The Personal Papers of Ray B. Fife SDASM.SC.10046

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San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives
10/14/2014
2001 Pan American Plaza, Balboa Park
San Diego 92101
URL: http://www.sandiegoairandspace.org/
Raymond B. Fife (March 26, 1900 – 1982) was a pioneer mechanic of aviation. Growing up in Venice, CA, he was exposed to the world of aviation from an early age. From 1912 to 1916 he worked with many barnstorming pilots; he ran errands, washed airplanes, gassed them, opened hangar doors and at the age of 16 he had learned enough to build a complete airplane. When World War I broke out, he was hired as a mechanic in a “Jenny” (Curtiss JN-4) factory in San Francisco. After the war he entered the Army Air Service, his duty stations included the base at Rockwell Field, North Island, where he remained from 1931 to 1938. During World War II he was an aviation mechanic in the Navy and after the war he continued working in North Island as a civilian aircraft examiner.

In November 3rd, 1961, he was presented with the Superior Achievement Award for his contribution to the construction of a Curtiss A-1 replica that was donated to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. He built several flyable airplanes; among which was a 1912 Curtiss Pusher type racer which he used to exhibit at air shows. Fife used to say of his Curtiss Airplane: “Riding there is about the same as riding a motorcycle or a bicycle, except, of course that there are no stop lights to worry about.”

He lived in Coronado, California.

Collection consists of 1 box 15” x 5” x 10”, containing: Sketches and Log book, Personal Trip Notes, Articles, Curtis Pusher Airplanes Rental Rates, Personal Letters, Sketches and Data of the Navy Curtis A-1, Brochures, Photographs and Negatives, Notes, Brochures.

Related Materials
Albums 27 (A,B,C), 141 and Bio Photos 02-F-00049-00057 Elrette Sudsbury Collection - INCORPORATED
Related Research Institutions: Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Independence Ave at 6th St, SW, Washington, DC 20560 Archives: (703) 572-4045

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Curtiss-Wright Aircraft
Curtiss A-1 Triad
Naval Air Station North Island (Calif.)
Fife, Ray B.
Sudsbury, Elretta
Curtiss-Wright Corporation

Box 01
Folder 00 - Pilot Log Book


Folder 01 - Correspondence


Folder 02 - Articles


Folder 03 - Newspaper, Articles and Clippings


Folder 04 - Curtiss A-1


Folder 05 - “21” Pusher Byplane” Booklet

Physical Description: 1. Approximately 35 page book detailing Specifications of Pusher Airplane, including diagrams and photos, by Ray Fife.
Folder 06 - Curtiss Pusher Aircraft and Airshow Notes

Physical Description:
1. “Curtiss” type Pusher Byplane of the 1912-1914 era sheet.
2. FIFE 21 Pusher drawings, schematics.

Handwritten note, Curtiss Pusher Airplane Rental Rates, N4161K April 12, 1950.

General Specs of Curtiss Racer on Exhibition at New York Aero Show, May 18, 1912.

Typed, Curtiss Pusher Airplane, Rental Rates #N4161K, letter to rentee, April 12, 1950.


Handwritten Itinerary of Trip to Washington DC and return to Naval Airsation, San Diego, CA, by Raymond B. Fife, Aircraft Mechanic General Maximum, Overhaul and Repair Department, c. 1961, 11 pages.


Folder 07 - Miscellaneous

Physical Description:
1. Flyer, NASM celebrates Paul E. Garber’s 80th Birthday.
3. Half page, Engine Five (CO2) System Bronze on Brass, sketching.

4. “Interesting story of life on Pugut Sound in the early 1850’s told by Captain J.E. Burns who saved his schooner from the fight with the Nit-Nat Indians… Anne Hibbard burns became Anne H. Fife, my mother,” 4 pages.

8. Clipping, Beachy Biplane 1914.
9. USNA Navy blue and gold sticker.
10. Japan Rising Sun flag sticker print.


Folder 08 - Photographs 1

Physical Description:
1. 37 photographs (some duplicate prints) of Curtiss Pusher biplane N4161K from various angles, from 1950-1951.

Folder 09 - Photographs II

Physical Description:
1. 56 photographs (including some duplicate prints) of people (including Peter Bowers, Tex LaGrone, and others), air shows, NAS North Island Naval Air Museum in Pensacola, FL, “Billy Parker’s Pusher,” Lindberg Field Early Birds show, and Army Curtiss Aviation Camp, Friedkin School of Aeronautics, photos at the piper & Stinson flying Service (1950), Airplanes photos, Airplanes models (not dated), photos at “Fiesta del Pacifico” Parade, San Diego, CA, Santa Monica, CA. Images are from 1913, 1950-1951 (the majority), 1956, 1959, and 1968.

Folder 10 - Negatives

Physical Description:
1. Items from folder marked “Negatives,” with respective prints and printing envelopes. 2. 8 envelopes of negatives: Pusher AF Day April 20, 1953, Biplane in front of Shell gas station. Pusher AF Day April 20, 1953, Biplane with different angle. Pusher AF Day April 20, 1953, Biplane Close-up from Behind.

Pusher AF Day April 20, 1953, Biplane front view. Pat/Jack 21 Pusher @ 815. Pat/Jack 21 Pusher @ 815 Pat/Jack 21 Pusher @ 815 Pat/Jack 21 Pusher @ 815 Rose Werner 120 “I” Avenue, 2 negatives.

3. 3 prints.

Folder 11 - Miscellaneous

Physical Description:
1. 4 items, pencil drawings and part costs notes, two pasted images – Japanese “Rising Sun” and U.S. Navy figure.
Folder 12 - The Ray Fife Story

Physical Description: Incorporated Eiretta Sudsburry collection - Biography of Ray Fife, several pages detailing his life, including photos.