



The first demonstration of airship – Sep 24, 1852

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Publication History

Received: 04 July 2013

Accepted: 10 August 2013

Published: 1 September 2013

Citation


Brindha V. The first demonstration of airship – Sep 24, 1852. *Discovery*, 2013, 5(15), 20

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General Note

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An airship or dirigible is a type of aerostat or lighter-than-air aircraft that can be steered and propelled through the air using rudders and propellers or other thrust mechanisms. Airships were the first aircraft to enable controlled, powered flight, and were widely used before the 1940s, but their use decreased over time as their capabilities were surpassed by those of aeroplanes. The Montgolfier brothers launched the first hot-air balloon in 1783. Inventors began to design ways to propel and control lighter-than-air aircraft. The major drawback in balloon travel was that it was essentially a one-way trip. In 1784, General Jean Baptiste Marie Meusnier designed an elliptical airship that was about 260 feet (79 meters) long. It was to be powered by three hand-cranked propellers, which required the labor of 80 men. In 1850, another Frenchman, Pierre Jullien of Villejuif, demonstrated a cigar-shaped model airship at the Paris Hippodrome. The airship's rudder, elevator, and gondola were mounted under the front part of the balloon. The first flight of Giffard's steam-powered airship took place Sept. 24, 1852 - 51 years before the Wright Brothers' first flight. Traveling at about 6 miles per hour (10 kilometers/hour), Giffard traveled almost 17 miles (27 kilometers) from the Paris racecourse to Elancourt, near Trappes. The small engine could not overcome the prevailing winds, and Giffard could only manage to turn the airship in slow circles. Charles Renard and Arthur C. Krebs, inventors and military officers in the French Army Corps of Engineers, built an elongated balloon, *La France*. It was 165 feet (50.3 meters) long, and it had a capacity of 66,000 cubic feet (1,869 cubic meters). A battery-powered electric motor propelled *La France*. The airship also had a rudder and elevator, ballonets, a sliding weight to compensate for any shift in the center of gravity, and a heavy guide rope to assist in landing. The first flight of *La France* took place on Aug. 9, 1884. Renard and Krebs landed successfully at the parade ground where they had begun—a flight of 5 miles (8 kilometers) and 23 minutes in which they had been in control throughout. During 1884 and 1885, *La France* made seven flights. The airship demonstrated that controlled flight was possible if it had a sufficiently powerful lightweight motor.