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A M E R I C A



The year in review

History

This year marks the centennial of the birth of the aerospace industry. Today we can look back 100 years to its beginning in 1909, when the Wright brothers set up the Wright Company, to today, when exciting developments range from a new generation of commercial airplanes to sophisticated space exploration activities. In 1909 it would have been hard to project where the aerospace industry would be a century later.

In May of 1909 the Wrights were hailed as heroes upon their triumphant return from demonstration flights made the previous year in Europe and at Fort Myer, Va. On October 4, 1909, Wilbur Wright made a 20-mi. flight up the Hudson River and back in view of a million people. Now, 100 years later, over three million passengers a day travel in airplanes.

On July 25, 1909, Louis Blériot crossed the English Channel, flying from Calais to Dover in 37 min in a Blériot XI Monoplane. The event had implications that would prove devastating during the two world wars: Britain was now vulnerable to air attack. Nevertheless, the flight was hailed as one of aviation's early triumphs. On July 27 of this year, to commemorate the flight's hundredth anniversary, Frenchman Edmond Salis flew a restored Blériot XI across the channel.

Another celebration that took place this year was the 40th anniversary of the Apollo 11 landing. At a widely publicized event marking this achievement, Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins were reunited, and each was awarded a Congressional Space Medal of Honor.

Meanwhile, NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter began its mission to map the lunar surface with high-resolution cameras and return pictures from the Apollo landing sites. Many museums and work sites around the country also celebrated the 1969 landing. A 40th anniversary documentary film, *Moon Beat*, won the 2009 Special Jury Remi Award at the 42nd Annual WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival. In addition, NASA announced the availability of remastered footage of the initial TV broadcasts of the landing.


This year is also the 400th anniversary of Galileo's introduction of the telescope. On August 25, 1609, Galileo gave a demonstration of his new optical device to several prominent Venetian officials. The event was celebrated by a PBS special, *400 Years of the Telescope*, sponsored by Ball Aerospace. Four

hundred years after Galileo presented his invention, which he used to discover Jupiter's moons, the Hubble Space Telescope received its final servicing, and on July 23 its lens turned to Jupiter, recording sharp images of the aftermath of a surface impact by a comet or asteroid.



On the eve of the 40th anniversary of Apollo 11's Moon landing, crewmembers (from left) Michael Collins, Neil Armstrong, and Buzz Aldrin gathered at the National Air and Space Museum. Photo Credit: NASA/Bill Ingalls.

Fifty years ago, the Mercury Seven—the first astronaut group—were selected to great fanfare. Meanwhile, the X-15 began early flight testing, with pilot Scott Crossfield at the controls. The contrast between the two methods of early access to the edge of space is a subject of continuing discussion.

This year AIAA sponsored the transcription of three important oral histories, those of Sam Jacobellis of North American-Rockwell; Jack Duffendack, who worked at Lockheed from 1937 to 1977 and became its chief engineer; and Les Jonkey, also of Lockheed (1937-1984), where he was head of manufacturing engineering for the Skunk Works. These histories should be available to AIAA members in the near future. 

by **Scott Eberhardt**