



Wright Model A Wright Military

The Wright Model A was an early aircraft produced by the Wright Brothers in the United States beginning in 1906. It was an outgrowth of their Flyer III airplane of 1905. The Wrights actually built about seven Model As in their bicycle shop during their interim period 1906-1907 in which they did no flying. One of these was shipped to Le Havre in 1907 in anticipation of it being demonstrated for the French. The Model A had a 35 horsepower (26 kW) engine and seating for two with new control arrangement. The Model A was the first aircraft that they offered for sale, and the first aircraft design to enter serial production anywhere in the world. Apart from the seven machines the Wrights built themselves in 1906-1907, they sold licenses for production in Europe, with the largest number of Model As actually being produced in Germany by Flugmaschine Wright GmbH, which built about 60 examples.

Signal Corps Specification, No. 486

By late 1907, with negotiations in Europe going well, the U.S. Army showed renewed interest in the Wright brothers. Rather than directly offering them a contract, the Board of Ordnance and Fortification and the U.S. Signal Corps announced an advertisement for bids to construct an airplane. However, the design and performance specifications were such that the Wrights were the only viable bidder.

A price of \$25,000 (\$590,926 in present-day terms) was set for the brothers' airplane if they could meet the performance criteria in actual flight trials.

Fort Myer

The flight trials were scheduled for late summer 1908 at Fort Myer, Virginia, a military post just outside Washington, D.C. With the commitments in Europe, the brothers had to separate for the first time. With Wilbur off to France, Orville did the flying for the Army.

First fatality

On September 17, 1908, with Army observer Lt. Thomas O. Selfridge on board, the airplane experienced a mechanical malfunction involving one of the propellers and crashed. Orville was severely injured and Selfridge died, the first fatality in a powered airplane. Orville would resume the flight trials after his recovery.

All Army requirements met

The Wrights returned to Fort Myer to complete the Army trials after the homecoming celebrations in June 1909. Over several weeks, the Wrights fulfilled each requirement in Signal Corps Specification No. 486. The final one was a cross-country flight of 10 miles with a passenger. This flight also served as the official speed trial. The contract stipulated that they would receive a 10 percent bonus for every full mile per hour above 40. Their average speed was 42.5 miles per hour, which rewarded them with a \$5,000 bonus and brought the final purchase price of the airplane to \$30,000 (\$709,111 in present-day terms).

Wright Military Flyer

The Wrights returned to Fort Myer in 1909 with an entirely new airplane. The Military Flyer was a one-of-a-kind Model A built by the Wright Brothers. With wings shortened two feet and the same engine salvaged from the wrecked 1908 Fort Myer Flyer, it differed from the standard Wright A in size and had a faster speed. The aircraft was demonstrated successfully at Fort Myer, Virginia June 28, 1909. The Army purchased it that year, used it to train pilots in the fall of 1909 and in 1910, then donated it to the Smithsonian Institution in 1911 after acquiring other aircraft. Designated Signal Corps No. 1 by the Army, it is generally referred to as the Wright Military Flyer and was the world's first military airplane.

The Wrights and the U.S. Navy

Also interested in aviation, the U.S. Navy purchased a Wright Model B airplane in 1911 and modified it for water takeoff. However, the Navy preferred the aircraft produced by Glenn Curtiss, who had designed airplanes specifically for operating off water