

10-31-2002

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University of Dayton

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## Recommended Citation

University of Dayton, "Did Orville and Wilbur's First Flight (12 Seconds) Arrive Late, Too? 100th Anniversary of Flight Spurs Humor Contest" (2002). *News Releases*. 9950.

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Oct. 31, 2002  
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## NEWS RELEASE

### DID ORVILLE AND WILBUR'S FIRST FLIGHT (12 SECONDS) ARRIVE LATE, TOO? 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF FLIGHT SPURS HUMOR CONTEST

DAYTON, Ohio — "There are many similarities between the first flight 100 years ago and the experience of flying today," says Tim Bete. "For instance, the Wright brothers served the same meal that I got on my last flight — nothing."

Bete, who is a humor columnist ([www.TimBete.com](http://www.TimBete.com)) and co-director of the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop ([www.HumorWriters.org](http://www.HumorWriters.org)) at the University of Dayton (Ohio), thinks the 100th anniversary of flight in 2003 is also an opportunity to celebrate 100 years of flight humor. So, he created a Web site — [www.FlightHumor.org](http://www.FlightHumor.org) — where visitors can submit their humorous stories and jokes about flying. Bete and other humor writers will pick the five funniest entries and announce the winners in July 2003. Winners will receive Dayton Flyers T-shirts. The Flyers are the nickname of the University of Dayton's athletics teams.

"As long as there have been flying machines, there have been jokes about them," says Bete. "The Wright brothers first flight lasted only 12 seconds — but I bet it still arrived late."

Orville and Wilbur Wright may have appreciated Bete's sense of humor. In his book, *The Bishop's Boys: A Life of Wilbur and Orville Wright* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), author Tom Crouch calls Orville "an incorrigible practical joker." Wilkinson Wright, great grand-nephew of the aviation pioneers, can testify to that. Wright recalled a practical joke that took place while eating lunch at Orville's house in a 1999 *News & Record* (Greensboro, N.C.) article.

"A big cockroach ran from my plate and ducked under his," said Wright. "It was a tin cockroach, and he had it on a thread. He enjoyed it thoroughly."

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In addition to the title "birthplace of aviation," Ohio could also be dubbed the "birthplace of humorists." Ohio-born humorists include Phyllis Diller, James Thurber, Kaye Ballard, Tim Conway, Paul Lynde and Drew Carey. Bob Hope, whose family moved to Ohio when he was four years old, is another comedian Ohio claims as its own. Hope has logged more than 10 million air miles traveling to perform for U.S. troops and often jokes about flying.

"The stealth bomber is supposed to be a big deal," Hope told troops during a USO Christmas tour in the Persian Gulf. "It flies in undetected, bombs, then flies away — I've been doing that all my life." The U.S. Air Force Museum in Dayton features an exhibit, 50 Years of Hope, to honor the comedian.

In her book, *When You Look Like Your Passport Photo, It's Time to Go Home* (HarperCollins, 1991), Dayton native Erma Bombeck took advantage of flight humor.

"They have rules to cover everything," wrote Bombeck. "Ironically, the things that airlines concern themselves with are the things that never really happen. How many headlines do you see: *Glass Not Collected by Attendant Before Takeoff Responsible for First-Class Drowning?* or, *Luggage Not Pushed All the Way Under Seat Causes Plane to Plummet?*"

Bombeck, whose syndicated column was carried by 700 newspapers, died of kidney disease in 1996. She graduated from the University of Dayton in 1949 and credited the University with preparing her for life and work, for making her believe she could write. Bombeck and the Wright brothers are buried in Woodland Cemetery in Dayton.

The University of Dayton is a partner of Inventing Flight, which will draw visitors from around the world to Dayton July 3-20, 2003, for a world-class celebration. They will gather to celebrate not only the Wright brothers' invention, but also the entrepreneurial spirit, determination, creativity, innovation and dedication that is still part of the greater Dayton community today.

"We owe a debt of gratitude to the Wright brothers," says Bete. "Without their ingenuity, it wouldn't make any sense when a comedian says 'I just flew in from Chicago and, boy, are my arms tired.'"

Visit [www.FlightHumor.org](http://www.FlightHumor.org) and [www.inventingflight.com](http://www.inventingflight.com)