

# The Wright Brothers were Wrong!

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Compiled by G. Edwin Lint, MA  
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*This site is dedicated to students and teachers everywhere who have learned [and are teaching] some slanted facts about the history of public, powered, and piloted heavier-than-air flight in America*

**The Wright brothers were right when they made persistent experiments until they got**

# Quick Index for Posts to My *Night Watchman* Blog

A culture war rages all around us. I am stationed in a watchtower, on top of the wall, watching the night. If I see danger approaching in any form, from any quarter, I will sound the alarm!

"Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh"... Isaiah 21:11, 12

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1. [Obama: Oh, Yes! I'm the Great Pretender](#)
2. [Governor Sarah Palin: Greta Van Susteren is "On the Record"](#)
3. [Obama: is he an illegal alien, is he a literary fraud, or is he both?](#)
4. [Sack Lunches for Iraq-bound Soldiers](#)

5. [Obama has first press conference since election](#)
6. [Sad Report about Governor Sarah Palin as McCain's Running Mate](#)
7. [Obama Names Rahm Emanuel as White House Chief of Staff](#)
8. [Jack Cashill, Obama, Ayers: a Progress Report on Literary Fraud](#)
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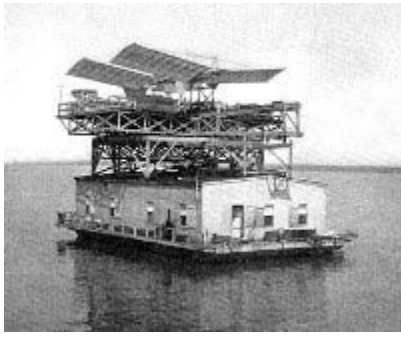
[G. Edwin Lint, Th.B., M.A.](#)

the *Flyer* into the air in December, 1903.  
However . . .

## The Wright brothers were wrong. . .

- *When they tried to keep the invention of the airplane to themselves with a sweeping patent*
  - *When they included the dangerous wing-warping lateral control technique in their patent [wing-warping caused the wings to twist in correlation to the plane turning]*
  - *When they persisted in clinging to wing-warping even when the use of ailerons, as developed by Bell, Curtiss, and the Aerial Experiment Association [AEA] were proven to provide safer flight with superior lateral control*
  - *When they sued Curtiss or anyone else who flew, exhibited, manufactured, or sold airplanes without their approval*
  - *When they wasted the time and resources of Curtiss and other forward-thinking inventors with their pestiferous patent suits*
- 

The entire history of aviation can't be told on this page but we must include mention of Professor Samuel P. Langley.



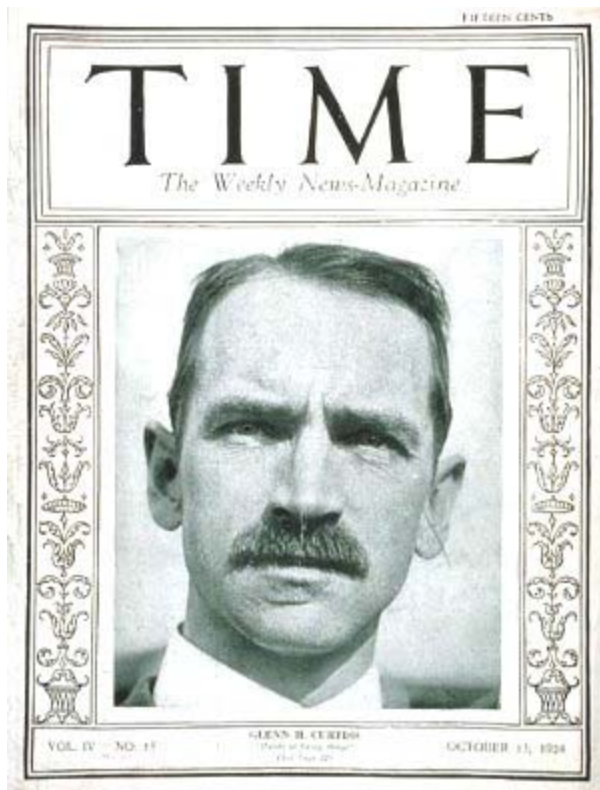
*Professor Langley's 1903 flying machine, mounted on a catapault atop a houseboat in the Potomac River.*

Langley had long dreamed of flying through the air. He built several versions of what he called an *Aerodrome*, first powered by steam, and then by a radial internal combustion engine. The final trial in October 1903 nose dived into the waters of the Potomac River. The newspapers had a field day!

If Langley's plane hadn't snagged on the catapault at liftoff, he might have beat the Wrights in the race to be first into the air. [Langley died before he ever saw his dreams of flying come true.]

The Wright Brothers had been working on flying for some years and got their *Flyer* briefly into the air December 17, 1903. However, they were very secretive about everything they did. Perhaps they were made more skittish by Professor Langley's recent and very public failure that Fall.

Meanwhile, another aviation pioneer was waiting in the wings, building and racing motorcycles, of all things. Enter Glenn H. Curtiss, of Hammondsport, New York.



**Curtiss on the cover of Time Magazine, October 13, 1924**

- *In 1908, Curtiss was the lead designer and pilot of the June Bug. This was the first official, pre-announced, public flight in US*
- *In 1909 Curtiss produced and sold the first private aircraft in the US*
- *In 1910 Curtiss set the long distance flying record of 150 miles, from Albany to New York, much of it above the Hudson River*

**Curtiss was a true inventor, cast in the same mold that created Alexander Graham Bell [telephone] and Henry Ford [assembly line; Model T].**

**In fact, the three became close associates and collaborators. While the Wrights were secretive and wanted to profit from their accomplishments, Curtiss was willing to expend his creative genius to improve aviation in general.**

- *In 1911 Curtiss received pilot's license No. One for the June Bug flight*
- *In 1911 Curtiss became "Father of Naval Aviation". His Hydroaeroplane A-1 was purchased by the US Navy*
- *In 1912 Curtiss developed and flew the first flying boat-- (demonstrated on Lake Keuka, NY)*



*Glenn Curtiss, 35, and Henry Ford, 50, with a Curtiss flying boat at Hammondsport, NY, 1913*

*Henry Ford had won a patent battle of his own. When he heard of the Wright-Curtiss legal struggles, he put the legal resources of the Ford Motor Company at the disposal of Curtiss. This included Mr. W. Benton Crisp, Ford's favorite patent attorney.*

*Now we have the Wrights with their dangerous wing-warping on one side and Curtiss, Bell, Ford, and all thinking aviation experts on the other.*

*And in the middle, are judges and patent attorneys who know next to nothing about the infant science of aviation.*

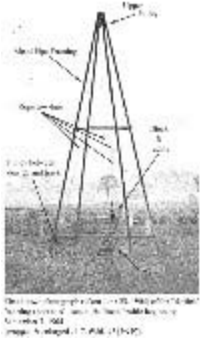
*What a mess!*

**Dr. Bell and the AEA realized that some form of lateral control was necessary but they didn't want to infringe on the Wrights' wing-warping patent. Since both Bell and Curtiss were accomplished inventors in their own right, they came up with movable flap-like devices for use on the wings. They came to be known as "little wings" [ailerons in French].**

**To everyone's delight [except the Wrights], ailerons accomplished lateral control even better than wing-warping! Curtiss was open and sharing and would have**

**The Wright Brothers were Wrong! 5**

gladly shared ailerons with the Wrights. However, they were were secretive and very litigious and wanted nothing to do with ailerons.



In 1904, Wilbur describes a launching derrick they built to compensate for the lack of North Carolina winds when they weren't testing at Kitty Hawk. A 1600-pound weight is hoisted to the top of the derrick. When the weight drops, the plane is catapulted down 60 feet of track and becomes airborne.

The rest of the aviation world of the early 1900's treated the Wrights' launching derrick the same way as they did wing-warping: they found a better way. They put wheels on their planes instead of skids, revved up their engine, taxied down a runway, and took to the air!

There was one thing the Wrights couldn't hide from the world. Wright planes, with their outmoded wing-warping, were death traps!

In 1914, Grover Loening, an early Wright follower and then working with the military, spoke for the Army:

***"We decided to change the old-style warping wings to the more modern trailing edge aileron...on planes used by Curtiss for six years, since 1908".***

Jack Carpenter says in *Pendulum II*, "In effect what Loening did was modify the Wright planes by incorporating features long standard on Curtiss machines." Carpenter goes on to say that in 1935, Loening wrote about the *reign of death*: "The **series of deaths that took place in Wright planes was shocking.**"

The parade of unfortunate pilots who were to be sacrificed on the Wright brothers' altar of intransigence began with Lieutenant Thomas E. Selfridge who died in a nose-dive crash on September 17, 1908, with Orville at the controls. [Ironically, Selfridge was really a member of the Bell/Curtiss AEA group and was just along for the ride as an observer for the Army.] It is this author's layman's opinion that this was the first of many unnecessary deaths caused by the Wrights' clinging to their patented wing-warping means of lateral control, when ailerons as developed by Bell

and Curtiss were in successful use on all new Curtiss planes and were clearly superior to wing warping. Selfridge was the first aviation fatality but the list goes on and on:

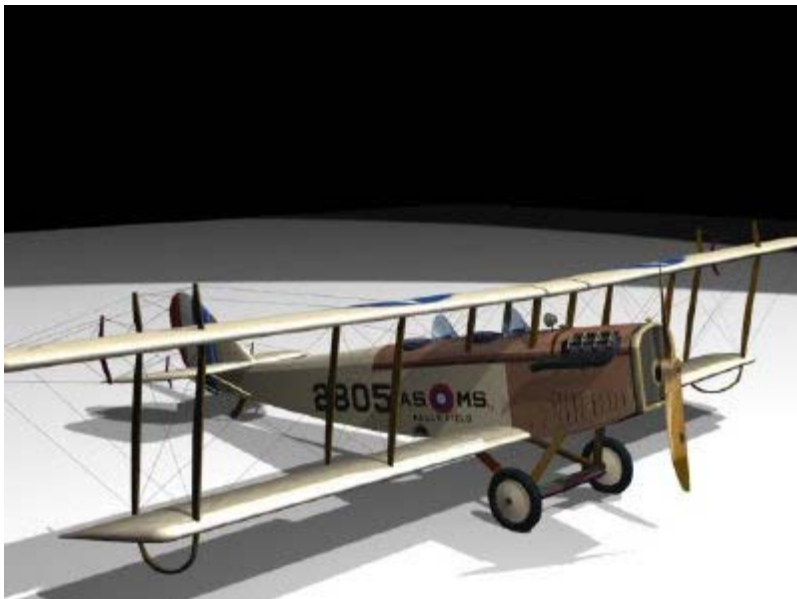
*Billingslee, Call, Ellington, Gill, Hazelhurst, Hein, Herbster, Hoxsey, Johnstone, Kelly, Lefebvre, Lillie, Love, Parmalee, Post, Rich, Rockwell, Rodgers, Rolls, Scott, Towers, Waterman Welch.*

And this was happening while airplanes usually carried no more than one passenger plus the pilot!



*The Curtiss version of Langley's 1903 Aerodrome that had crashed into the Potomac River.*

**In an attempt to prove that Professor Langley really invented the airplane in 1903 and pervert the Wrights' patent suit, Curtiss salvaged Langley's old *Aerodrome* and fitted it with pontoons and various other enhancements such as a new engine. [Curtiss was always into faster and better engines.] Curtiss was able to get his version of the *Aerodrome* off the water and into the air. But that was 1914.**



*Curtiss Jenny JN4*

**The World Wars brought an end to the litigation. Curtiss and the Wrights combined forces to fight the enemy instead of each other.**

**The Curtiss Jenny JN4 helped defeat the Germans in World War I.**

**Curtiss flying boats put the big hurt on many German U-Boats, too.**

**Sadly, Glenn Hammond Curtiss died July 23, 1930, at 52. He had a heart attack in connection with appendicitis.**



***Curtiss P-40  
Flying Tiger***

**Claire L. Chennault and the American Volunteer Group used 100 Curtiss Pursuit-40 *Flying Tigers* to help the Chinese Air Force hold off Japan, before we actually got into World War II.**

**The Curtiss P-40 with the Flying Tiger paint job is perhaps the most famous fighter of World War II.**

# Glenn H. Curtiss Timeline

1901		Curtiss builds his first motorcycle, mounting a mail-order engine on one of his Hercules bicycles. By 1902 he begins building lightweight, high horsepower engines of his own design. He sells motorcycles and engines under the Hercules name.
1903	May 30	Curtiss sets a world speed record by riding a mile in 56.25 seconds (64 MPH) on one of his Hercules motorcycles during a championship tournament in Yonkers, NY, sponsored by the National Cycle Association. He would set several more speed records in the following few years.
1904	Early summer	Curtiss unwittingly sells his first engine for aviation use to Thomas Scott Baldwin, who would mount it on a hydrogen-filled dirigible
1905	October 19	Curtiss and four other directors incorporate the G. H. Curtiss Manufacturing Company, Inc.
1906	May 16	Curtiss writes the Wright brothers to suggest they purchase one of his motors for their aircraft. Curtiss meets the Wrights three months later. They did not buy an engine.
1907	January	Curtiss earns the title, "fastest man in the world" by riding a large, custom-made motorcycle, with an eight-cylinder engine, at 136.3 MPH in Ormond Beach, Florida. No human being travels faster until 1911, when a race car made 141.7 MPH.
1907	June 28	Curtiss flies for the first time, [as a passenger] aboard a Baldwin dirigible in Hammondsport, NY.
1907	October 1	Curtiss joins Alexander Graham Bell and others in the founding of the Aerial Experiment Association [AEA] in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The association appointed Curtiss "director of experiments."
1907	December 30	Curtiss writes the Wright brothers again, offering to give them one of his engines for their aircraft. They decline.
1908	May 21	Near Hammondsport, NY, Curtiss makes his first airplane flight, in "White Wing, the longest public flight to date in America (1017 feet)."
	June 21	Near Hammondsport, NY, Curtiss makes his first flight in "June Bug," an aircraft of his own design. He sets a new record for longest public flight in America (1266 feet).
	July 4	Curtiss wins first leg of three-legged "Scientific American" trophy by making first public flight of one kilometer or more, in "June Bug."
	November	Curtiss tests "Loon" ("Junebug" with floats); it does not rise from water.
1909	August 29	Curtiss flies at 47 miles per hour to win Gordon Bennet speed trophy at Rheims, France.
1910	May 29	Curtiss flies from Albany to New York City in the "Hudson Flyer."
	November 14	Curtiss makes first take-off from a ship.
1911	January 18	Makes first landing onto the deck of a ship
	January 26	Curtiss' hydroplane rises from water
	February 17	First hydroplane flight to a ship
	February 23	Curtiss flies world's first amphibian aircraft.
	May	Curtiss returns to Hammondsport, NY, rents part of North Island to the

		Army as a pilot training base
	May 8	Navy orders two Curtiss hydroplanes
1916		Curtiss builds second “canoe machine,” rises from water.
1920		Curtiss leaves the aviation business, moves to Florida.
1930	May	Curtiss makes his last flight as a pilot, in a Curtiss Condor transport plane, from Albany to New York City [recreating his famous flight of 20 years earlier]
	July 23	Curtiss dies in Buffalo, New York, from complications after appendix surgery.

**If you find the contents of this page to be out of step with your beliefs regarding American aviation history, use the resources listed below and come to your own conclusions. GEL**

Carpenter, Jack. *Pendulum II*, © 2003, Aradalen, Bosch, & Company, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92693

<http://glennhcurtiss.com/>

<http://www.curtisswright.com/history/1909-1917.asp>

<http://www.glennhcurtissmuseum.org/>

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<http://aviation-history.com/early/curtiss.htm>

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