PRESS RELEASE
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On This Day in History: Otto Lilienthal's legacy lives on

Lausanne, Switzerland, 10 August 2016 - **Otto Lilienthal, the 'Glider King' who was an inspirational 19th-century aviation pioneer died 120-years ago on 10 August 1896. We remember his legacy today…**

The life and works of Otto Lilienthal, the 'Glider King' are well known. Born in 1848 in Germany, he was an aviation pioneer who made repeated, successful gliding flights at the end of the 19th century.

A professional design engineer, flight had always fascinated Lilienthal, and he published a famous book on the subject in 1889, Bird Flight as the Basis of Aviation. In it, he examined how storks flew, and imagined how engineers might recreate their motion.

Two years later he had designed and built his own glider, the Derwitzer. Over the next five years he made some 2,000 short flights, starting with 25m hops and extending to 250m glides. Much like modern hang gliders, his designs depended on weight-shift – the pilot moving side to side, or forwards and back – for control.

By 1894 he had even built his own artificial conical hill, which he called Fliegeberg, Fly Hill. It was 15m high and allowed him to take off in any direction.

Lilienthal had photographers on hand to document his flights from his very first take off. Photographs went around the world, making him famous and opening the eyes of many to the possibility of human flight. His work influenced others, including the Wright Brothers, the founding fathers of powered flight.

However, tragedy was to strike when 120 years ago, on 9 August 1896, Lilienthal flew his final flight. Reports from the day say he had already flown three successful flights, each about 250m long. But on his fourth, his glider pitched forward, towards the ground. Unable to correct it with weight-shift, he hit the ground from 15m while still in the glider.

Transported first by horse-drawn carriage and then cargo train to Berlin, he was diagnosed with a broken back. One of the most famous surgeons of the day operated, but unfortunately it was unsuccessful. Lilienthal died on 10 August 1896, 36 hours after his final flight. He was 48.

Otto's dream of flight however, did not die with him. His work was continued by many others throughout the 1890s. They included the Wright Brothers on the east coast of the USA, where they worked on gliding flight until finally, on 17 December 1903 they made their first powered flight – a 37m, 12-second level flight along the beach near kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Today, aviation remembers Otto Lilienthal in several ways. The Lilienthal Gliding Medal was established by the FAI, the World Air Sports Federation, in 1938 and rewards "remarkable performance" in gliding.

And the Otto Lilienthal Museum in Anklam, Germany, remembers Lilienthal life as an engineer, pilot and man. Opened in 1991 it contains many examples of Lilienthal's glider designs.

And he is remembered too in both the Science Museum in London, UK, and the National Air and

Space Museum in Washington, DC, USA. His glider designs hang from the ceiling, inspiring countless thousands of children to look up and imagine.

But perhaps there is no greater tribute than that bestowed on him by his fellow countrymen: Berlin's busiest airport is in fact named after this great German aviator.

Berlin Tegel Otto Lilienthal Airport, to give Berlin Tegel its full name, sees more than 20m people pass through it each year. And although they don't know it, each and every one of them owes their journey, at least in some small part, to this great aviation pioneer who did so much, and gave everything, for his dream of flight and the freedom of the skies.

Pictures
Some 145 photographs of Otto Lilienthal's experiments in flight still exist today. They can be ordered and licensed cheaply from the Otto Lilienthal Museum directly.

See: www.lilienthal-museum.de/olma/ebarchi.htm

Three photographs are available at www.flickr.com/photos/airsports_fai/albums. They are public domain.

About FAI
FAI, the World Air Sports Federation (www.fai.org), is the world governing body for air sports and for certifying world aviation and space records. The FAI was founded in 1905 and is a non-governmental and non-profit-making organisation recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

FAI activities include Aerobatics, Aeromodelling, Airships, Amateur-Built and Experimental Aircraft, Balloons, Gliding, Hang Gliding, Helicopters, Manpowered Flying, Microlights, Parachuting, Paragliding, Paramotors, Power Flying and all other Aeronautic and Astronautic sporting activities.

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