UTD Library Pays Tribute to Jan Collmer

Interim McDermott Library Director Larry Sall presented Jan Collmer, long-time History of Aviation Collection supporter and member of the Advisory Board, with the Distinguished Library Service Award at its annual meeting on November 2. Collmer was instrumental in obtaining the extensive German World War I collection from the estate of the late A. E. “Ed” Ferko. The collection was sought by several foreign buyers but the bid of the HAC prevailed through Collmer’s efforts. He not only persuaded several friends to write large checks but provided the remaining necessary funds to obtain the world class collection.

Dr. Sall reported that several major collections were received during the year, including those of George E. Haddaway, Douglas Robinson, Arthur H. Sanfelici, Braniff Silver Eagles and Civil Air Transport/Air America. In addition, significant monetary donations were received from the Louise Timken estate and other individuals.

Newly-appointed member Johnson “Jack” Taylor of Houston attended for the first time and the Board recommended that UT-Dallas President Dr. Franklyn G. Jenifer approve the appointments of Judy Porter and Lewis Shaw to the Board.

During 1999, volunteers continued their prodigious efforts to sort aviation periodicals for binding and prepared hundreds of photographs of aircraft for efficient retrieval. Assistance was offered to several television documentary producers during the year. Numerous films from the Doolittle Collection were used by Lou Reda Productions for the Biography show featuring Jimmy Doolittle that was shown nationwide on the A&E Channel on Veterans’ Day last November.

Jan Collmer reported that the fundraising program for a new facility for the Frontiers of Flight Museum was well underway. The museum is to be built on the southeast corner of Love Field. Currently, two-thirds of the artifacts on display at its present location in the Love Field airline terminal have been acquired since the museum was created and one-third is from the HAC.

Bernt Balchen Biography Published

Bernt Balchen: Polar Aviator, the life story of the first man to pilot an aircraft over both poles, has just been published by Smithsonian Institution Press. Balchen, a native of Norway, had an unusual career as a pilot, explorer, scientist, military leader, visionary and artist. He was the pilot of the America, a Fokker transport that flew Cmdr. Richard E. Byrd and two others across the Atlantic in 1927, and piloted the Floyd Bennett, a Ford tri-motor, over the South Pole in 1928 on Byrd’s first expedition to Antarctica.
Balchen became an American citizen and joined the Army Air Corps in 1941 at the request of General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, then chief of the Army Air Corps. He established an air base on Greenland and led many rescues of American airmen before transferring to England where he led clandestine air operations to supply saboteurs in Norway and evacuate American and Norwegian personnel from Sweden. At the beginning of the Cold War, he was instrumental in persuading the Air Force to construct a large air base at Thule, Greenland.

One of the revelations in the biography is Balchen’s contention, now supported by many others, that Byrd did not reach the North Pole in 1926 as he claimed but for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor. Balchen, then a pilot in the Norwegian naval air force, was present at Spitzbergen when Byrd departed and returned from the flight and later flew the Fokker on a nationwide tour of the U.S. Knowing the elapsed time of the flight, the distance to the pole and the speed capabilities of the Fokker, Balchen concluded that Byrd and Floyd Bennett, the pilot, had turned around about a hundred miles short of the pole.

Balchen, a colonel, was promised a promotion to brigadier general for a special secret task while on inactive duty after World War II. He did not get promoted and always suspected Admiral Byrd and his brother U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd had prevented it. Byrd continually harassed Balchen and after Byrd’s death, his followers caused the first edition of Balchen’s autobiography to be destroyed to prevent any unfavorable reference to Byrd.

Balchen died in 1973. On the 100th anniversary of his birth last October, a special presentation of his accomplishments during his lifetime was made in the Caucus Room of the Cannon Office Building of the House of Represen-

tatives. Special graveside ceremonies were held at Arlington National Cemetery the next day, followed by a centenary testimonial dinner and reunion of friends and service members at the U.S. Naval Center, Bethesda, Md., sponsored by the Sons of Norway. Ironically, Balchen lies buried beside Byrd.

Distinguished Flying Cross Recipients Organized

Members and veterans of the armed services who have earned the Distinguished Flying Cross are eligible to join The Distinguished Flying Cross Society. It was formed in 1994 to honor its recipients and publicize the meaning of the award. Information may be obtained from the society at 8430 Production Ave., San Diego, CA 92121.

More Doolittle Reflections

Some of General Jimmy Doolittle’s thoughts about life and aviation collected from his speeches and writings have been printed previously in Air-Log. Here are some more:

About planes: When an airplane takes a pilot where he’s going and brings him back, and does it repeatedly, he develops a certain attachment for it. And when that airplane does that over a long period of time, it can have some very basic faults, but that pilot no longer sees them. He becomes a part of the airplane.

About writing history: There is an optimum time to write history. That is after the emotions have cooled down and before memory has started to fade. Very frequently when an individual writes history immediately after the event, he is still knowingly or unknowingly emotionally involved. I think only after those emotions have cooled can you have a real rationalization. Rational thinking and emotions don’t go together.

About aging: As long as a man is able to accept new concepts, he can continue to be useful. He is only old when his mind atrophies—then he lives in the past and is no longer in tune with the present and looking into the future.

Did You Know…?

…That the only two Latin American nations that had combat troops in action during World War II were Brazil and Mexico? (Many of their pilots were trained at Texas bases.)

…That a Lockheed A-29 Hudson is credited with scoring the first “kill” against a German plane and also the first American-built plane to sink a German U-boat?

…That the Gloster Meteor III was the only Allied jet aircraft to enter service during WW II?

…That the Chance Vought F4U-1 Corsair was nicknamed “Whistling Death” by the Japanese?

…That the Soviet Air Force had an all-female fighter group—the 566th Fighter Aviation Regiment, 122nd Air Division—that flew 4,400 combat missions?

…That the Flying Tigers were the first to use rockets in air combat in the Far East?

National World War II Memorial Progressing

The National World War II Memorial, the first national memorial acknowledging the commitment of the entire nation to win the war, will soon be reaching the go-ahead for construction. It will be located on the National Mall in Washington between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, one of the last great public places available in the Nation’s Capital. Primary funding for the $100 million needed must be raised from private contributions. The preliminary design has been approved and the funds received have now reached the $68 million mark. Groundbreaking is set for Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2000, with completion in two years.
The memorial will not only honor those veterans who fought the enemy but those on the home front who contributed to the war effort. A World War II Registry of Remembrances will list them and be kept on permanent public display "so future generations will always remember the sacrifices of those who served their country in the greatest war of all time." Anyone who served in the armed forces during World War II, and any civilian who helped on the home front, is eligible for the registry. Home front activities include working in defense-related industries, recycling material needed for the war effort, participating in civil defense maneuvers and more. An individual may list his own name or that of a family member or friend. Registry forms are available from the American Battle Monuments Commission, PO Box 96766, Washington, D. C. 20090.

Americans can help build the World War II Memorial by becoming members of the WW II Memorial Society with tax deductible contributions. Leading the effort to complete the memorial are former senator Bob Dole and Federal Express CEO Frederick W. Smith. More information can be obtained on the memorial web site: wwwiememorial.com or by calling 1 (800) 639-4WW2.

Airport renamed for Robert "Fox" Stephens

The airport at Gilmer, Texas will be renamed for the late Col. Robert Stephens, a Gilmer native who set several speed and altitude records in the YF-12A on May 1, 1965. Stephens was known among his fellow Air Force test pilots at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif. as "The Silver Fox," the radio call sign assigned because of his premature gray hair.

Stephens, who died in 1984 at age 62, flew at three times the speed of sound, averaging 2,070 mph and then established a world record for sustained horizontal flight of 80,257 feet. He was a graduate of Texas A&M University and held a master's degree from Princeton University.

The airport will be named officially "Fox" Stephens Field—Gilmer Municipal Airport at ceremonies to take place on October 19-20, 2000 during Gilmer's traditional Yamboree, an annual event in the Upshur County city. A museum is planned and will be named Flight of the Phoenix Museum. It will include a war bird air park, featuring the F-104, one of the planes Stephens flew.

Al Mooney Collection Available For Study

Al Mooney designed 24 individual aircraft in his time. Born in 1906, he designed his first plane at age 18. It was the Longwing Eaglerock manufactured by Alexander Aircraft Co. in Denver. A self-taught engineer, Mooney started his own firm in 1921. A better designer than businessman, he had financial problems and went to work for Culver Aircraft Co. during World War II. In 1945, he resigned from Culver and started Mooney Aircraft, Inc. which lasted until 1955. From 1957 until his retirement in 1968, he worked for Lockheed-Georgia. He died in Dallas in May 1986.

Mooney's aircraft designs enjoyed wide success, his M-20 series being the most popular. More information on Mooney can be found in his biography titled The Al Mooney Story by Gordon Baxter. Mooney's files are available for research at the History of Aviation Collection.

CAT Oral History Project

At the recent CAT Association Reunion in Dallas, Frank Boring began recording video interviews of CAT veterans. In addition, the second generation CATers decided to support additional interviews and as of press time had raised $3100 to underwrite more interviews. Anyone wishing to support this project is invited to send contributions specifying the CAT Oral History Project to the History of Aviation Collection.

Texas Hall of Fame Inducts 18 "Aviation Heroes"

Tribute was paid to 18 Texas "Aviation Heroes" at an inaugural induction banquet held at the Texas Hall of Fame, Galveston International Airport last November 18. The list includes former President George Bush, Gene Autry, Senator Lloyd Bentsen, Najeeb Halaby, B/G David "Tex" Hill, Howard Hughes, Herb Kelleher, Tom Landry, Ben Love, Admiral Chester Nimitz, Wiley Post, Robert Prescott and C. R. Smith.

Sall Speaks in St. Louis

In October Larry Sall, Interim Director of Libraries at the University of Texas at Dallas, gave a program at the St. Louis meeting of the Council of Historic Aviation Writers. His program was about German civil aviation activities in China during the 1930s. Following his translation of Max Springweiler's memoirs, Pioneer Aviator in China, Sall has pursued his interest in Germany's Eurasia Aviation Corporation and its work tying China together. Copies of Springweiler's book are still available from the History of Aviation Collection.

The University of Texas at Dallas History of Aviation Collection Web Site is www.utdallas.edu/library/special/index.html