The Wright Brothers The Wright brothers, Orville (1871–1948) and Wilbur (1867–1912), were inventors and aviation pioneers who built and flew the first successful airplane. They developed their skills as pilots through extensive glider tests, from 1900 to 1903, until their first powered flight. Competing researchers and entrepreneurs challenged the Wright brothers' abilities and skills as inventors. They were not the first to build and fly experimental aircraft, but they were the first to invent airplane controls that made powered flight possible.