S. Sidney Pike Skywriting Corporation of America Collection

by Tyler Love & Jordan Ferraro

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Collection Overview

Repository: National Air and Space Museum Archives Division

Creators: Pike, S. Sidney
          S. Sidney Pike Skywriting Corporation of America.

Title: S. Sidney Pike Skywriting Corporation of America Collection

Dates: 1923-1964

Bulk Dates: 1930-1940

Quantity: 9 film reels, (Five 16mm films - runtime 41:59) (Four 35mm films - runtime 27:04)
          5.5 linear feet, (Four flat boxes, one document box, one slim document box)
          4 cubic feet, (6 boxes)

Abstract: Skywriting, defined as the process of writing a name or message with smoke from an aircraft against a blue sky, began in England after World War I, the brainchild of Major John C. Savage, Royal Air Force (RAF). His first successful demonstration was at the Derby at Epsom Downs, in May 1922, when Captain Cyril Turner wrote "Daily Mail" above the track. In October of that year, Turner travelled to the United States and wrote "Hello U.S.A." above New York City. Allan J. Cameron, along with Leroy Van Patten established the Skywriting Corporation of America at Curtiss Field, an American branch of Savage's original company. They acquired the patents for mixing the writing gas in the United States and as a result controlled the market for years. In 1923, using the Skywriting Corporation, the American Tobacco Company launched the first skywriting advertising campaign for Lucky Strike cigarettes. Pepsi-Cola Corporation became one of the longest-running contractors of skywriting; in the late 1930s and mid 1940s, it contracted or owned a total of 14 aircraft. In 1940 alone, Pepsi contracted for 2,225 writings over 48 states, Mexico, Canada, South America and Cuba.

Language: English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Nancy M. Podurgiel, gift, 2011

Processing Information

Arranged by the archivist into series by subject, then in chronological order within series. Additional folder description by the archivist appears below folder titles.
Preferred Citation
S. Sidney Pike Skywriting Corporation of America Collection, Acc. 2012-0001, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

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No restrictions governing access.

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Biographical Note
S. Sidney Pike (d. 1968) was born in Bennington, Vermont, and attended Vermont Military College. In 1928, Pike joined the Skywriting Corporation of America and became the corporation's president in 1935. During the early part of his tenure with the company, Pike was a pilot but soon trained a crew of pilots to do the flying. He introduced Sky-Typing, in which five to seven planes, with their smoke-producing mechanisms controlled from a "mother" plane formed different parts of the message. During World War II, Pike was a Major in the 415th Bombardment Squadron, Army Air Forces. He was member of the Quiet Birdmen, a secretive club in the United States for male aviators founded in 1921 by World War I pilots.

Scope and Content Note
This collection consists of 4 cubic feet of archival material related to the Skywriting Corporation of America. The material includes three scrapbooks of photographs and news clippings, two small manuals on skywriting, correspondence, and photographs and negatives of pilots and aircraft, as well as skywriting and sky-typing examples.

The researcher should note that the collection also contains five 16mm and four 35mm films totaling a 1:09:03 runtime. These films are not included in the container list but a NASM Archives staff person can assist you regarding access.

Arrangement
Arranged by the archivist into series by subject.

Series 1: Documents
Series 2: Images
Series 3: Scrapbooks
Series 4: Oversize Materials
Arranged in chronological order within series.

Additional folder description by the archivist appears below folder titles in italics.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:
- Advertising
- Aeronautics
- Skywriting

Types of Materials:
- Articles
- Manuals
- Motion pictures (visual works)
- Photographic prints
- Scrapbooks
Container Listing

Series 1: Documents, 1936-1963

1 box

Contains documents, ephemera and publicity materials for specific pilots who flew for the Pike Skywriting Company

Arranged in chronological order and then alphabetical. Undated materials placed after dated materials.

Box 1, Folder 1          Misc. Documents, 1936-1963
                         Correspondence, articles, brochures, flyers and 2 small technical manuals
                         written by Liet. Joseph Mackey "Acrobatic and Inverted Flying" and
                         "Skywriting and Skywriting Equipment"

Box 1, Folder 2          Pilot -- Lt. Thomas J. Campbell, 1946
                         Publicity materials including B&W portraits prepared by Pepsi-Cola.

Box 1, Folder 3          Pilot - Lt. Cecil Coffrin, undated
                         Publicity materials including B&W portraits prepared by Pepsi-Cola.

Box 1, Folder 4          Pilot - Maj. August A. "Gus" Ficken, undated
                         Publicity materials including B&W portraits prepared by Pepsi-Cola.

Box 1, Folder 5          Pilot - Cpt. Jim Gregg, undated
                         Publicity materials including B&W portraits prepared by Pepsi-Cola.

Box 1, Folder 6          Pilot - Maj. Elwood "El" Keim, undated
                         Publicity materials including B&W portraits prepared by Pepsi-Cola.

Box 1, Folder 7          Pilot - Tom Murphy, undated
                         Publicity materials including B&W portraits prepared by Pepsi-Cola.

Box 1, Folder 8          Pilot - Lt. Winfred E. Souther, undated
                         Publicity materials including B&W portraits prepared by Pepsi-Cola.

Box 1, Folder 9          Pilot - Maj. Andy Stinis, undated
                         Publicity materials including B&W portraits prepared by Pepsi-Cola.
Series 2: Images, 1930-1950

1 box, Photographs & 2 negatives

Arranged in chronological order and then alphabetical. Undated materials placed after dated materials. Negatives placed at end of series.

| Box 2, Folder 1       | Photographs, 1930-1950 |
| Box 2, Folder 2       | Banner Towing, 1933     |
| Box 2, Folder 3       | Skytyping, 1940         |
| Box 2, Folder 4       | Airplanes, undated      |
| Box 2, Folder 5       | Aerial, undated         |
| Box 2, Folder 6       | Blimps & Gyros, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 7       | Pilots, undated         |
|                       | A few of the photos have IDs on the back. |
| Box 2, Folder 8       | Skywriting, undated     |
| Box 2, Folder 9       | S. Sidney Pike Portrait, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 10      | Negatives, undated      |
|                       | Contains two 8x10 negatives. |
Series 3: Scrapbooks, 1923-1964

3 boxes

Box 3  Scrapbook, undated
Consisting mostly of photos, newspaper advertisement and short articles on
the Martinson's Coffee autogiro.

Box 4  "Skywriting Press Clippings", 1937-1964
Newspaper & magazine articles most likely collected by a clipping service.

Box 5, Folder 1  Scrapbook, 1923-1931
Newspaper clippings most likely collected by a clipping service.

Box 5, Folder 2  "Photographs", undated
8x10s of people looking up, planes performing skywriting, finished skywritten
advertisements, planes on the ground, planes and pilots.
Series 4: Oversize Materials, 1938-1940

1 box

Arranged in chronological order and then alphabetical. Undated materials placed after dated materials.

Box 6, Folder 1  Newspaper Clippings, 1938-1940
Box 6, Folder 2  David Ghilchik line drawing, undated
Box 6, Folder 3  Lithographs by David Ghilchik Reproduced from *Punch* Magazine, undated
Box 6, Folder 4  Photographs, undated
Of pilot Louis Meier Jr., various airplanes and the NYC skyline