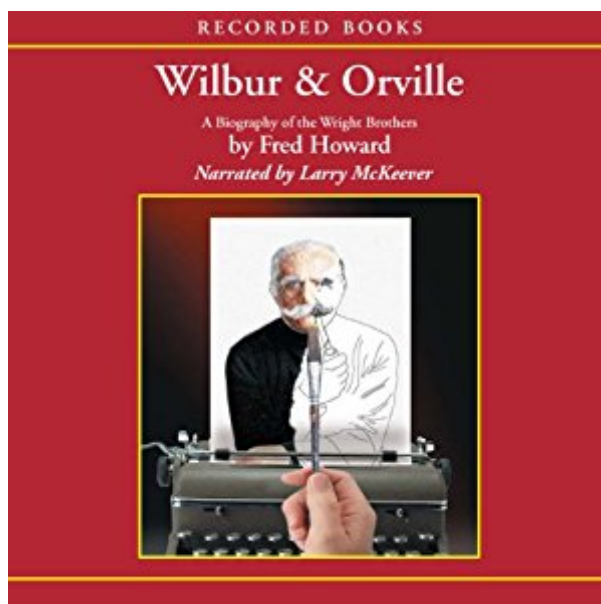


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Wilbur And Orville: A Biography Of The Wright Brothers



Synopsis

The Wrights' longest flight in 1903 covered 852 feet and lasted 59 seconds. In 1905, Wilbur flew 24 miles in 38 minutes and the issue was no longer how to fly but how to cash in. Their effort to exploit their invention is a suspense story of the best kind; their voyage into flight and into American history is a gripping tale from takeoff to landing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are thousands of books produced each year on history and biography that are written by people with a preeminent knowledge of their subject but whose intellect suppresses their passion or perhaps simply masks the truth that they just don't know how to write -- how to let their passion soar upon the page. In that respect Donald Howard has done with "Wilbur and Orville" what only the greatest of biographers can do. He opens the roof on a cloistered and inscrutable family and allows you to share with two of its members the adventure of a lifetime. You bear witness to the achievement of manpowered flight, not as an Archimedean moment of "Eureka!" but as a result of a dogged pursuit of knowledge through trial and failure. The great genius of Wilbur Wright and his brother is one of unstinting determination. Failure is not defeat but only the next small problem to solve. They knew that experimentation without failure yields only a partial truth -- that failure and success are irrevocably intertwined. Only those with the persistence not to be discouraged by the false thread will find what they seek. As a former aeronautics librarian for the Library of Congress, Donald Howard does a tremendous job in defining precisely the nature of the Wright brothers' achievement and in defending them from later detractors who crawled from the woodwork to lay

their own partial claims to invention. In truth, the Wrights leaned heavily on the experimentations of others, letting the failures of others serve as a practical classroom. What they invented was not the first machine to rise from the earth under its own power, but the first that could sustain itself and be navigated across the skies.

I have to say, first, that there is little I can add to the other 5-star reviewers of this gem. I will admit that the technical and legal details were a reach for me. However, Fred Howard clearly explains them in a way that even a layperson like me can get the main points.* The Wright Brothers' "Eureka" moment was when Wilbur twisted some tubing and intuited the principle of windwarping.* The legal battles from thenceforth, had mostly to do with whether or not the Wrights' rivals had already innovated something that could be dubbed "windwarping." So - yes, this part I got. Howard excels in weaving the invention of heavier-than-air flight, through the fabric of the rather remarkable Wright family. For it is in the Hawthorn Street home of the Wrights, that I, a non-techie that loves history, gains the most value from Howard's account. A modern observer would be amused and appalled, and everything in between, to contemplate a family like this; where three grown children continue to live in the parental home, (the brothers, and their sister Catharine). What did their father, Bishop Milton Wright, see in his children, that he be not alarmed at their "failure to launch"? Surely even in turn-of-the-Century America, there were busybodies questioning the judgment of the Bishop, so accommodating to his no-count kids. Had the Bishop, and his generation, had our Fifties-spawned conception of what it means to grow up in America, and kicked his kids out at the age of twenty-one, there would have been no Kitty Hawk, no Wright Company, and maybe even, no Delco (linked at the start to some of the Wrights' fortunes); No Wright-Patterson Air Force Base; no Bosnian-Serb summit at Dayton, etc.

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