Descriptive Finding Guide for the Horace Clyde Balsley Personal Papers
SDASM.SC.10013

Finding aid prepared by Alan Renga
San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives
2001 Pan American Plaza, Balboa Park
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10/15/2014
Title: Horace Clyde Balsley Personal Papers
Identifier/Call Number: SDASM.SC.10013
Contributing Institution: San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 0.36 Cubic feet One Archival Box
Date (inclusive): 1893-1942
Abstract: Primarily, this collection focuses on Balsley’s service as a member of the Lafayette Escadrille. A significant item is a reprint of Balsley’s war-time diary. This collection contains many newspaper clippings concerning injuries sustained when his airplane was shot down in service. Balsley gained some fame and therefore generated much publicity when making appearances or speeches during his subsequent service during war bond drives. Several letters seem to detail Balsley’s efforts to claim benefits from the Veteran’s Administration. The collection also includes Balsley’s wedding announcement to actress Miriam MacDonald and references to her sister, actress and producer Katherine MacDonald.
Related Archival Materials note
Photos of Balsley from the San Diego Air & Space Museum Archives are available for viewing on Flickr.com. Catalog numbers BIOB00048-BIOB00054.
Photos from the Collection have been digitized and are available for viewing.
Conditions Governing Access note
The collection is open to researchers by appointment.
Conditions Governing Use note
Some copyright may be reserved. Consult with the library director for more information.
Preferred Citation note
[Item], [Filing Unit], [Series Title], [Subgroups], [Record Group Title and Number], [Repository "San Diego Air & Space Museum Library & Archives"]
https://www.flickr.com/photos/sdasmarchives/sets/72157633216080568
Immediate Source of Acquisition note
The materials in this Collection were donated to the San Diego Air and Space Museum.
Biographical/Historical note
Capt. Horace Clyde Balsley (July 27, 1893 – July 23, 1942) was a member of the Lafayette Escadrille and the first American whose plane was shot down during World War I, in effect, the first American pilot to be shot down in aerial combat. Lafayette Escadrille was a French fighter squadron mostly comprised of American volunteers to aid France. The group hoped to encourage America to abandon neutrality. Balsley was born in Carbondale, Pennsylvania. In 1915, he chose to go to France and participate in the European conflict seeing it as a chance to see the war and to learn aviation. He was first a part of the American Ambulance Hospital. In early 1916, he was accepted to the Air Guard of Paris, and he trained on the Nieuport 23. He became the ninth American pilot of Lafayette Escadrille. Balsley’s combat career was short: his plane was shot down June 18, 1916. Association of American Volunteers in the Foreign Legion 1914–1918. Upon his return to the US, Balsley served as a flight instructor at Gerstner Field, near Lake Charles, Louisiana. Later, he was assigned to participate in recruiting and war bond drives. He married silent film actress Miriam MacDonald in 1919. Never quite recovering from his combat injuries, Balsley became a general manager for the Merle Norman cosmetics firm in Los Angeles until his death in 1942.
Scope and Contents note
Primarily, this collection focuses on Balsley’s service as a member of the Lafayette Escadrille. A significant item is a reprint of Balsley’s war-time diary. Telegrams, newspaper articles, letters, certificates, military documents, photos, address book, calling cards, post cards, military base charge slips, orders, affidavits, Cross and Cockade journal.
Subjects and Indexing Terms
Balsley, Horace Clyde, 1893-1942
Box 01
Series 01: Records
Folder 01 - Diary of Horace Clyde Balsley
  Physical Description: Photocopy of “The Diary of Horace Clyde Balsley,” Cross and
  Cockade Journal (Vol. 18, Number, Summer 1977).

Folder 01 - Certificates - Lafayette Escadrille
Folder 03 - Correspondence, Personal
  Physical Description: H.A. Halverson photocopy – sole source. 3 Letters to Mrs.
  Balsley from Amy Otis Earhart, mother of Amelia Earhart. 2 Photocopies of letters on
  Congressional letterhead, photocopy. One is typed, one is handwritten, Sole Source.
  Telegram of funeral information. Notice from title company. 1913 letter on letterhead
  from The Bishop’s House 21 Washington St, Newark, New Jersey. Transcript of July 8,
  1915 letter to Balsley. Transcript dated April 19, 1982 by R.M. McClung 1917 Telegram
  from Balsley to his mother, photocopied. Photocopy of letter to Balsley – sole source.
  Photocopies of two deposits to the Bank of Coronado, and photocopy of request for
  birth certificate – sole source.

Folder 04 - Correspondence, Military - Veterans Administration
  Physical Description: 20 photocopies of letters between Balsley and the Veteran
  Administration concerning his retirement and sick pay.

Folder 05 - SDASM Correspondence
  Physical Description: 16 letters from Author Robert M. McClung, 1982–1985. Letters
  contain addition information about Balsley garnered through McClung’s research. 2
  letters from Mr. & Mrs. Craig.

Folder 06 - Military Documents and Correspondence
  Physical Description: 2 photocopies of Oct. 1919 pay voucher – sole source.
  Photocopy Office of Inspection Department – sole source. 2 Photocopies property list
  Rockwell Field – sole source. Photocopy memo from property officer – sole source.
  Photocopy memo from Col. Henry H. (Hap) Arnold. Photocopy memo Transportation
  Officer. Photocopy telegram. 3 Photocopies of orders from Special Operations 2
  Photocopies of memos concerning living quarters at Rockwell Field. Photocopy Flight
  Surgeon’s Office report. Photocopy memo from Letterman General Hospital.

Folder 07 - Newspaper Clippings 1916-1920
  Physical Description: Photocopy of photo of Balsley with actress Mary Pickford and
  cutline. 43 clippings. 8 fragments – Photocopied. 1 clipping about war injuries –
  Photocopied. 1 clipping of marriage to Miriam MacDonald.

Folder 08 - Newspaper Clippings 1916-1920
Folder 09 - Newspaper Clippings 1916-1920
Folder 10 - Correspondence, Military - Lafayette Escadrille
  Physical Description: Photocopy of March 1, 1919 letter – sole source. 2
  Photocopies of orders – sole source.
Folder 11 – Certificates - Other

Folder 12 – Address Book
   Physical Description: Restricted - delicate condition.

Folder 13 – Photos – Military and Personal
   Physical Description: 12 Photos

Folder 14 – Miscellaneous