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**THE FIRST DEFINITIVE AND ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGICAL HISTORY
OF THE INVENTION OF THE AIRPLANE**

THE AIRPLANE
How Ideas Gave Us Wings
By Jay Spenser

“Knowledgeable, accessible history of heavier-than-air flight...A satisfying journey guided by an able pilot.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“A smart...history of a thrilling machine all too often taken for granted.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

Older than the ancient Greek myth of Icarus, flying is humankind’s most deeply rooted and widely embraced dream. As technology advanced, this universal yearning evolved into a focused quest for wings, culminating on December 17, 1903 in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, when two bicycle mechanics from Ohio flew the world’s first airplane. Less familiar, yet no less significant, are the stories of dreamers from Australia, Belgium, the Netherlands, England, France, Germany, and Switzerland, as well as across America, who contributed to and expanded on the amazing achievement credited solely to the Wright brothers.

In ***THE AIRPLANE: How Ideas Gave Us Wings*** (Smithsonian Books/November 1, 2008/\$25.95 hardcover), Jay Spenser celebrates the contributions of far-flung visionaries to the wonder of routine air travel. Along with revisiting history’s most famous self-taught aeronautical engineers, Orville and Wilbur Wright, he presents riveting profiles of driven inventors and daring pilots largely unknown today. Inviting fellow aviation buffs to stand elbow to elbow with flight’s pioneers and share vicariously in their “aha” moments, Spenser captures the adventure of inventing the jetliner, a true technological marvel and testament to the power of human ingenuity, perseverance, and collaboration.

Revealing the unique process of teamwork behind the birth and development of the flying machine, ***THE AIRPLANE*** explores critical components of flight technology, from overall configuration to

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the components of the airplane and how they evolved. In the course of this tour, Spenser spotlights the ingenious, courageous individuals who dedicated their lives to creating or improving the pieces that have made flying an everyday reality. These pioneers include:

- The father of aviation science, Yorkshire baronet Sir George Cayley, who in 1799 first imagined the airplane, and his enthusiastic disciple, William S. Henson, the first dreamer to attempt to design and construct a real, working airliner—in 1843!
- Australian naturalist Lawrence Hargrave, whose fascination with birds yielded a great gift to aviation: the invention of the box kite, in 1893.
- Germany's "flying man," Otto Lilienthal, the first human ever to make repeated gliding flights, accomplished with fixed wings he designed and built himself.
- Intrepid French aviator Louis Blériot, who flew across the English Channel, on July 25, 1909.
- Igor Sikorsky, the Ukrainian genius who built and flew the world's first multiengine airplane, in Imperial Russia in 1913 when he was just twenty-three years old.
- Elderly German university professor Hugo Junkers, whose abysmal lack of aviation knowledge led to two great breakthroughs and the best airliners prior to Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic.
- Jimmy Doolittle, a daredevil flier with a PhD from MIT, who led the small team that in 1929 solved the problem of blind flight, allowing airliners to fly at night and in bad weather.

Moving from early breakthroughs and trailblazing feats to modern technological triumphs, ***THE AIRPLANE*** explores recent advances in aero propulsion, flight controls, passenger cabins, and safety systems. Spenser also offers a preview of the technology now being introduced by the ultra-efficient Boeing 787 Dreamliner, which promises to use 20 percent less fuel, and generate correspondingly lower emissions, than previous airliners of similar size. In the author's view, scientists and visionaries will take flight to a higher level as they work together with a shared commitment to protecting our planet and improving passenger comfort and safety.

"More than two centuries after George Cayley first imagined the airplane, and over a century since Wilbur and Orville Wright invented it, progress in flight continues at an astonishing pace," Spenser attests. "Humankind's oldest dream lives on."

About the author

Jay Spenser has spent a lifetime studying aviation as a curator at the National Air and Space Museum and the Museum of Flight, and more recently as an aerospace industry writer. He is the coauthor of *747* and lives in Seattle.

About the book

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