

National Aviation Day: August 19

To mark the birth date of Orville Wright, August 19th is celebrated as National Aviation Day. When one thinks of aviation, Orville and Wilbur Wright immediately come to mind. They were actually bicycle manufacturers, for the most part, but they were also mechanics and pilots who pioneered in aviation. They made their first flight in a power-driven aircraft, *Flyer*, near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903.

The plane, driven by a small gasoline engine, had a wingspan of 40 feet, 6 inches. Orville piloted the first of four flights. He was in the air for 12 seconds covered 120 feet. Wilbur followed with a thirteen-second flight of 195 feet. Then Orville flew more than 200 feet in 15 seconds. The fourth and final flight, with Wilbur at the controls, was the most successful—852 feet in 59 seconds.

The original aircraft can be seen in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC. Here is the telegraph message Orville sent to his father: “Success—four flights—Thursday morning—all against 21-mile wind—started from level with engine power alone—average speed through air was 31 miles—longest 59 seconds—inform press—home Christmas.”

...And that gets us into “Aviation” as a possible category. Makes sense, but I’ve never actually seen anyone have that as a want area. Look at the categories that *could* make up “Aviation”:

- **Army Air Force** (there are currently 865 such covers listed—and they’re *all* front-strikers and some 60+ years old; Don Marquette, AR, reported having 1,088 in 2001)
- **Air Force** (Hmrrrrrrrr...there are currently 1,096 covers listed here, dating from 1947, when the Army Air Force changed into the Air Force, to the present; John Nichols, UT, reported having 2,108 in 1993)
- **Airports** (there is no listing on Airport covers, but I have at least 500)
- **Flight Safety Single Covers and Sets** (the ones I have are Military and are thus included in those categories, but there could possibly be some civilian ones I’m not aware of; no numbers on these, but we’re probably only talking a handful)
- **Non-Military Plane Pictures -H/M/R, etc.** (Bill Furlong reported having 908 in his collection back in 1990)
- **Non-Military Nationals - Store sets, etc.** (No numbers on these either, but there probably more than a few out there)

So, if you were to include all this under the umbrella category of “Aviation”, we’d be talking about...*add the one and the eight; that’s nine; carry over the one*...at least 3,000 covers. Not a small category numerically, but a Small Category in the traditional sense of not being one of the ‘usual Categories.

...Let’s see....Have I forgotten any? I suppose it depends on how you, as the individual collector, would define a category of “Aviation.” If you included *anything* that had to do with Aviation, then you’d also be including corporate covers from business such as Boeing, helicopter manufacturers, and so on. If you restricted it to covers that have a plane picture, then you’d be whittling down the possible numbers here very substantially. Since Military is traditionally collected separately, perhaps you’d want an “Aviation” category to only include non-Military covers. Anyway you look at it, there’s plenty of room to maneuver here, so have fun!