Descriptive Summary

Creator Information  Johnson, Ralph S., 1906-

Title  Ralph S. Johnson papers

Collection Identifier  MSA 25

Date Span  1935-2008, predominant 1940-1947

Abstract  Engineering drawings, articles, papers, newspaper clippings, awards, honorary Doctorate of Engineering from Purdue University, memoirs and biographical information, along with photographs, which document the pioneering aviation career of Ralph S. Johnson.

Extent  0.4 cubic feet (1 mss. box)

Finding Aid Author  Mary A. Sego, 2009

Languages  English

Repository  Virginia Kelly Karnes Archives and Special Collections Research Center, Purdue University Libraries

Administrative Information

Location Information:  ASC

Access Restrictions:  Collection is open for research

Acquisition Information:  May 9, 2008, Abra Johnson Parkhurst; donation

Accession Number:  20080509

Preferred Citation:  MSA 25, Ralph S. Johnson papers, Archives and Special Collections, Purdue University Libraries

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Subjects and Genres

Persons
Johnson, Ralph S., 1906-

Organizations
Purdue University
United Air Lines
United State Army

Topics
Test Pilot
Aerospace engineering

Form and Genre Types
Clippings
Papers
Photographs

Occupations
Test Pilot
Mechanical Engineer
Biography of Ralph S. Johnson, 1906-

Ralph S. Johnson was born in Goodland, Indiana in 1906, where he grew up on a farm. His parents were John W. Johnson and Helen Johnson. Having been influenced by his uncle, Hartley Rowe, a Purdue graduate who became a famous engineer who helped build the Panama Canal, Johnson also decided to attend Purdue University. While at Purdue, Ralph was a member of R.O.T.C., Acacia fraternity, the Debate Team, Kappa Phi Sigma, Purdue Little Theater, Purdue Independent Association, and he worked his way through Purdue working at the Union, as a food server. He graduated from Purdue in 1930 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering.

Ralph Johnson’s flying career began in 1930 after graduating from Purdue. He became an Army pilot, one of only four to complete the rugged flight program. He was chosen as personal pilot for General Wyman, Commander of the U.S. National Guard and Reserve Units.

In 1933 he became a “mate” (co-pilot) flying Ford Tri-Motors for National Air Transport, which was absorbed by United Air Lines. He was named chief pilot in 1935.

During the early years of WWII, he was responsible for developing and testing a myriad of programs all aimed toward air safety. He flew hundreds of Boeing B-17s, B-24s, C-87s, DC-4s and PBYs modified by United’s Modification Center in Cheyenne. He developed the stabilized approach taught to all USAF multi-engine pilots and produced a movie called, “All Weather Flying Methods” used by all the training commands.

At the end of the War, United moved to San Francisco. Johnson elected to stay in Wyoming. He invented spraying equipment to adapt war planes for use in agricultural aerial application. He also served two terms in the Wyoming State Legislature.

His many and varied contributions to the aviation industry are the legacy of Captain Ralph S. Johnson. He has won numerous awards over the years, and Purdue University awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Engineering in 2008.

Sources:

Excerpts taken from his Oral History interview: http://earchives.lib.purdue.edu/u/?oralhist,55

Text was also taken from the Wyoming Aviation Hall of Fame Certificate Johnson was awarded in 1995.
Collection Description

Scope

The Ralph S. Johnson papers (1935-2008; 0.4 cubic feet) documents the pioneering aviation career of Ralph S. Johnson. Included among the papers are aeronautical engineering drawings done by Johnson, along with articles and papers authored by him. The newspaper clippings, awards, and honorary Doctorate of Engineering from Purdue University focus on the latter part of his career, as he was being recognized as an aviation pioneer. The biographical information was often collected and written by the authors, as a part of a nomination for an award. His memoirs provide a unique look into his life at this time period in aviation history. Most of the photographs represent the planes he flew during his career. The papers are organized into four series:

Arrangement

1. Engineering Drawings, Papers, Articles, DVD, 1941-1948 (0.15 cubic feet)
   This segment of the Ralph Johnson papers has a strong focus on the unique contributions he made to aviation and aeronautical engineering.

   Most of these materials focus on the latter part of Johnson’s career, as he was recognized for his pioneering aviation feats.

3. Memoirs and Biographical Information, 1941-2005 (0.1 cubic feet)
   The memoirs give the reader a look into the life of Ralph S. Johnson, as he saw it during this unique time in early aviation history. Most of the biographical information was collected and written by the authors for awards for which Johnson had been nominated.

4. Photographs, ca. 1930-2005 (0.01 cubic feet)
   The photographs show the numerous aircraft Ralph S. Johnson flew during his career.

Descriptive Rules
Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Processing Information
All materials have been housed in polyester sleeves, acid-free folders, and acid-free boxes. Some clippings containing images of people or color graphics, or front pages of newspapers, have been preserved for display purposes, with photocopies made available for research. Photographs and artifacts have been separated and grouped into individual series for preservation purposes.
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Engineering Drawings, Papers, Articles, DVD, 1941-1948
(0.15 cubic feet)

1 Box

Folder

1. Engineering Drawings and Paper
   Centrifugally Operating Grounding Switch, July 15, 1944
   Throttle Landing Power Limiter-Indicator, July 22, 1944

   Throttle Landing Power Limiter (Mounted on Carburetor Body), July 25, 1944

   Approach and Landing Procedure, Technique, and Equipment for Proficient Landing of Aircraft During Blacked-Out Conditions -- Incorporating the All-Weather Approach and Landing Technique, April 16, 1942

2. Articles and Papers
   All-Weather Landing Descent, Air Transport, November, 1947
   Get Better Landings with All-Weather Roll-Ons, Air Transport, March, 1948
   Cross-Wind Takeoffs, Air Transport, July, 1947
   Cross-Wind Landings, Air Transport, June, 1947
   Exposure—The Key to Flight Safety, Air Transport, April, 1947
   When Vulnerable Be Vigilant, Air Transport, October, 1947
   Buzzing is Bad Business, Air Transport, May 1947
   An All-Weather Approach and Landing Technique for DC-3 Airplanes, May 2, 1941
   Possibility of Increasing Airplane Utility by Use of the All Weather Landing Descent Test, undated, circa 1940s
      [detailed letter from Ralph Johnson to W. C. Mentzer and R.D. Kelly]
   Co-Ordination of Flight Deck Duties on Large Airplanes, by Ralph S. Johnson
      [paper presented before the Society of Automotive Engineers, Los Angeles, California, October 6, 1944 – includes photographs of flight deck coordinator instrument and engine]
   “All Weather Flight Methods”, written and directed by Ralph S. Johnson, Engineering Department of United Air Lines, United Air Lines Transport Corporation, c. 1943
      dvd, b&w; sound; length: 37 minutes, 48 seconds; file size: 1.28 GB plays with Windows Media Player, 2 copies

3/17/2010
(0.1 cubic feet)

1 Box  Contents

Folder
3.

Aviation Industry Finally Recognizing Pioneer’s Feats
   [newspaper clipping from Scottsdale Progress, July 11, 1992]
Goodland Native, 100, is ‘Part of the History of Flight’  Wyoming declares: June 26 was Captain Ralph S. Johnson Day
   [newspaper clipping from Lafayette Journal and Courier, Sunday, July 2, 2006]
Jack Knight’s Long Night: The Mail Went Through
   [newspaper clipping, source and date unknown; notation states one of Ralph’s Friends and his favorite newspaper article, a hero to Ralph]
Wyoming Aviation Hall of Fame - Ralph S. Johnson
Purdue University College of Engineering School of Mechanical Engineering
And School of Aeronautics and Astronautics Co-Nominated with Purdue University Libraries
   [nomination for Doctorate of Engineering, honoris causa, Fall, 2007]
Itinerary for Ralph S. Johnson, Commencement Weekend, May 8-11, 2008
The President and Trustees of Purdue University cordially invite you to dinner celebrating those receiving honorary doctorates at Spring Commencement
   [invitation to Westwood, Saturday, May 10, 2008]
The President and Trustees of Purdue University cordially invite you to a Luncheon celebrating Spring Commencement 2008
   [invitation to luncheon in the Café and John Purdue Room – Stone Hall, Saturday, May 10, 2008]

Memoirs and Biographical Information, 1941-2005
(0.1 cubic feet)

1 Box  Contents

Folder
4.  Aviation: The Early Years
   [spiral bound publication compiled by Jacqueline McBrien Morgan from the respective memoirs of: Ralph S. Johnson, test pilot, United Airlines and Richard L. McBrien, Engineer, United Airlines]

5.  “The Best Of Times: Memoirs of Ralph Johnson,” as told to his niece, Jacqueline McBrien Morgan, during his 99th year, 2005
“Captain Ralph S. Johnson”
[spiral bound biography, sent to Wyoming Aviation Hall of Fame, by Captain Billy Walker, 1992]

“Fait pour Valour”, by Billy Walker, ca. 2006
[biographical pages for Captain Ralph S. Johnson, compiled and clipped together]

Interview with Ralph S. Johnson, by Red Kelso, Cheyenne, Wyoming
[transcript, November 16, 1977]

Excerpts from an article on Ralph Johnson in RUPANEWS, November, 2002
[pages 3-4 of a what appears to be a fax transmission, other pages missing]

Photographs, ca. 1930-2005
(0.01 cubic feet)

1 Box
Folder 6.

C-82 dispersing insecticide, Ralph Johnson’s plane, Ralco, CO
[photograph mounted on board, undated]

Captain Ralph S. Johnson, Chief Test Pilot, United Airlines, 1935-1947
[8”x10” photograph, in United Airlines uniform]

Ralph S. Johnson, Aviation History
[twenty photos on CD, jpegs, 35.3 mb, along with a sheet with notations on the significance of each photograph]

1. B-18 Loading Up: taken in the mid-1950s
2. Captain Ralph, United Airlines: taken in the late 1930s early 1940
3. Douglas DC-5: Ralph test flew this aircraft while on loan from United
4. Flight Deck Coordinator: Ralph’s Master Equipment Company manufactured thousands of these scrolling checklist aids for the airlines and military from the 1950s to the 1970s
5. Firebomber test: one of Ralco’s PV-2 Harpoons converted to borate bomber use
6. Flight Safety Foundation citation – Ralph was honored with the Laura Taber Barbour Air Safety Award in November, 2005
7. Long Island Newsday Zero Vix Landing Spread
8. PV-2 Flightline
9. PV-2 loading
10. PV-2 number 112
11. Ralph S. Johnson and S-39
12. Ralph S. Johnson Bonanza
13. Class of 1931 – U.S. Army pilot training photo
14. Ralph S. Johnson (head and shoulders) at the Pima Air Museum the night he was inducted into the Arizona Hall of Fame in April, 2006
15. NAA Award – Ralph receiving the National Aeronautics Association Elder Statesman Award, 1991
16. Ralph on PV-2
17. Ralph and B-17
18. Ralph and B-24
19. Ralph and PV-2 – Ralph at 99 in front of a PV-s Harpoon he Donated to the Pima Air Museum