The Descriptive Finding Guide for the Hoffman-Russell Parachute Company
Corporate Records SDASM.SC.10074

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URL: http://www.sandiegoairandspace.org/
Abstract: The Hoffman-Russell Parachute Company was founded by James M. Russell and Major Edward L. Hoffman, both of whom helped design first parachute at McCook Flying Field in Dayton, Ohio, which was adopted by the Army Air Corps.

Conditions Governing Access
The collection is open to researchers by appointment.

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Biographical / Historical
James M. Russell had little to no aviation experience before becoming a major contributor to the evolution of parachutes. He helped design the first parachute at McCook Flying Field in Dayton, Ohio with Major Edward L. Hoffman, and this parachute was adopted by the Army Air Corps. Following this, Russell came to San Diego and designed the “Lobe” parachute, which reduced the force the handler experienced when the parachute was deployed by 1/3rd of other parachutes, as well as eliminating oscillation that plagued previous parachutes on their descent. Russell also patented the parachute pack. These two innovations led to the development of the Russell Parachute Company, located in San Diego. The company aimed to sell its parachutes to the military, but it also advertised towards commercial aviation. The company insisted that all aircraft passengers should be provided with a parachute in the case of an emergency.

Russell and Hoffman also experimented with other parachute designs, including a parachute for an entire aircraft. Should a malfunction occur, a parachute could be deployed to slow down the aircraft’s speed and hopefully give the pilot enough control to land the plane. Although his ideas were never implemented, his insight has been modified and used by other companies today.

Russell died of a heart attack in Las Vegas, Nevada on September 13, 1941 at the age of 43.

Scope and Contents
The majority of this collection contains business correspondence, diagrams, and blueprints. There are a few photographs, and a postcard, as well as newspaper articles. A few sheets of paper were stapled and contain rust marks. The book Parachute was also stapled. Report No. 706 was held together by special binding screws. The unmarked folders have pink string taped to the folder itself. Note: Northrop in Folder 2, unmarked folder 3, there is an original typographical error that spells it “Northrup.”

Related Materials

Subjects and Indexing Terms
World War, 1939-1945 -- Campaigns -- Pacific Area
Airplane factories
Aeronautics, Commercial
Parachuting
Lobe Parachute
Hoffman-Russell Parachute Company
Hoffman, Major Edward L.
Russell, James M.
Box 01  
Folder 1 - Business Correspondence

Folder 2 - Unmarked Folders 1, 2, & 3, Business Correspondence

Folder 3 - Newspaper Articles
Physical Description:
1. Article on J.M. Russell’s experience with parachutes and his developing company. The San Diego Union Tribune, April 19, 2008.
2. Same article as #1.
3. Article of the Lobe Parachute getting foreign attention, lobe parachute demonstration.
5. Article of how lobe parachute saves pilots when shot down.

Folder 4 - Parachute Book
Physical Description:
1. Mumma, J.V. Parachutes. San Diego, California: 1930

Folder 5 - Parts Drawings/Diagrams
Physical Description:
1. A.T.C Test Requirements: Functional Test (normal pack), Functional Test (twisted lines), Strength Test, Rate of Descent Test, Live Drop Test.
2. Hoffman-Russell Co. - Parachute Engineering: List of Drawings pertaining to parachute model C.Q.A-24W (Next 12 items are part of this list).
27. Hoffman-Russell Co. - Lock Bar Ass’y Center Fitting - 1-110. By: C. McCabe, August 1, 1939.
36. Hoffman-Russell Co. - Closing Plate (Back) - 1-119. By: C. McCabe, August 1, 1939.
37. Hoffman-Russell Co. - Closing Plate (Front) - 1-120. By: C. McCabe, August 2, 1939.
Folder 6 - Drawings


Folder 7 - Blueprints

Folder 8 – Report No. 706
Physical Description: 1. Landing Gear Analysis Preliminary Design, October 25, 1938.
2. Landing Gear Analysis Preliminary Design Signature page, October 25, 1938. 3. Photograph of parachute and weight attachment to an airplane, November 14, 1938 4. Photograph of parachute and weight after the drop, November 14, 1938 5. Photograph of parachute and weight after the drop, November 12, 1938

Folder 9 - Full Scale Blueprints

Folder 10 - Advertising

Folder 11 - Miscellaneous