The Descriptive Finding Guide for the Mary Ford Personal Papers
SDASM.SC.10229

San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives
2001 Pan American Plaza, Balboa Park
San Diego 92101
URL: http://www.sandiegoairandspace.org/
Language of Material: English

Contributing Institution: San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives

Title: The Mary Ford Personal Papers

Identifier/Call Number: SDASM.SC.10229

Physical Description: 1 Cubic Feet

The material consists of items primarily reflecting Mary Ford's years as an instructor and commercial pilot. There is a scrapbook that covers news articles and memorabilia during her time with ATA. There are files containing a draft manuscript, photographs, research materials, and news articles. The collection is housed in two archival flip-top boxes, 12 x 7 x 10-1/2 inches, and 15 x 5 x 10-1/2 inches.

Date (bulk): bulk

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Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open to researchers. Some restrictions may apply.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The collection was donated to the Museum in 2019.

Biographical / Historical

Mary Estelle Zerbel was born on August 4, 1920 in Marquette, Michigan, the daughter of Raymond Howard Zerbel and Norma Estelle Patrick, of Iron River, Michigan.

Over her career, she was an actress, she studied bacteriology at UCLA, and she earned a pilot's license in 1940 through a program at UCLA sponsored by the Civil Aeronautics Authority. She spent 19 years as a commercial pilot and flight instructor. She earned a Bachelor's degree in English and Life Sciences; a Master's degree in Library Science; a high-school teaching credential in English & Life Sciences; and a kindergarten-through-junior college teaching credential in librarianship. Unfortunately, she soon discovered that teaching was not for her and spent eleven years as a school, administrative, or recreational librarian; and several years moving around the world taking odd jobs that interested her.

In 1940, while flying a Taylorcraft Training and Sport plane, Mary flew with a group of 19 other pilots in an historic mass delivery of non-military airplanes from Allison, Ohio to Los Angeles, California. At the start of World War II, Mary sought permission from the U.S. military to ferry fighter planes, but was turned down and told that women would not be allowed to fly. At the time, her boyfriend Roy Wesley Hooper of Monterey Park, California, was serving in London with the British Royal Air Force. He suggested that Mary also fly for the British. Mary accepted the challenge and in June 1942, she joined Jacqueline Cochran's United States unit of the British Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), ferrying Spitfires, Hurricanes, and other planes for use by British Air Force pilots. Soon after, Mary and Roy were married in London on August 17, 1942. Tragically, Roy Hooper was killed two months later when the Hudson aircraft (#FH360) he was piloting on anti-submarine patrol in the Shetland Islands, was shot down and sank into the sea. Mary remained in London to continue her ferrying work and soon met fellow Air Corps pilot, Jack Hammond Ford, whom she married in 1943. After their return to the United States, the Fords started Fleetway, Inc., a long-distance airplane delivery company flying war surplus and other planes all over the world. In 1957, Hollywood produced a movie based loosely on the couples' interesting life. Titled "The Lady Takes a Flyer," the comedy-drama starred Lana Turner and Jeff Chandler as Jack and Mary Ford.

In 1959, Jack Ford was killed when the twin-engine Beechcraft he was ferrying from Wake Island to Japan exploded four minutes after takeoff. After the accident, Mary never flew again, but instead earned her Library Science degree and worked a variety of administrative and library jobs in the United States and Europe. After she retired, Mary lived with her daughter, Pam, in Seattle and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. She died at the age of 92 on September 27, 2012, in Pocatello, Idaho.

The Mary Ford Special Collection consists of material primarily reflecting Mary's years as a flight instructor and commercial pilot. A large scrapbook contains news articles, photographs, and memorabilia she accumulated while flying for the ATA. Photographs, research material, news articles, personal documents, and a draft of a manuscript (possibly for a book) are included. Also included are her soft leather flying helmet and gauntlet gloves. Of interest, there are several personal notes written by Mary highlighting memorable incidents that happened while she and Jack Ford ferried planes for their company, Fleetway, Inc.
## Separated Materials
The following items have been removed from the collection and placed with the Curatorial Department of SDASM:
1. Small box containing four pins: RAF and ATA. 2. Pair of leather flying gloves. 3. Leather pilot’s cap. 4. Name badge.

## Subjects and Indexing Terms
Women air pilots  
Women in aeronautics  
Women Airforce Service Pilots  
Ford, Mary

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**Box 1 of 2**

### Series I: Personal Papers

**Folder 1 - Office of Personnel Management**  
Physical Description: Retirement and annuity statements.

**Folder 2 -- Mary E. Ford Records**  
Physical Description: Vital statistics; genealogy; correspondence.

**Folder 3 -- Passports**  
Physical Description: Eleven U.S. passports, 1947 to 2015.

**Folder 4 -- Chapters**  

### Series II: Documents

**Folder 5 -- ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary)**  

**Folder 6 -- Mary’s ATA Adventures**  
Physical Description: Copies from ATA website of history, airplanes, people.

**Folder 7 -- Flight Logs**  

### Series III: Newspaper Articles

**Folder 8 -- Newspaper Articles**

### Series IV: Books

Series IV: Books

Golden Wings, Alison King, C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., 1956.  

Box 2 of 2

Series V: Scrapbook

Folder 1 -- Scrapbook

Physical Description: 10" x 14" scrapbook with fragile loose pages, primarily containing newspaper articles on Mary's flying career; some snapshots; some souvenirs; and some memorabilia.

Series VI: Photographs

Folder 2 - Photographs (Folder #1 of 2)

Physical Description: 1. Professional photographs. 2. Publicity photographs from the movie "The Lady Takes a Flyer."

Folder 3 - Photographs (Folder #2 of 2)


Series VII: Memorabilia

DVD "Around the World with Fleetway."
DVD "The Lady Takes a Flyer."
Postcards