

FULLERTON AIRPORT ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Center for Oral and Public History
California State University, Fullerton

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Descriptive Summary

Title

Fullerton Airport Oral History Project

Date(s)

2005 - 2006

Creator

Shelley Alongi

Extent

Seven (7) oral histories

Repository

Center for Oral and Public History
California State University, Fullerton

Project Abstract

Project creator Shelley Alongi interviewed seven people associated with Fullerton Municipal Airport and compiled in this collection interviews that describe working and flying at the airport. Interviewees are pilots, mechanics, managers, linemen, and flight instructors. Each relates his/her personal experiences at the airport, some history and thoughts about the airport's future. Discussion includes safety issues, business management and local economics.

Ephemera

Orange County Register article about Shelley Alongi and this project research

<http://www.ocregister.com/news/airport-194463-alongi-fullerton.html>

Photographs – See Project File

Fullerton Airport Oral History Project Abstracts

OH 3797

Narrator: Cobb, Ralph E.
Interviewer: Shelley J. Alongi
Title: “An Oral History with Ralph Cobb”
Date: February 18, 2005
Language: English
Location: Woodland, California
Project: Fullerton Airport
Format: tape

This oral history spans 1960s-2005. Bulk dates: 1980-1985.

An oral history with Ralph E. Cobb, manager at CalPERS and former resident of Orange County, California. This interview was conducted for the Fullerton Airport Project for California State University, Fullerton and the Center for Oral and Public History. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Cobb’s experiences working at the Fullerton Municipal Airport in the 1980s as both a lineman for Aviation Facilities, Inc [AFI], and for the City of Fullerton, California. This interview includes discussion about growing up in La Habra, California, and taking an interest in the Fullerton Airport at a young age; recalls that the Fullerton Airport was much busier in the earlier days, and that security was more lax; remembers beginning work at the AFI Flight Training Center as a lineman in 1980, working on the fuel trucks, washing planes, and later helping to taxi aircraft, but being laid off in 1982 during the “economic slump;” comments on taking a job with the City of Fullerton under the supervision of Jay Jaso, Airport Manager, writing grants and acting as a community liaison; describes airport expansion in the 1980s with the acquisition of the Jewett and McProud properties, but not extending the runway to allow for bigger aircraft, as per community wishes; speaks in depth about noise ordinance concerns—fielding calls and observing legal proceedings, as well as helping to alter flight plans; talks about city projects, including a plan to augment airport funds by increasing low rents on hangar space and outside tie-downs; comments on the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, California, and its effects on airport traffic and funds; describes different types of aircraft at AFI, including large helicopters that would make a stop at the Disneyland Hotel; recalls chaining down airplanes when the Santa Ana winds would pick up, different crash landings at the airport and property damage, as well as having to keep the gopher population down so as to control electrical damage; speaks about AFI’s programs, including a partnership with Missionary Aviation Fellowship; talks about the physical changes to the airport; [tape cuts out while narrator continues to speak].

OH 3798

Narrator: Propst, Rodney
Interviewer: Shelley J. Alongi
Title: “An Oral History with Rodney Propst”
Date: October 5, 2005

Language: English
Location: Fullerton Municipal Airport in Fullerton, California
Project: Fullerton Airport
Format: tape

This oral history spans 1940s-2005. Bulk dates: 1973-2005.

An oral history with Rodney Propst, manager at Fullerton Airport and current resident of Orange County, California. This interview was conducted for the Fullerton Airport Project for California State University, Fullerton and the Center for Oral and Public History. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Propst's experiences as Airport Manager at the Fullerton Municipal Airport. This interview includes discussion about growing up in Oregon and joining the United States Navy Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at Oregon State University, where he studied Business Administration, then being commissioned in the United States Marine Corps (USMC) in 1973, as well as attending flight school in 1980, at the age of thirty; speaks at length about his positions in the USMC, including foreign assignments in Okinawa, Japan, and Saigon, Vietnam, as well as high-ranking roles at Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station El Toro; compares the Fullerton Airport to that of Salem, Oregon, where he took his first civilian job as airport manager, after retiring from the Marines in 1993; recalls being hired at the Fullerton Airport in 1996, and recounts the changes over the years, including a fewer number of flight operations per year, but a significant increase in spending on airport infrastructure; comments on the duties of an airport manager to ensure safe operation at the airport and to "generate enough revenue to pay the bills;" explains trends in general aviation, including that owning and operating aircraft now is much more expensive than in the past, and that more people are becoming fractional owners of planes; speaks about Fullerton Airport's sources of revenue, including 30 percent from businesses that rent from it, 50 percent from hangar rental, and the remaining 20 percent from "odds and ends;" talks about teaching courses in aviation management at Southern Illinois University Carbondale sites across the country; discusses the utility of his Masters in Business Administration, as well as his flight experience, for his present position; explains that the Fullerton Airport has eighty-six acres of land and no room for expansion, but that most aircraft coming through remains small.

OH 3799

Narrator: DuPuy, Todd (b. 1976)
Interviewer: Shelley J. Alongi
Title: "An Oral History with Todd DuPuy"
Date: September 9, 2005
Language: English
Location: Fullerton, California
Project: Fullerton Airport
Format: tape

This oral history spans 1976-2005. Bulk dates: 1994-2005.

An oral history with Todd DuPuy, Fullerton Airport Manager and a longtime resident of Fullerton, California. This interview was conducted for the Fullerton Airport Project for California State University, Fullerton and the Center for Oral and Public History. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about DuPuy's experiences working at the Fullerton Municipal Airport. This interview includes discussion about growing up in Fullerton with aircraft flying over his house; describes his first experiences with flying, including a commercial flight to Washington D.C. in eighth grade, and learning to fly sailplanes with his cousin, Chad, at Warner Springs Gliding Port; speaks about working at different Fullerton Airport businesses, including AirCombat USA mailing promotional materials, and then as a line serviceman at General Aviation beginning in 1994, while attending Mount San Antonio College; talks about taking flying lessons with General Aviation; discusses the duties of a line serviceman, including understanding different types of gas and how to refuel aircraft; briefly explains the history of General Aviation at the Fullerton Airport; remembers dates of his milestones in flight and education, including his first lesson, solo flight, and flight test in 1995, instrument training, commercial flight training, and graduating from University of Southern Illinois Carbondale in 2000 with a degree in Aviation Management; discusses the different aircraft and customers that frequent the Fullerton Airport, including helicopters and corporate planes; comments on becoming a flight instructor at the Fullerton Airport, as well as flight instructor protocol, and the joy of helping people who are passionate about flying; recalls joining his college flying team and competing in mock air meets; discusses in detail the training and experience requirements for commercial pilots; recounts his experiences as a traffic watch pilot, as well as briefly mentions his weekend aviation classes at Marine Corps Air Station El Toro in South Orange County, California; comments on his present position as a first officer for SkyWest Airlines, and his goal to captain jets; expresses fondness for the Fullerton Airport, as well as his appreciation for the time he spent there.

OH 3800

Narrator: Griggs, Bill Sr. (b. 1929)
Interviewer: Shelley Alongi
Title: "An Oral History with Bill Griggs Sr."
Date: January 26, 2006
Language: English
Location: AFI Flight Training Center at the Fullerton Municipal Airport
Project: Fullerton Airport
Format: tape

This oral history spans 1940s-2006. Bulk dates: 1960s-2006.

An oral history with Bill Griggs Sr., owner of AFI Flight School at the Fullerton Airport and resident of Orange County, California. This interview was conducted for the Fullerton Airport Project for California State University, Fullerton and the Center for Oral and Public History. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Griggs' businesses at the Fullerton Municipal Airport. This interview includes discussion about the growth of his flight school, beginning with one plane in 1966 and now owning ten, as well as being the longest running company at the Fullerton Airport; speaks about learning to fly in his youth, in Marion, Kansas;

discusses joining the Air Force as a mechanic and living in Alaska, until he began work at North American Aviation on the Apollo Program; comments on reasons why people want to learn to fly, including recreation and training for commercial airlines; speaks extensively about Aviation Facilities, Inc, and Fallen Air Service, as well as fondly remembers several longtime employees who helped build these businesses; discusses the different planes in his fleet, including Cessna 152s, 172s, and 182s; comments on other local airplane and flight businesses he has seen develop since the sixties, including Air Combat and AeroCommuter, which transported people from Los Angeles to the Disneyland Hotel via helicopter; believes “flight training and private ownership of aircraft” are most important to the Fullerton Airport; speaks about Civil Air Control, Squadron 56, which meets at the Fullerton Airport since the closure of Marine Corps Air Station El Toro in South Orange County, California; comments on his involvement with aviation-related community activities, including Mission Aviation Fellowship and Missions at the Airport, both of which instruct missionaries to fly on their missions; explains that the City of Fullerton cannot extend the Airport due to its geographic limitations, as well as a “pledge” not to do so; comments on the people with whom he interacts and teaches, saying that they are the best parts of his job.

OH 3801

Narrator: Blumer, Charles
Interviewer: Shelley J. Alongi
Title: “An Oral History with Chas Blumer”
Date: January 30, 2006
Language: English
Location: Fullerton, California
Project: Fullerton Airport
Format: tape

This oral history spans 1960s-2006. Bulk dates: 1980s-2006.

An oral history with Charles Blumer, building inspector for University of California, Irvine, and resident of Orange County, California. This interview was conducted for the Fullerton Airport Project for California State University, Fullerton and the Center for Oral and Public History. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Blumer’s experiences at the Fullerton Municipal Airport. This interview includes discussion about growing up around the Fullerton Airport and riding his bike from La Habra to watch the planes take off; recalls working at Aviation Facilities, Inc (AFI) at the Fullerton Airport as a lineman in the 1980s in order to save money for flying lessons; speaks about attending Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) School at Mount San Antonio College in order to become an airplane mechanic, and then working at McDonnell Douglas and Boeing in different fields, such as inspection and customer service; details the steps he took in order to obtain his multiple flying licenses, including flight instruction; remembers different businesses that were fixtures at and around the Fullerton Airport, such as Ed Nievesky’s maintenance business, Western Aviation, and the Skyways Motel, which became a casualty of expansion; tells about the history of the Fullerton Airport through stories about local planes, pilots, instructors, and crashes, including an accident on Airport Day in 2004; comments on a trend of fewer individuals owning their own aircraft and attributes this

to a decrease in notoriety and economics; speaks about his father's involvement in aerospace, his love of flying, and his involvement with the Airport Users' Taskforce; expresses disappointment with heightened security measures, saying this hinders an excitement about flying; discusses the owner of AFI, Bill Griggs, Senior, in depth, including his managerial skills, association with Missionary Aviation fellowship, and business ventures; recalls when independent or tailgate mechanics were banned from the airport and that this was resolved through a lawsuit; speaks in detail about several planes he helped restore, including those that he and his father own together, both of which were built in 1949; talks about the businesses that the airplanes support, including the sale of gas and services, as well as the community interaction it creates; comments on flying with his children, saying he usually takes them to a beach in Mexico; remembers the heyday of the Fullerton Airport in the 1970s and 1980s, and expresses discontent with current airport manager, Rodney Propst, especially concerning a decrease in revenue and the number of planes at the Fullerton Airport.

OH 3802

Narrator: Pierce, Charles (b. 1920)
Interviewer: Shelley J. Alongi
Title: "An Oral History with Charles Pierce"
Date: August 17, 2006
Language: English
Location: Laguna Niguel, California
Project: Fullerton Airport
Format: tape

This oral history spans 1919-2006. Bulk dates: 1939-1980s.

An oral history with Charles Pierce, retired Air Force colonel and pilot, and resident of Orange County, California. This interview was conducted for the Fullerton Airport Project for California State University, Fullerton and the Center for Oral and Public History. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Colonel Pierce's experiences flying out of the Fullerton Municipal Airport, as well as his career as a pilot in the United States Air Force. This interview includes discussion about growing up in Long Beach, California, and meeting his wife in 1937, and marrying her four years later; speaks about first learning to fly in the Civilian Pilot Training Program through Long Beach Junior College, and then joining the Air Force in October of 1940; remembers the Fullerton Airport as one of the first airports he ever landed in, and recalls a dirt runway; talks about the Fullerton Airport in the 1980s, that he went there for repair work, and hasn't flown there or elsewhere for years; discusses his thirty-year career in the Air Force at length, including assignments in three different wars, bomber and passenger aircraft he has flown, and attaining the rank of colonel in 1954; details a position flying the king of Saudi Arabia on Trans World Airlines in 1946, including descriptions of the aircraft and living conditions in the Middle East; comments on his position writing war plans for the defense of Taiwan and for the Vietnam War, explaining his plans for supplies, soldiers, and logistics, as well as flying changes in top secret plans to locations of interest; details his time as an inspector for Strategic Air Command (SAC), as well as with the 509th Air Wing, discussing flying the "Fat Man" atomic bomb to different locations, and that he had to redact top secret information about this while writing his memoir; recounts frightening experiences while flying, including broken

fuel gages and night flying; recalls experiencing memorable weather patterns, and beautiful sunrises and sunsets while flying; explains the difficulties of international communication over airplane radios, as well as the use of Morse Code; speaks about teaching flight instruction at the San Juan Capistrano Airport after retiring from the Air Force, and teaching his daughter to fly.

OH 4348

Narrator: Paoli, Sylvia
Interviewer: Shelley J. Alongi
Title: “An Oral History with Sylvia Paoli”
Date: November 2, 2006
Language: English
Location: Fullerton, California
Project: Fullerton Airport
Format:

This oral history spans 1930s-2006. Bulk dates: 1967-2006.

An oral history with Sylvia Paoli, attorney, pilot, chairperson for the Fullerton Airport Users Task Force, and resident of Fullerton, California. This interview was conducted for the Fullerton Airport Project for California State University, Fullerton and the Center for Oral and Public History. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Paoli’s experiences with the Fullerton Municipal Airport. This interview includes discussion about being raised in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado, as her parents were schoolteachers during the Depression; explains that she was able to graduate high school and college early, and that she went on to the Conservatory of Music, where she received her Master’s in Music in 1957; talks about trying to become a flight attendant after graduation but discovering that she was too young and too short to be hired by an airline; speaks about meeting her husband, Peter, raising four children, and moving to California; discusses attending law school in Fullerton in 1976 after deciding that her music career took her away from home too often; recalls watching airplanes as a child during World War II, but did not want to become a pilot until 1967, when her uncle took her up in his airplane and let her fly; speaks about deciding to take flying lessons at the Fullerton Airport due to its close location; discusses in detail her involvement and chairmanship with the Fullerton Chapter of the Ninety-Nines, an international organization of women pilots that has met at the Fullerton Airport for thirty years, including seminars, scholarships, and different community service commitments; explains that females make up less than 5 percent of pilots worldwide; comments in detail about her involvement with the Airport Users’ Taskforce beginning in the 1970s, saying it began after a new airport manager ran the facility poorly and that it was needed to “solve the airport’s problems,” including alleviating noise complaints and increasing tie-down fees to sustain revenue; speaks about the Fullerton Airport’s economic contributions to the community, including fees it pays the city, as well as encouraging tourism; speaks about several crashes and at around the Fullerton Airport, attributing them mainly to carelessness and physical obstacles; explains that the air traffic at the Fullerton Airport has significantly decreased over the years due to the rising costs of flying.

Series 2

Color photographs (72) of the Fullerton Municipal Airport including airport manager, Rod Propst, staff, views of General Aviation Co., Inc., Combat Air USA, Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) and California Highway Patrol (CHP) air operations offices, interior views of the airport restaurant and many images of small aircraft.