Message from the Head Archivist

Thank you for your Donations! The Museum’s Library & Archives would like to thank the members of our Aviation Archives Preservation Corps for their generous support. The L&A raised $10,010 during our annual appeal. It is through the generous support of our donors, and with over 5,000 hours of invaluable assistance from our dedicated volunteers, that we are able to preserve our growing collection and provide greater online access.

Each year, we respond to over 2,000 significant requests worldwide for historical information, audio-visual support, and are visited on-site by hundreds of researchers. Our collection has been used by producers of aviation and aerospace-oriented television documentaries, as seen on the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, Public Broadcasting and the A&E network. The staff has also assisted writers with thousands of books, newspaper stories and magazine articles.

We have improved access to our collections through computerized collection data and the reorganization of collection storage areas. This year, we uploaded a listing of our video/film collection into the Museum’s catalog system, Aerocat. In addition our special collections are listed on the Online Archives of California (OAC). The OAC provides free public access to detailed descriptions of primary resource collections maintained by more than 200 contributing institutions including libraries, special collections, archives, historical societies, and museums throughout California and collections maintained by the ten University of California (UC) campuses. To date the Museum has twenty detailed finding guides listed on this site at http://www.oac.cdlib.org/institutions/San+Diego+Air+and+Space+Museum+Library+and+Archives.

To further raise awareness of our collections and increase accessibility, we have started listing our digitized photographs online at Flickr.com. As a result, we have enhanced our photo digitization efforts by using a rapid capture station (consisting of a very high-end camera, computer and light stand), on loan from the Balboa Park Online Collaborative (BPOC). Using this station, we have been able to digitize over 75,000 images from our collection during this period. These images, along with the 65,000 images digitized over the prior 10 years, have been placed on Flickr.com, creating what we believe to be the largest online aerospace image collection on the Internet.

The Flickr site has attracted more than five million views in just 2 years, and has elicited tens of thousands of comments from aviation professionals and enthusiasts from around the world. Some Flickr comments reflect enthusiasm for the collection, while others offer important facts or corrections that need to be transferred back to our official catalog, Aerocat.

We have gained positive attention within the aviation community, with reports of our digitized collection appearing on a large number of websites and message boards. Incredibly, we still have over one million images to digitize and share with the public. Some of those images awaiting digitization are among our most significant, documenting two of the area’s largest aerospace companies, Ryan and Consolidated/Convair. Both aerospace companies contributed greatly to the history and development of our region.

We are also digitizing our film and video collection. To date, we have over 400 placed on the Museum’s YouTube channel at http://www.youtube.com/user/sdasmarchives.

Our digitization project has built on collaboration among institutions within Balboa Park to establish a shared collection portal on the Internet (known as The Commons) for educators, researchers, and the general public. This project is funded by IMLS with Balboa Park Online Collaborative (BPOC) as the facilitator, and the San Diego Air & Space Museum as one of the participating museums. The San Diego Air & Space Museum has been one of the largest asset contributors for the project.

New Publications

The Library & Archives has a growing publication program that helps spotlight our collections and raise awareness. Due for release in 2012: San Diego International Airport: Lindbergh Field through Arcadia Publishing and a Museum guidebook entitled, Celebrating the San Diego Air & Space Museum: A History of the Museum and its Collections.

In addition, we began publishing electronic books through iTunes. The first such offering was Wheels to Wings: San Diego’s Ford Building. Recently, we published the eBook, The History of Rockwell Field, a narrative prepared by H.H. “Hap” Arnold in 1925, documenting the early days at North Island Naval Air Station.

eBook: Rockwell Field by “Hap” Arnold

San Diego’s North Island Naval Air Station is one of the largest and most important naval bases on the west coast today. The site has a rich aviation history dating back to 1910. At the dawn of flight, aviation pioneer Glenn Curtiss used the site to establish one of the first pilot training schools in the country. The United States Army saw the advantages that the location offered as an air station and training center, and it soon acquired the island, establishing Rockwell Field as its...
west coast training center. Eventually the U.S. Navy took over the growing base, and today it is a thriving deep water port and naval aviation center, serving as home for some of the most advanced ships and aircraft in the naval inventory.

The officers, enlisted men and students of Rockwell Field, and later North Island Naval Air Station, are composed of some of the most important and influential aviation figures of the 20th century. One of these was Henry “Hap” Arnold, who served as overall commander of the Army Air Forces in World War II and was one of the primary figures responsible for the establishment as the United States Air Force.

Arnold served as Rockwell Field base commander on three separate occasions during the crucial early years of the establishment of the base. Arnold wrote of these early years in 1925 when he penned A History of Rockwell Field, a chronicle of the history of the site until that time. His manuscript sheds light on the vital first years of the North Island base, when the function of aviation and the potential that it offered to the military was still being defined. It is an important document that so far has never been published, a situation that hopefully will be resolved with publication of the book by the San Diego Air & Space Museum.

The Library & Archives has augmented the text with the addition of many rare and unpublished photographs of the locations, incidents, and individuals that Arnold writes about in this book. As such, it is a vital document that chronicles the early years of the development of a military base that has had a large influence on aviation in the 20th century, written by one of the most influential figures in aviation history.


**San Diego International Airport, Lindbergh Field**

Now formally known as San Diego International Airport, Lindbergh Field was named in honor of Charles Lindbergh and has been a center of aeronautical activity since its dedication in 1928. This airstrip quickly grew to include a Coast Guard Air Station, three airlines, two flying schools, and Ryan Aeronautical. In 1935, Consolidated Aircraft relocated to Lindbergh Field, transforming it into an aviation manufacturing center. Situated just three miles north of downtown San Diego, Lindbergh Field serves more than 50,000 travelers a day, making San Diego International Airport the busiest single-runway commercial airport today in the United States.

The San Diego Air & Space Museum preserved this history, featuring unique photographs from its archives. Authored by museum staff members Katrina Pescador, Alan Renga, and Pamela Gay, this publication features many photographs from that collection, including rare images taken during construction.

Retailing for $21.99, this book is due for release in April 2012. To reserve your copy, please contact the Library & Archives at 619-234-8291 x125.

**Celebrating the San Diego Air & Space Museum: A History of the Museum and its Collections**

An illustrated guide documenting the history of the Museum and its priceless collections is in the final stages of being published and will soon be released in honor of the 50th anniversary of the San Diego Air & Space Museum. Library & Archives volunteer Dave Barnett has played a major role in researching and writing text for the guide. Thanks to the fundraising efforts of the Library staff and dedicated volunteers the final layout of the book was sent to the printers. An eBook edition will be available on iTunes.

The guidebook highlights the dazzling collection of historic aircraft and aviation memorabilia, bringing to life significant events associated with aviation history and space exploration. Showcasing a part of this exciting collection, the book will be organized into six major sections: Dawn of Flight, World War I, Golden Age, World War II, Jet Age, and Space Exploration. Each section will bring to life, through stories and photos, events which represent these periods in the history of aviation.

The book, which retails for $20.00, is due for release in the summer of 2012. To reserve your copy, please contact the Library & Archives at 619-234-8291 x 125.

**Volunteer Spotlight**

The Library & Archives has many wonderful volunteers who provide valuable services in support of our mission. One of these knowledgeable volunteers, whose assistance has been invaluable, is Bob Johnston. He has been a volunteer in the Library & Archives since 2010.

Robert E. “Bob” Johnston is responsible for the development of finding guides to better document our collection content. He also assists the Head Archivist in the preparation of grant proposals, and other SDASM publications, such as the Museum’s Annual Report and the Long Range Plan. Bob also serves as a Director on the SDASM Scholarship Board.
Bob recently completed six years as Executive Director, SAWE, Inc., responsible for the direction of all administrative activity for this non-profit engineering organization. Bob spent over forty years with General Dynamics, Convair Division, retiring as Director, Contracts and Estimating, Aircraft Programs, responsible for all aspects of contract administration, cost estimating, and design-to-cost and life cycle cost systems integration. More than 20 years of this time was spent in the research and engineering organization, working on engineering proposal development activities.

Bob is a graduate of the Department of Defense Program Management Course, Defense Systems Management College at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He holds an MBA in Management from San Diego State University, and a BS in Operations Analysis from California State University, San Diego (Summa Cum Laude).

A Chance to Update Aviation History

When Reuben H. Fleet founded Consolidated Aircraft in 1923, his initial design emphasis was for trainers for the U.S. Army. With operations moved to Buffalo, NY, and orders shifting to the U.S. Navy, Consolidated started building sea plane versions of their designs. In 1927, Fleet hired I.M. Ladden as his chief engineer, and Consolidated started to compete for larger sea planes. Their first large flying boat, the XPY-1 Admiral, was designed and prototyped for use by the U.S. Navy, but the Navy decided not to purchase these. Fleet was able to obtain orders for 10 Model 16 Commodore flying boats, a direct derivative of the XPY-1, when they became part of a joint venture for a new commercial airline, the New York, Rio and Buenos Aires Airlines (NYRBA). NYRBA used the Commodores to establish over water service in the Caribbean and to Central and South America. The NYRBA was acquired in 1930 by Pan American Airways, a fledgling airline which used the Commodore and the NYRBA route structure, along with U.S. Mail contracts, to establish this airline as a profitable business. Able to carry up to 32 passengers, and substantial quantities of mail, the Commodore provided Pan Am and their founder, Juan Trippe, with the basis of their empire as a U.S. airline.

Pan American Commodore

The Commodore’s performance, payload capacity and reliability were so impressive that the Navy subsequently placed orders with Consolidated for patrol versions of this vehicle, establishing the Catalina flying boat line for the rest of the ‘30s and World War II. The Navy’s flying boat orders incentivized Consolidated to move to San Diego in 1935, where they could benefit from the year-long fair weather and warm water harbor. Consolidated’s increased production allowed them to meet the growing number of orders.

Pan American operated their Commodores so successfully that they expanded their service by ordering larger flying boats and operating the Clipper flying boats on trans-Pacific and trans-Atlantic routes. They continued to use their Commodore for shorter routes and for training.

In 1937, Pan Am transferred two of their Commodores to China National Corp, a Pan Am subsidiary. The CNAC Commodores flew routes along the Yangtze River and, in 1939, assisted the evacuation of Pan Am’s employees from Hankow during the Japanese invasion. Both of the CNAC Commodores were subsequently destroyed by the Japanese.

Pan Am also sold one of their Commodore fleet (NC664C: “Porto Rico”) to Chamberlin Airlines in 1937, where it flew between Miami, Havana, Cuba and other Caribbean locations.

Chamberlin Airlines’ “Porto Rico”

With the start of World War II in December 1941, civilian air service was suspended and the airplanes were taken over for use by the U.S. Military. The “Porto Rico” was in route to Alaska for military use in 1942, when it stopped for refueling at a lake in British Columbia. Fuel which had been spilled on the wings ignited during engine startup, consuming the wing coverings and the upper hull skin to the waterline. The remains of the fuselage and wings, including the floats and engines, sank to the bottom of the lake.

Stories of a lost military payroll prompted a Canadian expedition to the lake in 1963. Divers found the “Porto Rico” resting in silt at a depth of 100 feet. Attempts to drag her to shore were unsuccessful and the effort was abandoned. In 2010, a second expedition returned to the site and relocated the Commodore. Underwater photos and videos confirm the excellent condition of the remains. Several items, including a landing light and a chest of mechanics tools, were recovered.

Following registration of the site by the Archaeology Department of the Province of British Columbia, the team has been in communication with the San Diego Air & Space Museum. The goal is to establish a partnership, recover the Commodore from the lake bottom, and transport her to the Museum. To learn more about this project go to http://www.commodoreflyingboatrecovery.com/.
Stay Connected

Are you following us on Facebook? We are posting regularly with news, photos of the week, and special articles. Facebook is just one way the Library & Archives is sharing its collections with the community.

By becoming a fan and following our blog, you can stay up to date with the latest news, volunteer information, publications, and photos of the Library & Archives. Join us and stay connected at facebook.com/SDASMLA.

Recommend us to all your family and friends, and help spread the word about our mission to “Collect… Preserve…and Make Available” Aerospace history.

Open for Research

The SDASM Library & Archives collection is accessible for research. Staff and/or volunteers are available for assistance. Appointments should be made in advance by calling 619-234-8291, x125, or emailing nchase@sdasm.org, prior to your visit. Information can often be pulled prior to your visit if we are aware of your research request. Contact the Library & Archives staff for research rules and regulations.

SDASM Library & Archives
Hours of Operation

Tuesday to Friday, 10:00am – 4:00p.m.
(Closed on Mondays, weekends, federal holidays, and for some special Museum functions)