

For Immediate Release

GUSTAVE WHITEHEAD FIRST FLIGHT FINDINGS

Beginning in March 2013, a small group of aviation enthusiasts have presented Gustave Whitehead, a German immigrant living in Bridgeport, CT at the turn of the twentieth century, as the first man to successfully fly a powered airplane. The revival of this old story was occasioned by the promotion of a photo -- actually a photo within a photo -- allegedly showing Whitehead in flight on August 14, 1901. As this anniversary approaches, organizations from Connecticut and Germany promise new pronouncements to support this view.

Although the flights Whitehead claimed in 1901 and 1902 have been discredited by mainstream aviation historians many times before, scholarship is an ongoing process. Whitehead's aeronautical career has been reviewed in detail since March and historians have made new discoveries.

1. THE PHOTO-IN-A-PHOTO HAS BEEN POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED AND IT DOES NOT SHOW WHITEHEAD FLYING. It is a photograph of a glider built by John J. Montgomery of Santa Clara, CA. The glider, called the "California," was suspended from the trees in Agricultural Park in San Jose, CA on May 21, 1905. That photo was displayed on a wall with other Montgomery materials at the Aero Club of America's Exhibition of Aeronautical Apparatus in January 1906 when its photo was taken.

2. WHITEHEAD COULD NOT HAVE MADE THE FLIGHTS HE CLAIMED IN 1902 BECAUSE THE AIRPLANE WAS NEVER BUILT. Whitehead claimed three powered flights -- a half-mile flight in 1901 using an airplane called the "No. 21," and 2-mile and 7-mile flights in 1902 in the "No.22." New research shows that the No. 22 never existed, some of the evidence coming from Whitehead's own words.

3. WHITEHEAD SUPPORTERS HAVE CONSPIRED TO KEEP WHITEHEAD'S PAPERS FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC. Unlike the papers of other pioneer aviators, access to Whitehead's personal effects are restricted and cannot be used to evaluate the accomplishments he claimed. In addition, researchers who gain permission to see the papers must pay a massive "royalty of 60%" on all profits earned by using them.

We have prepared short papers to explain each of these three discoveries and provide links where you can get sources and additional details.

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Links:

[Flying Machines/Gustave Whitehead – What Did He Do?](#)

"Flying Machines" is an encyclopedic web site on pioneer aviation. "Gustav Whitehead – What Did He Do?" is a sub-site that offers information on Gustave Whitehead and the controversy surrounding his work. This is the most extensive of those Internet resources that support the mainstream historical view of Gustave Whitehead, that is, he was an early aeronautical engineer and prolific designer who never achieved powered flight.

[Wright Brothers Aeroplane Company/The Case For Gustave Whitehead](#)

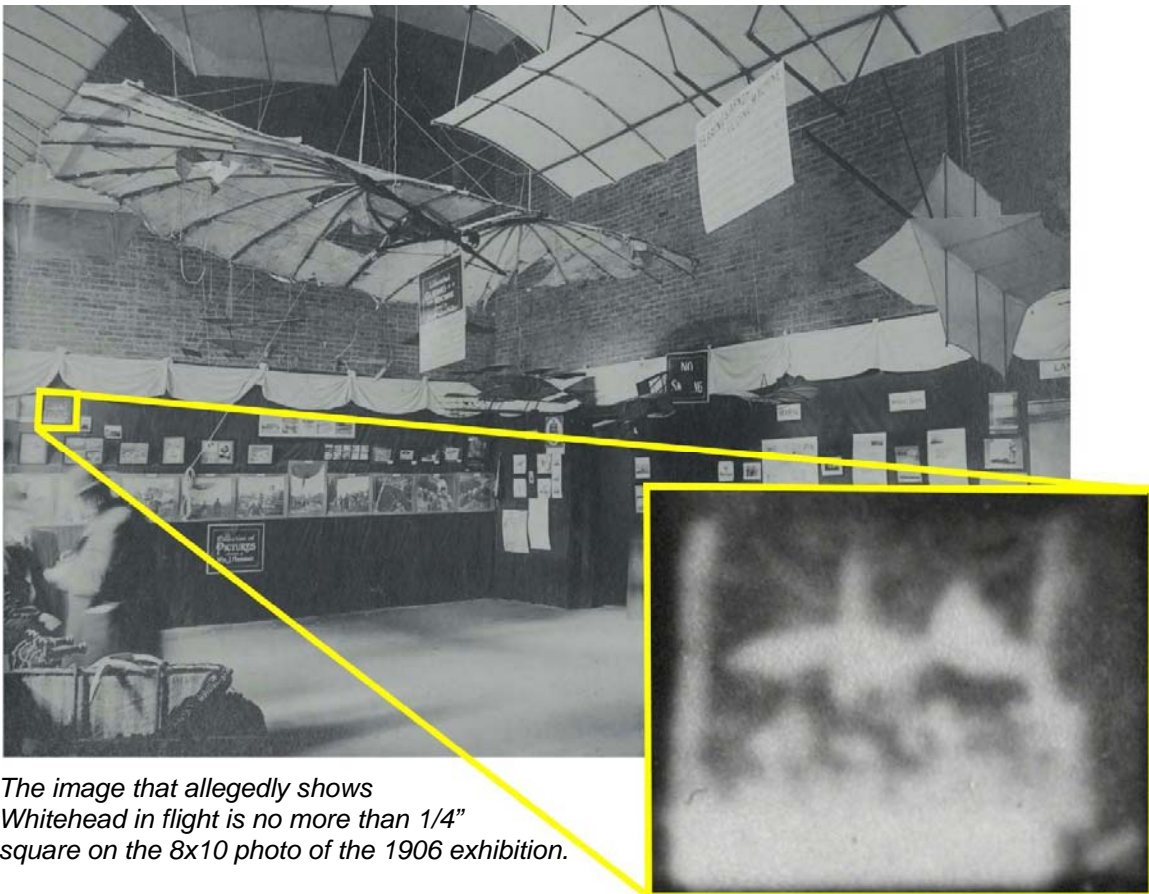
A concise history of the Gustave Whitehead controversy, beginning with Stella Randolph and Harvey Phillips article in the January 1935 edition of *Popular Aviation*, "Did Whitehead Precede Wright In World's First Powered Flight?" It includes the events precipitated by the announcement of a photo that allegedly shows Whitehead in flight on March 2013.

A Second Look

Analyzing the photo-within-a-photo alleged to show Gustave Whitehead in flight

By Nick Engler

Earlier this year, John Brown, an employee of an obscure aeronautical company trying to develop a roadable airplane, published a “forensic analysis” of a photo that appeared at the 1906 Exhibition of Aeronautical Apparatus at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City. Actually, it was an analysis of a photo within a photo. A photo of the exhibition shows the back wall covered with images and a sign saying “Collection of Pictures loaned by W.J. Hammer.” According to Brown, one of Mr. Hammer’s pictures shows Gustave Whitehead’s aircraft, the No. 21, in flight in 1901, two years before the Wright brothers first made powered flights.



The image that allegedly shows Whitehead in flight is no more than 1/4" square on the 8x10 photo of the 1906 exhibition.

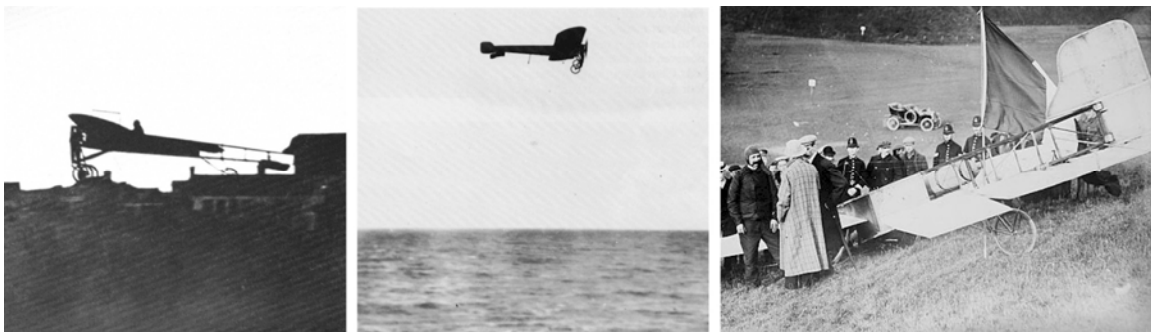
I have analyzed a few photos myself, beginning with photos taken from Robin Falling Weather Balloons in the 1960s. I applied the analytical techniques I learned on that job in my long career as a craftsman and author, developing architectural drawings of classical buildings and furniture from old photos. I used this skill again when I joined a team who, between the years of 1999 and 2005, reproduced and flew all of the Wright brother’s experimental aircraft. Still today people send me obscure aviation pictures, asking me to identify pioneer aircraft and the circumstances in which they were photographed. So I was fascinated to

read how Brown, analyzing a blur that was no more than 1/4-inch square on a 100-year-old photo, enlarged it an estimated 3200% and proved that this was an image of a Whitehead airplane in flight. Not only that, he determined that it was taken at the moment the wings collapse and the aircraft begins to fall from the sky – an unbelievably specific conclusion from such blurry data.

If you read Brown's long and convoluted "analysis" – and very few people do; I am sure he is counting on this – he uses confusing technical jargon which obfuscates more than it illuminates. He skips steps that professionals consider of primary importance and spends pages tracing shapes in the blurs which, because we don't know the background against which this photo was taken, could be anything – people, trees, clouds, or flying saucers. This is nothing more than junk science, designed to impress rather than inform.

My first clue was Brown's continuous misuse of the word "forensic." In the vernacular, forensic describes the sciences and technologies used to establish facts to be presented in a court of law. Although I have analyzed hundreds of photos, I have never done a forensic analysis – and neither has Mr. Brown. What I am about to present here is just a simple analysis involving a little math, the laws of physics, and common sense.

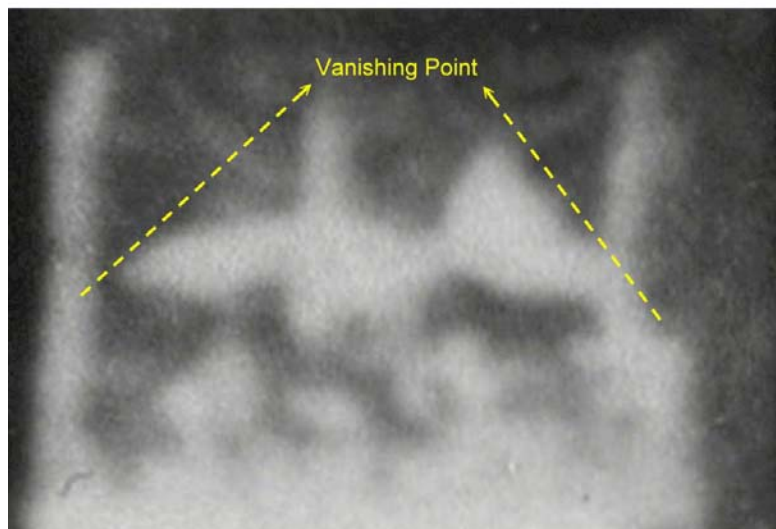
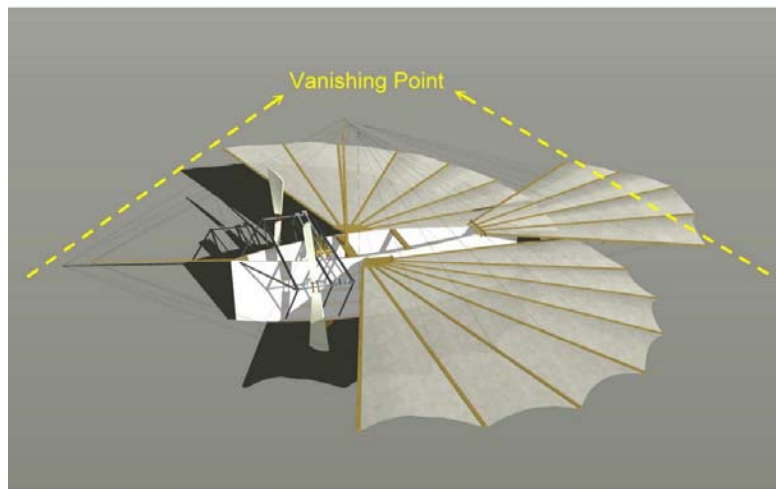
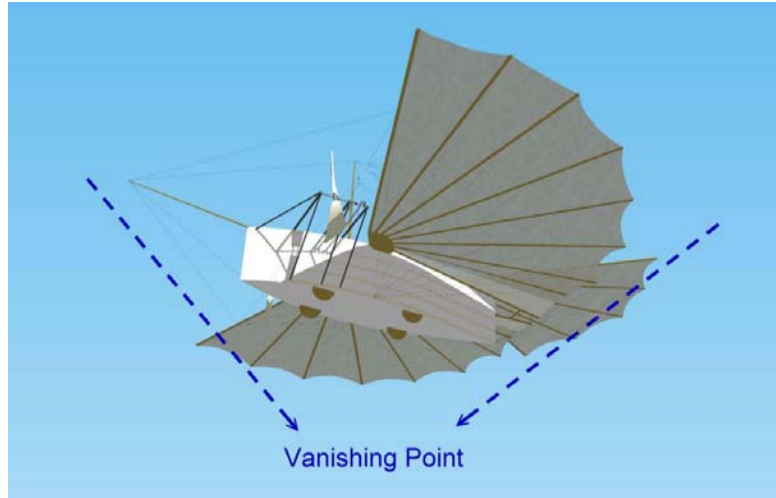
The first thing you must consider in analyzing a photo is lighting. In the case of an outdoor photo, which this blur is supposed to be, you have to ask yourself where is the sun and what shadows is it casting? When photographing an airplane against the sky, the answer is simple. Light from the sun scatters as it enters the atmosphere, making the entire sky luminous. When an aircraft crosses the sky, it blocks that light so that even a white aircraft appears darker than the surrounding space. Photograph that aircraft and what you see is its shadow against the incandescence. The objects in the blur that Brown identifies as the fuselage and tail of Whitehead's airplane appear light against a darker background. Because of this, it is highly unlikely that the blur represents an aircraft in flight.



These famous photographs show aviator Louis Bleriot crossing the English Channel in 1909. Note that his aircraft appears dark against a light sky, even during a pre-dawn take-off. Once he had landed, however, the same aircraft appears light against the grassy fields of Dover.

The next thing to consider is the position of the camera relative to the object. This is crucial not only for identifying the object, but also determining its size, shape, condition, and the circumstances in which it was photographed. I start by looking for vanishing points – imaginary points on the horizon into which an object would vanish if it were receding from you. The classic example is train tracks that seem to grow narrower and vanish into a spot in the distance. Find that spot and you know where the camera was in relation to the tracks.

If the object in the blur is the fuselage and horizontal tail of the Whitehead No. 21, then the tail will point us toward the vanishing point. The tail was triangular in shape and the triangle will be skewed toward that spot. To locate this vanishing point with some precision, I made a 3D drawing of the No. 21 that I could manipulate to match the shapes in the blur. If the camera was below the aircraft looking up – as it would have to be if the aircraft was in flight – the far



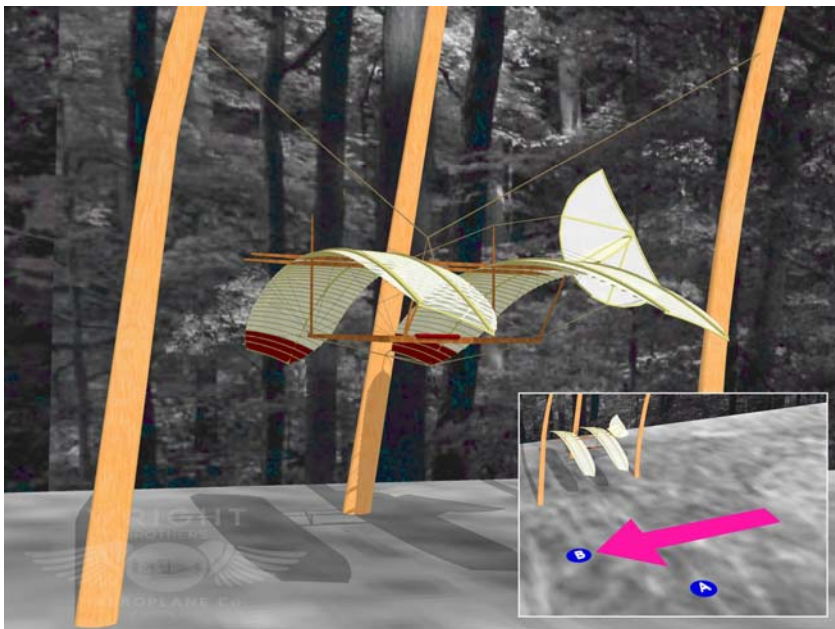
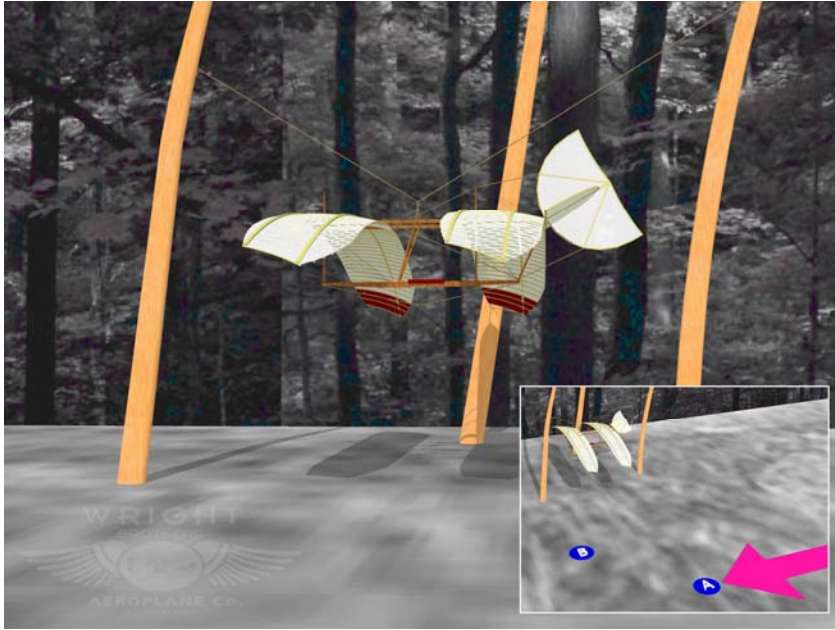
The vanishing point (VP) is always a point on the horizon. In the top illustration, the VP is below the aircraft, as is the horizon. In the middle one, it's above the aircraft. In the blurry photo, it appears to be above the objects in the image.

corner of the triangular tail would have to be skewed down and toward the center of the photo. But it wasn't. It was plainly skewed up, meaning the camera was more likely above the aircraft, looking down. This isn't an opinion or interpretation; it is a plain, unvarnished fact proved by the mathematics that governs perspective (and the graphic software with which I was working). If the triangular shape was the *No 21* tail, the camera had to be above the aircraft.

Unfortunately, not all scientific facts lead us to the truth, as later events plainly showed. About the same time I was spinning the virtual *No. 21* on my computer screen, Craig Harwood, co-author of *Quest for Flight: John J. Montgomery and the Dawn of Aviation in the West*, sent historian Carroll Gray a photo of a Montgomery glider, the *California*, taken in 1905. The glider was on exhibit in San Jose, suspended in front of a dense wall of trees and leaves. The wings, rudder, and elevator of the glider appeared light against the darker vegetation. The trunks of three nearby trees match the vertical shapes in the blur; the shape of the *California* vertical rudder matches what Brown had promoted as the *No. 21* tail. It was not a complete match, however; the wings did not form the same cigar shape that Brown had determined was the *No. 21* fuselage.



This image shows the Montgomery glider California suspended between three light-trunked trees at Agriculture Park in San Jose, California in the late spring of 1905. If you reduce the photo by 3200% to 1/4" tall, then re-enlarge it, the shapes blur. The trees and the tail of the glider match shapes in the blurry image that was extracted from the photo of the 1906 exhibition. But there is no cigar-shaped "fuselage."

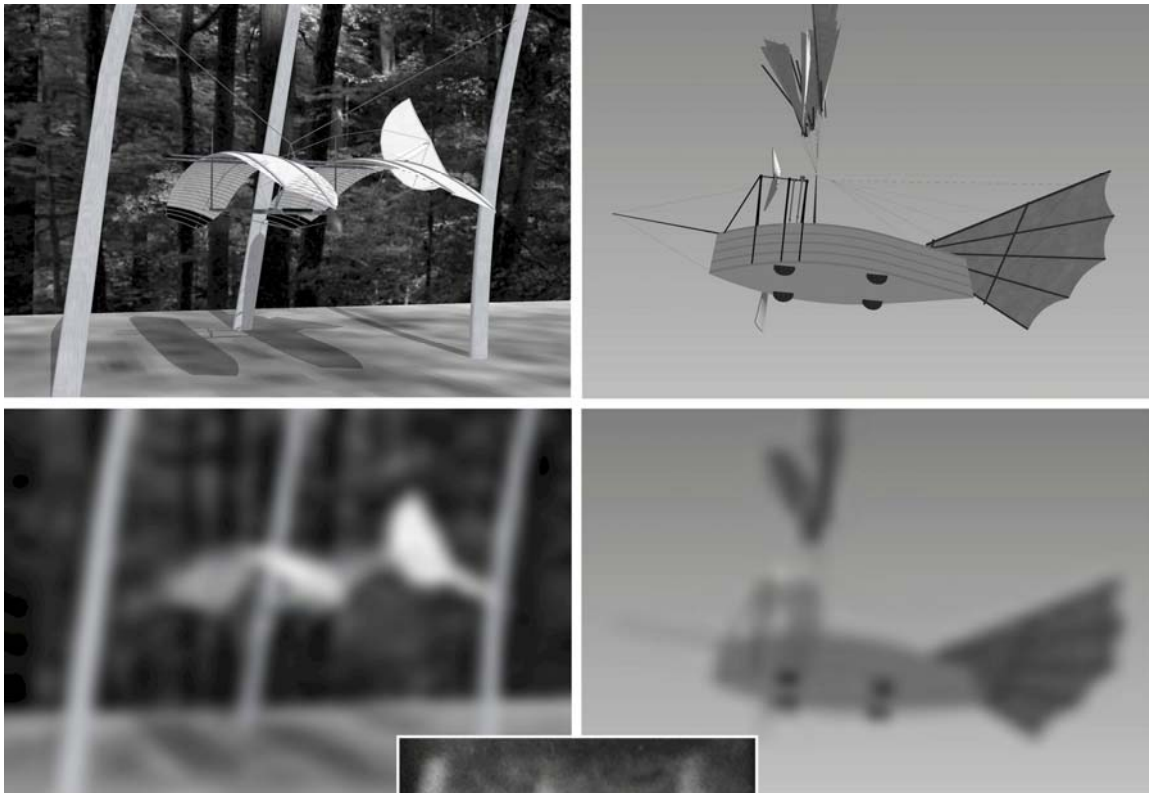


The illustrations show the *California* suspended between three trees. The camera position (A) for the top image is almost perpendicular to the longitudinal access of the aircraft. This matches the 1905 photo taken in San Jose. The bottom image was generated with the camera position (B) closer and to the left of the first. The overlapping wings form an oval shape close to the “fuselage” shape in the blurry image from the 1906 exhibition photo.

then moved it again looking for a match to the shapes in the blur. I found what I was looking for about forty degrees to the left and five feet closer to the glider than the camera position for the Montgomery photo.

Carroll Gray had a reasonable hypothesis to explain this. The photo of the *California* that he had found was taken from a different position than the blurry image in the 1906 exhibition photo – two different camera locations. I decided to test this hypothesis the same way I had tested Brown’s conclusion. I drew a virtual *California* that I could view from any angle on screen. Using a little trigonometry, I determined the relative positions of the three trees in the Montgomery photo and suspended the *California* between them. I rotated this tableau and adjusted the distance between the camera and the glider until the virtual image echoed the Montgomery photo. I marked the camera position,

To check my work, I generated an image of the *California* from this new position. I stripped the image of color and added contrast to mimic the effects of old black-and-white photographic film. I reduced the image by 3200% so it was the same size as it appeared in the original photo of the 1906 exhibition, then re-enlarged it to fill the screen. As a control I did the same with a virtual image of the *No. 21*, first rotating it so the outlines of the tail and fuselage matched the shapes in the blur as well as possible. I also adjusted the lighting in both images. The positions of the shadows in the *California* rendering match those in the Montgomery photo. The position of the sun in the *No. 21* drawing is adjusted for early morning in mid-August when the photo was alleged to have been taken.



The top illustration shows the California in black and white from camera position "B." The blurry image below it was generated from this. The image to the right is the blurry 1906 photo-in-a-photo.

The illustrations above show the No. 21 twenty feet above the ground. The wings have ripped away and are fluttering above as the aircraft plummets – all per Brown's complex analysis.

There are two conclusions to be drawn from this second analysis. The first is that Gray's hypothesis is most likely the correct interpretation of the blur, pending new data. Truth in science grows and evolves, always making it impossible to pin down with one hundred percent certainty. The second is that Brown's analysis is likely junk science, ignoring laws of physics and logic. By the same token, the changes in aviation history that he proposes are likely junk history.

For Further Information:

[Flying Machines/Gustave Whitehead – What Did He Do?/The Photographs](#)

Historian Carroll Gray discusses the photo-within-a-photo. He identifies the event where the original photo was taken – a display of John J. Montgomery's gliders in San Jose in 1905 -- then tells how that photo made its way to the Aero Club of America's Exhibition of Aeronautical Apparatus in New York City in 1906, where it was photographed in turn.

[Wright Brothers Aeroplane Company/The Aero Club of America 1906 Exhibition](#)

A reprint of the article from From Scientific American, Volume XCIV, No. 4, January 27, 1906, pps. 93-94, describing the 1906 Exhibition of Aeronautical Apparatus. Includes a description of "a single blurred photograph of a large birdlike machine propelled by compressed air, and which was constructed by Whitehead in 1901..." Allegedly, the blurry photo-in-a-photo was this image.

The Phantom 22

*Did Whitehead's No. 22 ever exist?
Or did he simply imagine his most successful airplane?*

By Louis Chmiel and Nick Engler

In the face of the following evidence one must ask, if a man is capable of fabricating a story for a national publication about an epoch-making flight in a plane that didn't exist, what other deceits might he be capable of and should anything he has said be given credulity?

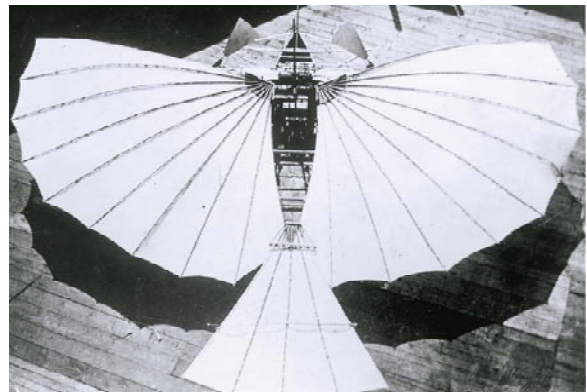
At the turn of the twentieth century, Gustave Whitehead of Bridgeport, Connecticut made three specific claims that he had successfully flown a powered airplane. On August 14, 1901, he claimed to have made a 1/2-mile flight in a bat-winged monoplane he called the No. 21. This story ran in the *Bridgeport Herald* on August 18. Several months later, he made two more claims of having made 2- and 7-mile flights in a new aircraft called the No. 22 on January 17, 1902. This story was published in the *American Inventor* on April 1, 1902.

The first claim as recounted in the *Bridgeport Herald* has been widely discussed and dismissed, most recently by historian Carroll Gray who discovered it was a cut-and-paste job from an earlier story published in *the New York Sun* on June 7, 1901. These were Whitehead's own words to the *Sun*, only the dates and geography were altered in the *Herald*. But at least there is photographic evidence to prove that the No. 21 existed, even if Whitehead's story of a successful flight was nothing more than wishful thinking. But with the two later claims, Whitehead's powers of invention seemed to grow. The *American Inventor* article was written by Whitehead himself as a letter to the editor. He not only fabricated the stories of the 2- and 7-mile flights; the aircraft itself was also imagined!

Consider these facts:

Exhibit 1: There are NO known photos of Gustave Whitehead's plane, the No. 22, either stationary or flying.

Whitehead's photo ruse was cunning. He presented a photo of the No. 21 in his letter to the *American Inventor* with the explanation that his plane No. 22 looked exactly like the photo except that it was of infinitely higher quality construction using much better materials, steel, aluminum and silk. When reading about the alleged exploits of the No. 22 in the letter, the reader sees the plane in the photo performing the alleged feats. Whitehead promised to report back with photos and



According to Whitehead, the No 22 looked exactly like the No. 21, but made of metal.

the results of further tests in the spring but these reports never materialized. Whitehead had a habit of making these promises and then shifting the conversation just as randomly as he shifted his airplane designs. In his next outreach to the press he told of his new No. 23 with no mention of the No. 22 or any proof that it ever existed. The only airplane he had on hand, the No. 21, he used as a stage prop for story-telling, creating the illusion of progress.

Exhibit 2: On January 26, 1902 (9 days after the alleged flights of January 17), the *Bridgeport Herald* reports that Whitehead is still building the 40 hp motor he allegedly used to fly 9 days earlier.

Whitehead also states in this article that he believes when the question of a lightweight motor is settled, only then will man succeed in flying. And he says that he also believes that if enough money were forthcoming he could accomplish the task himself. This is nine days after he alleged (in a letter to the *American Inventor*, published April 1, 1902) that he had flown first two, then seven miles.

Exhibit 3: In a letter to Stella Randolph written on August 6, 1934, Gustave Whitehead's brother John describes the only airplane Gustave had when John arrived in Bridgeport in April of 1902 as made of wood, bamboo, and muslin – the No. 21.

He also stated that the motor of the No. 21 had been broken in a flight attempt in 1901 and that no motor had been built since, as his brother had no money. John Whitehead never described an aluminum and steel airplane although he arrived in Bridgeport just three months after the alleged seven-mile flight, about the same time Whitehead's letter in the *American Inventor* was published.

Arriving at Bridgeport beginning of April 1902 I found my brother living at 24. From then he still had the flying machine he told me he had succeeded in flying a short distance at a height of about 10-20 feet some place in Long Island. He told me also he would have flown further if his motor had not broke down beyond repairs. It was for this reason, also as he had no money to secure patents, or try to keep things secret, he did not duplicate his flight shortly after. The exact date I don't know but it happened in the summer or fall 1901. My brother had been

A portion of John Whitehead's letter to Stella Randolph.

Exhibit 4: In her first book, "The Lost Flights of Gustave Whitehead" (1937), Stella Randolph conveniently disposes of the No. 22 by claiming that John Whitehead said that it deteriorated over the winter of 1901-1902, a claim he never made.

John Whitehead plainly stated that the "original plane" (the No. 21), which he spent most of his letter describing in detail, had deteriorated. A full metal plane would have lasted decades, not three months. John Whitehead made no mention of an aluminum and steel airplane. Even without John Whitehead's testimony, the idea that a plane built of steel and aluminum had deteriorated over three months calls into question Randolph's veracity or her powers of observation. Wing coverings might have been more vulnerable to the elements, but the metal would have remained and could have been easily recovered.

Exhibit 5: There are ZERO newspaper accounts of Gustave Whitehead's alleged flights of January 17, 1902 before the publication of his *American Inventor* letter in April of 1902.

Everything ever written about the alleged January 1902 two- and seven-mile flights was derived from Gustave Whitehead's own words in that letter. There are no newspaper stories immediately following the flights as you might expect from such a momentous event. All published accounts from newspaper references to Stella Randolph's unquestioning claims come from this letter.

Exhibit 6: There are ZERO references to the existence of a metal-framed, aluminum-skinned airplane in all the testimonies of those who claimed to witness Gustave Whitehead's flights.

When properly conditioned and prompted, people have been able to conjure up recollections of short hops or "flights" by Gustave Whitehead thirty-five years after the fact. They claim some of these occurred in beach locations similar to those Whitehead's described in his *American Inventor* letter. But not one of these witnesses has described what must have been a remarkable and memorable sight for the times, the metal-framed, metal-clad No. 22. The existing testimonies invariably recall aircraft made of the wood and canvass like the No. 21.



Anton Pruckner claimed to have flown the No. 22, but never mentioned it was made from metal.

Exhibit 7: In 1902 Gustave Whitehead submitted a photo of his No.21 to the *Aeronautical World* presenting it as a photo of airplane No.23.



In the Aeronautical World, Whitehead presents this photo as the No. 23. In "Before the Wrights Flew" by Stella Randolph, it is both the No. 21 and the No.23.

This is further evidence that Gustave Whitehead built no motorized planes in 1902 following the deterioration of the No. 21, but he continued to represent the old aircraft as new work. In a story that appeared in the *Aeronautical World* in December 1902, Gustave Whitehead claimed the No. 23 had been built and flown after the No. 22 and he was at that time working on a No. 24. As he added to his imaginary air force, he continued to reuse old photos as evidence of his work. The exact same photo appears in Stella Randolph's second book, "Before the Wrights Flew" (1966), opposite the title page as airplane No. 21, and on page 178 in a copy of the *Aeronautical World* article as No. 23.

Exhibit 8: In the spring of 1902, Bridgeport newspapers described the dissolution of a partnership between Herman Linde and Gustave Whitehead, giving one of the reasons as Whitehead's failure to fly.

In October of 1901, Gustave Whitehead formed a partnership with Herman Linde who agreed to advance him \$1000 to build the No. 22. By January of 1902 Whitehead had spent the money but had not made sufficient progress on the aircraft to satisfy his new partner. Linde dissolved their partnership on January 17, 1902 and warned Frank Miller Lumber Company, where Whitehead was buying his lumber, not to put any more materials on account. Whitehead, however, managed to sneak a \$38 order past the lumberyard clerks and Linde refused to pay. Linde found himself in court over the bill and the proceedings were covered by the Bridgeport papers. The headline in the April 5, 1902 *Bridgeport Post* was tongue-in-cheek:

"Whitehead Flew High –Financially but not Actually – That is to Say, as of Yet He Hasn't." That same day, the *Bridgeport Farmer* was more direct, but the message was the same: "Last Flop of the Whitehead Flying Machine...Airship Did Not Fly." The *Farmer* also takes a potshot at some New York papers that had printed more positive accounts of Whitehead's efforts: "...there is yet no airship. This will be a blow to some of the New York daily papers who have been printing long accounts of the airship and which were amply illustrated." These may have been spin-offs from the *Bridgeport Herald's* August 18, 1901 cut-and-paste fiction concerning the No. 21:

**WHITEHEAD
FLEW HIGH**

That Is Financially but Not Actually—That Is, To Say as Yet He Hasn't.

**LINDE TIRED OF PUTTING
UP DUCATS.**

**Miller Lumber Co. Brings Him
into Court—Says He Order-
ed Brakes Down.**

The Frank Miller Lumber Co. summoned Herman Linde before Justice John S. Pullman yesterday to show cause why he should not foot a bill which Gustave Whitehead, the widely known flying machine inventor, had contracted.

Many months ago Mr. Whitehead in order to carry on his extensive experiments sought the assistance of men with money. His enthusiastic description of what he hoped to do interested Mr. Linde who promptly put \$1,000 into the venture.

This fund, although not large, enabled Mr. Whitehead to do considerable experimenting. Lumber was necessary in the work and Mr. Whitehead went to the Frank Miller Co. to get it. He told them that Mr. Linde was back of him and it would be all right.

The lumber firm was a bit skeptical on flying machines and made some inquiries. At the City National bank it learned that Mr. Linde was all right, so an account was opened with the firm of Linde & Whitehead.

The headline of the article in the April 5, 1902 Bridgeport Post.

Exhibit 9: Gustave Whitehead's breakup with Herman Linde occurred on January 17, 1902, the same date he chose in his American Inventor letter as the date for his flights.

One might think that an astute businessman (Herman Linde) would choose a better time for falling out with a partner than at the time of a breakthrough event like the alleged two- and seven-mile flights. Those flights would have been grist for the newspaper stories about the disagreement between the two men which sprung up over the next several weeks. Had the flights actually happened, the subject of those stories would have been who owned the rights to an incredibly successful invention rather than stories of a lawsuit over a hundred dollar lumber bill. Gustave Whitehead's world was closer to chaos on January 17, 1902 than to the "eureka" moment he alleges. It should be noted that he chose the January 17th date for his two- and seven-mile flights when he composed the letter to the editor of the *American Inventor*, some time (weeks to months) after the events of that day, and in time for publication in April of 1902. One wonders if this wasn't a poke at Linde.

Exhibit 10: Gustave Whitehead's application to display his aircraft at the St. Louis World's Fair, made on January 10, 1902, seven days before the alleged two- and seven-mile flights, describes a wood and bamboo airplane to the fair committee.

One might think that with such a formidable creation as the metal-framed, metal-clad No. 22 being readied within the week for its first test flights, it might deserve some ink in a letter where one is putting one's best foot forward. However, when Gustave Whitehead wrote his letter to the Worlds Fair Committee in January 1902, he failed to mention it. Apparently Whitehead did not discover until a couple of months later, when he composed his letter to the *American Inventor*, that he had an aluminum and steel airplane that he had already flown seven miles.

A Parting Thought

In all probability, the *American Inventor* letter to the editor was a ruse to entice investors to take a chance on winning the prize offered by the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (better known as the St. Louis World's Fair) for the best flight by an airship or airplane at the fair in 1904. The prize was huge – \$100,000 – the largest ever offered for an aeronautical competition up to that time, and it was the focus of aviation-minded scientists and inventors everywhere. Because Whitehead had lost his financial backing (Herman Linde) and was unable to fund his own aviation experiments, he used this story to lure new investors.

Story aside, the preponderance of evidence shows that Gustave Whitehead's No. 22 was only imaginary – *vaporware* is the contemporary term. A photo in the December 15, 1906 *Scientific American* suggests that Whitehead did assemble another wooden-framed aircraft hull, similar to the No. 21, but there is nothing to show that he completed it. Furthermore, all of the "evidence" that Whitehead flew in 1902 stems from the claim that he himself made in the *American Inventor*. But if the No. 22 never existed, how could he have possibly made those flights?

For Further Information:

[Wright Brothers Aeroplane Company/The Case for Gustave Whitehead/The Phantom 22](#)

Includes all the supporting documents and evidence referred to in "The Phantom 22," proving that in all likelihood the aircraft was never built.

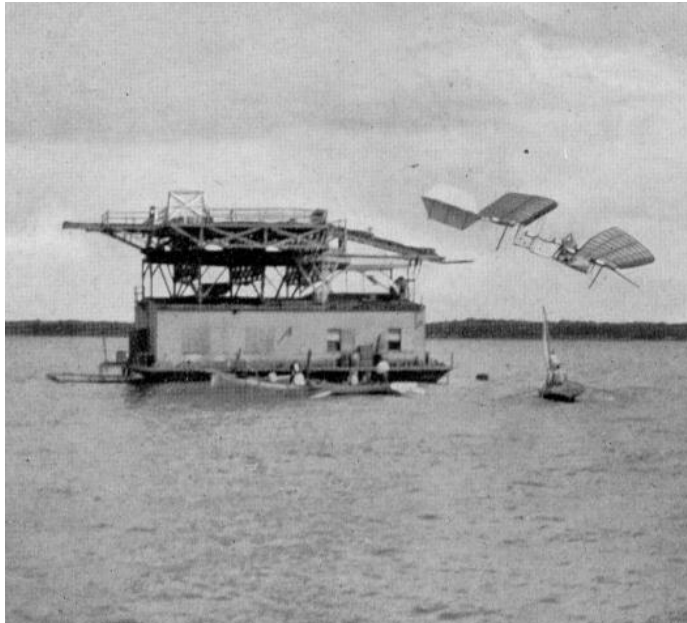
Just Whose Conspiracy Is This?

The pot conspires to call the kettle black.

By Nick Engler

Those who insist that Gustave Whitehead flew before the Wright brothers often point to an agreement between the Wright Estate and the Smithsonian Institution as evidence of a conspiracy to deny Whitehead the recognition he deserves. This agreement, made in 1948, defines how the original 1903 Wright Flyer is to be displayed. One of its provisions says that should the Smithsonian "publish or permit to be displayed a statement or label in connection with or in respect of any aircraft model or design of earlier date than the Wright Aeroplane of 1903, claiming in effect that such aircraft was capable of carrying a man under its own power in controlled flight," then the Wright Estate may reclaim the Flyer.

This agreement was the result of a long-running dispute between Orville Wright and the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian had issued a report in 1914 that the Langley Aerodrome, an aircraft designed by the former Secretary of that institution, was the first airplane "capable" of flight despite two failed attempts. The Smithsonian finally retracted and apologized for the report in 1943 – 39 years later – and the agreement was to keep them from backtracking. It had nothing to do with Gustave Whitehead.



Samuel Langley, Secretary of the Smithsonian in 1903, tried twice to launch his Aerodrome from a houseboat on the Potomac River, and twice it slid into the waters.

However, it is true that the threatened loss of a national treasure is a disincentive for the Smithsonian to publish that someone flew successfully before the Wrights. Tom Crouch, Director of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, has said as much in the articles he has written and the lectures he has given. But it is not an impediment. The Wright/Smithsonian agreement creates no barrier that prevents the Smithsonian or any other institution or individual from exploring this possibility. This is not the case for agreements concerning Gustave Whitehead's papers and effects.

In a recent article, *Five Agreements*, historian Carroll Gray describes the custodians of Gustave Whitehead's personal papers as they were transferred from the Whitehead family to author Stella Randolph to William O'Dwyer and the Connecticut Aeronautical Historical Society, and finally to the Fairfield Historical Society. Every time the papers changed hands, the rules governing access to them became more restrictive. "No use, study, reproduction, publication, or transfer of any of the Whitehead memorabilia or files will be made by any group, groups, person or persons having the apparent intent of discrediting Whitehead or his work," reads the first paragraph in the agreement between Randolph and O'Dwyer. Successive agreements have similar clauses. The last agreement, between O'Dwyer and Fairfield Historical Society, adds a massive user fee requiring "that an author receiving profits from a publication using these materials pay a royalty of 60%" to O'Dwyer and the FHS.

These restrictions on the Gustave Whitehead archives have two effects that govern the type of people who may see these resources. The first is obvious. Because the material may not be used to disprove the aeronautical accomplishments Whitehead claimed, only those who believe these claims may have access to the material. The second is less obvious, but more insidious. To use this information, you must give up more than half of your earnings. This massive royalty effectively removes any incentive that a professional historian might have for seeking Whitehead's side of the story. Only true believers with sufficient commitment to donate their time and money will be allowed to see the relics. In a word, zealots. Consequently, any reports generated from these resources come from people with the least inclination to be objective.

The technique by which we reconstruct the past – historiographics – puts great emphasis on primary sources, specifically the correspondence, diaries, reports, and other papers written by the historic figure who is being studied. In the case of the Wright brothers, these primary sources are located at several institutions, the Library of Congress, the Franklin Institute, Wright State University, the Dayton Public Library and others. In no case is their access restricted; they are available to the general public. There are no fees; many have been posted on the Internet, making them available worldwide free of charge.

The primary sources for the Gustave Whitehead story, however, are severely restricted. Not even their whereabouts is generally known. Even if you find the files and are permitted to see them, they are ridiculously expensive to use. Scholars are left with only secondary sources – conflicting newspaper articles and affidavits – to try to resurrect Whitehead's aeronautical career. In view of this, for Whitehead supporters to accuse the Wright Estate and Smithsonian of a conspiracy to suppress the truth is the very definition of hypocrisy.

For Further Information:[Flying Machines/Gustave Whitehead – What Did He Do?/ Five Ageements](#)

Describes the Wright Estate/Smithsonian agreement concerning the display of the 1903 Wright Flyer and four additional agreements pertaining to Gustave Whitehead's personal effects – who may see them and what fees must be paid. These four agreements were made one at a time whenever the Whitehead material changed hands.

[Wright Brothers Aeroplane Company/The Smithsonian Contract](#)

The history of Orville Wright's dispute with the Smithsonian Institution and why the executors of the Wright Estate deemed it necessary to insist on a contract with the Smithsonian defining how the Wright Flyer should be displayed.