

Abstract

The Wright Brothers pioneered the first sustained, powered, heavier than air, manned flight on December 17, 1903 (Garber, 1978). Some say that the Wrights' invention and innovation brought the "aerial age" into being (Douglas, 2003, p. 367). Having invented something truly unique and accomplishing it before anyone else, the Wrights took prompt action to protect their invention by filing patent applications in the United States, France, Germany and Great Britain (Johnson, 2004). Once these patent applications were accepted, the Wrights spent significant amounts of time and money defending their patents (Johnson, 2004). Ultimately, the Wrights recovered little in return for their herculean efforts, and further developments of the airplane by the Wrights languished as they sought to protect what they had wrought. A student of aviation history might ask if the Wrights were "right" or "wrong" to devote so much effort to protecting their patents, when ultimately, they recovered so little, at such a great expense. This paper contends that they were ultimately right.