Addems, Walter J Personal Papers Finding Guide SDASM.SC.10001

Finding aid prepared by Alan Renga
San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives
2001 Pan American Plaza, Balboa Park
San Diego, CA, 92101
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10/16/2014

SERIES I: Material Related to the Collection
SERIES II: Newspapers
SERIES III: Misc Material
SERIES IV: Photographs
**Title:** Walter J. Addems Personal Papers  
**Identifier/Call Number:** SDASM.SC.10001  
**Contributing Institution:** San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives  
**Language of Material:** English  
**Physical Description:** 0.4 Linear feet1 Manuscript Box  
**Date (inclusive):** 1899-1997  

**Walter J. Addems Special Collection Abstract:** This collection contains approximately 5 linear inches of papers covering Walter J. Addems long, successful life of flying and achievements. He began flying at a very early age and was a member of the famous Early Birds. He was integral in the founding and early days of United Airlines. The collection contains invoices, logbooks, chronology of his accomplishments, news articles, correspondence, route maps, NAT newsletters, schedules, licenses, photographs, technical notes, and magazine articles. The collection primarily covers the years 1914-1982.

**Scope and Contents**  
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**Access Conditions**  
The collection is open to researchers by appointment.

**Usage Conditions**  
Some copyright may be reserved. Consult with the library director for more information.

**Preferred Citation**  
Please credit the San Diego Air and Space Museum’s Library and Archives

**Biographical Note**
Walter J. Addems (1899-November 21, 1997) grew up in Illinois and made his first flight in a glider he built himself when he was only 16 years old, using the plans found in an issue of Aviation Week magazine. The flight was short lived, but he flew enough to qualify for membership in the exclusive Early Birds club. In 1920, he moved with his family to Iowa for a time and briefly in the Army. He was soon back around local airstrips and continued refining his aviation skills. Soon, Addems was participating in airshows and barnstorming, by then he built a 50 HP plane, but used a Curtiss JN-4 or “Jenny” for his exhibitions, also working for the Harper Oil Company in Chicago, Illinois. During those years, he bought, built, and flew numerous aircraft that distinguished the era. In 1925, the same year he married Genevieve Mongeau, he joined Charles Dickenson to fly air mail on the Chicago-Minneapolis. Addems ceased barnstorming and began flying mail from Chicago to Milwaukee, eventually joining the National Air Transport (NAT) flying mail from Chicago to Cleveland. Addems became so proficient as a self-taught pilot, he began to train other fliers. In fact, he was granted one of the first pilot instrument ratings, and NAT modified a Douglas mail plane so Addems could instruct pilots in instrument flying by 1931. After NAT, BAT, PAT, and Varney became United Airlines, Walter Addems stayed on, ultimately becoming Director of Flight Operations where he had a significant role in flying and mapping each new route, testing new planes for the fleet from the DC-3 to the Boeing 377, and developing airline operating procedures. However, in spite of support from many of the airline’s pilots, he lost this job after the airline saw a series of unfortunate crashes in the 1950s. He resumed flying on government contract runs and eventually became United’s chief pilot on the San Francisco-Hawaii route. Then, in 1959 upon reaching the retirement age of 60, Mr. Addems retired in Atherton, California, where he began building planes again. In 1962 he completed a replica of a Nieuport XI, an aircraft used in WWI by the Lafayette Escadrille, to fly in air shows. He flew the Nieuport XI until the age of 83, spending 67 years of his life flying. His last flight was delivering the aircraft to the San Diego Air and Space Museum. He passed away at the age of 98 in Palo Alto, California.

https://www.flickr.com/photos/sdasmarchives/sets/72157633102796263

**Immediate Source of Acquisition note**
The materials in this Collection were donated to the San Diego Air and Space Museum.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**
Addems, Walter J  
Curtiss, Glenn Hammond, 1878-1930  
Airlines  
National Air Transport (NAT)
Folder 1: Photocopies & Collection Information
   Computer scanned images of documents and photographs belonging to Walt J. Addems. R.P. Callaghan -18 pages
   Copy- Letter from N.E. Halaby, April 2, 1959
   Copy- Letter from D.W. Rentzel, September 13, 1951

Folder 2: Newspaper
Folder 3: Newspaper
Folder 4: Technical Notes for Nieuport XI
Folder 5: NAT Bulletin Board
Folder 6: Correspondence
Folder 7: Miscellaneous
Folder 8: Photographs