvements in their living quarters because they anticipated visitors.

On September 8, the brothers began assembling their new glider. It was a biplane with a single elevator forward and a double fixed rear rudder. They began flying on September 19 and continued through October 24. With a wing span of 32 feet, their glider was the largest that had ever been flown. The first two days, the machine was flown as a kite and then they made many glides that were not entirely free.

Wilbur made one free glide on the second day. On September 23 they made about 75 glides, but the machine was damaged on the last one.

They spent several days repairing and altering the glider and then were delayed by weather conditions. They began flying again on Monday September 29, and recorded a number of flights over the next few days. During this time, visitors arrived as anticipated; brother Lorin on September 30, George Spratt on October 1 and Octave Chanute and Augustus Herring on October 5.

To remedy control problems they were encountering in these flights, Orville conceived the idea of changing the fixed double rudder to a single movable vane. Wilbur then proposed coupling it to the wing-warping control. They completed the necessary alterations, were delayed by bad weather, and began flying again on Wednesday October 8.

With the new controls in place, the brothers made a great number of successful flights. In one two day period, they made over 250 glides but were too busy to record times and distances because they had less help after their visitors had all left. On Thursday October 23, Wilbur made a record-breaking flight of 622 1/2 feet in 26 seconds.

After one more day of flying, the brothers packed up. They left Kitty Hawk on October 28 and arrived back home on the 31st.

Confident that they had at last achieved a control system which could effectively balance and turn an aircraft, the brothers decided that they were ready to try powered flight. In the 1902 glider they

vacation. Four newspaper reporters also arrived on the VAN DUSEN, however, and Orville was unwilling to test the glider in their presence. So the stabilizer did not get tested. They spent Saturday assembling the glider and then went to Kitty Hawk to get chicken and fish.

On Monday, October 16, they tried gliding on both West Hill and Big Hill and had a number of control problems. Orville made a number of changes in the configuration of his machine, pirating parts from the airframe of the 1905 flyer which had been left in the hanger shed in 1908. They tried five flights in all, the last one by Orville totalled 1223 feet in 23 seconds. On October 18 with Orville on board, the machine turned around, went into the hill and turned over. The next three days were spent on repairs with Orville making further changes in the airframe. More reporters arrived on October 20.

On Monday, October 23, the machine turned over again in the air with Orville on board. The next day, October 24, about 20 glides were made. In one of these, Orville stayed aloft for 9 minutes and 45 seconds, covering about 1/4 mile, a true soaring flight. This established a world record which was not broken until ten years later.

The experiments continued over the next two days, with 31 flights recorded on the 25th, and 24 flights on the 26th. In all, from the 16th through the 26th of October, around 90 flights were made. These glides by Orville demonstrated conclusively that, with good aerodynamic design, soaring flight was possible. On Friday, October 27, they knocked off and went fishing and then travelled to Manteo. They left Manteo on Monday and got back to Dayton the next day, October 31. Reporters had visited the Wright camp every day of Orville's stay there.

**CONCLUSION:** During the month of October in 1902 and again in 1911, truly significant events in the history of gliding flight took place on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

## Wilkinson "Wick" Wright

### Grand Nephew of the Wright Brothers



had developed a working control system, gained actual flying experience, and settled on a configuration for their airframe. In fact, the control system in the 1902 glider, not the 1903 flyer, subsequently formed the principal basis for the Wright's most important patent.

## 1911

By Wick Wright

Orville Wright left Dayton on Saturday evening, October 7, 1911, accompanied by his brother Lorin, his nephew Horace and an English flyer, Alec Ogilvie. They arrived at Kill Devil Hill on the Outer Banks of North Carolina on Tuesday, October 10 and spent some time repairing and rehabilitating the camp buildings where they planned to stay. On Thursday they measured the height and slopes of Big Hill and West Hill, and took wind speed readings.

On Friday, October 13, they took a motorboat up to Kitty Hawk where their glider arrived aboard the VAN DUSEN. The purpose of the trip was to test a new glider and an automatic stabilizer that Orville had been working on and also to

## 1999

By Tom Halfhill

Wick Wright, the great-nephew of the Wright brothers, died December 9, 1999 at his home town of Dayton, Ohio. Wick was a long time member of the First Flight Society and a frequent visitor to the Outer Banks. He was a speaker and participant at the annual December 17 celebration almost annually. He was a student of his famous uncles and served as the official spokesperson and ambassador for the Wright clan. Wick was a member of the Ohio group planning the 100th celebrations and Ohio's representative on North Carolina's First Flight Centennial Commission. Always a perfect gentleman, Wick was a wealth of information and willing to help in any way. He will be greatly missed.

The foregoing article was written by Wick and he kindly gave permission to us to print it before he passed away.

# **The Flyer**

is a Newsletter of  
**The First Flight Society**

**President  
Rex Peters**

**First Vice President  
Ken Mann**

**Second Vice President  
Col. James E. "Red" Smith**

**Third Vice President  
Rick Young**

**Secretary/Treasurer  
Pamela Merritt Nance**

**Web Director  
Todd Huvad**

**Newsletter Editors  
Tom Halfhill & Lisa Holian**

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*(96th Anniversary continued from front page)*

General Norman R. Seip, Commander 4th Fighter Wing, Chaplain Colonel Philip J. Fain, Beverly Sharp, President of the 99's and retired Colonel Charles McGee of the Tuskegee airmen. Giacinta Koontz mixed with the crowd dressed as and impersonating Harriet Quimby. The Aerial Review planning crew from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base: Lt. Col. John Aymonin, Capt. Eric Jorgensen, and Capt. Brian Peterson were also guests. Many Life members and past presidents of the Society, FFS Board of Directors and regular members and guests enjoyed the buffet catered by Kelly's Restaurant. Following the luncheon a new slate of officers were elected to serve this year. To finish off a busy day, the formal Wright Anniversary Ball was held the evening of the 17th and as usual it was an enjoyable event and full of surprises.

*(New President continued from front page)*

rated pilot. He is involved in the partnership, Tailfeathers, which is the area's exclusive dealer of the SeaRey, an amphibious aircraft.

"It is important to me to broaden the membership base of the First Flight Society and continue to host the December 17th First Flight ceremonies at the Wright Brothers' National Memorial that the society has been organizing for decades." Peters continued, "With the international attention being given to the upcoming centennial of flight, I believe the First Flight Society can further achieve the objectives of their mission statement, which is to promote the achievement of the Wrights, through increased awareness and education in the form of their internet site, print, television and radio media and by encouraging partnership with local, national and international organizations."

## **Communicate!**

**The First Flight Society Has A New Telephone Number: 252-441-1903**

- Also, please keep us advised of address changes.
- We like to communicate at lightning speed and zero postage. Please send your e-mail address to [dec17@firstflight.org](mailto:dec17@firstflight.org).

## **First Flight Society Membership Application**

Members of the First Flight Society come from all walks (or flights) of life, but we all share a common bond: our love of aviation. The purpose of the society is to foster and promote a public awareness of, and widespread interest in, the origin, history and future of flight, in all its forms, and to memorialize Orville and Wilbur Wright, first in the world to successfully achieve powered flight in a heavier-than-air machine, December 17, 1903, near Kill Devil Hill, at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Join us by completing the information below and mailing your membership check made payable to the First Flight Society.

Name \_\_\_\_\_, Address \_\_\_\_\_, State \_\_\_\_\_, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**(Mail to The First Flight Society, P. O. Box 1903, Kitty Hawk, NC 27949)**

\$25.00 Renewal    \$25.00 New Member    \$150.00 Corporate Membership    \$300.00 Lifetime Membership



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