



## The Friends of the Air Force Academy Library

# — NEWSLETTER —

P.O. Box 188 | U.S. Air Force Academy, CO 80840-0188  
friends@usafalibrary.com | www.friends.usafalibrary.com

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Friends' Board of Directors and their Executive Committee have successfully completed a challenging year of transition. After more than 20 years of service, our business manager retired last June. Through herculean efforts, Secretary Jim Head and Treasurer Kathy Wilson learned the details of their respective areas developed over the last 20 years by the retiring business manager. They then used their knowledge to train our new business manager, Amanda Hess, who under their tutelage was able to assume full responsibilities quickly.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of Dona R. H. Hildebrand, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret) in 2022. Dona was a Board member and Honorary Director of The Friends for many years.

Our annual luncheon held May 11th was well attended. Guests were treated to a superb, illustrated talk about some gems of the library's Special Collections by Dr. Joel Hebert.

In our fiscal year 2022 The Friends provided one full-time and two part-time contractors to work in Clark Special Collections. A major project completed in May 2022 was a complete inventory of all the special collections. This detailed database now allows the Special Collections Branch library staff to easily find requested items as well as set priorities for unprocessed collections and for preservation of items needing attention. The Friends' contractors played a key role as they accessioned and processed 53 manuscript collections as well as 2133 individual audiovisual items in 45 separate audiovisual collections. To provide this additional margin of excellence for the

McDermott Library Special Collections, your continued support helped us supply nearly \$96,000 of direct assistance to the McDermott Library.

Board member Bill Estelle has continued updating our website, featuring a celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the United States Air Force and the Academy's Medal of Honor winner Lance Sijan. Please visit often and tell us what you think.

<http://www.friends.usafalibrary.com/>

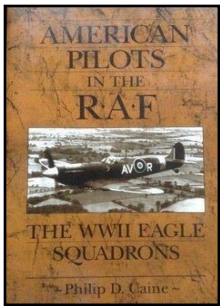
Looking ahead, The Friends will continue our independent contractors' excellent work to include effort on unprocessed manuscript and audio-visual collections. We had a Clark-Yudkin Fellow conducting research in Special Collections this spring on "The Traumatic Blue Sky: The Psychological Consequences of Aerial Combat in the Twentieth Century" and are soliciting additional participants for this program.

This and future newsletters will feature at least one article on the 'gems of Special Collections.' Three gems are featured in this issue, the Eagle Squadrons, the Maj Gen Hugh J. Knerr, and the Searles collections. All feature intriguing insights into air power before and during WWII.

With your continued support, The Friends look forward to increasing the McDermott Library's capabilities for original source research and greatly improving cadet, faculty, and researcher digital access to the wonderful collections. If you are interested in becoming involved in this effort at any level, or if you have items to donate, please contact us at [friends@usafalibrary.com](mailto:friends@usafalibrary.com).

# Gems of Special Collections

## THE EAGLE SQUADRONS COLLECTION



One of the most remarkable chapters in the history of aviation is that of the 245 American airmen who, as members of Eagle Squadrons 71, 121, and 133 of Great Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF), fought against the Luftwaffe prior to the United States entry into World War II. They came from all walks of life and

myriad backgrounds. The common threads that held them together were the cause of freedom and the love of flight. Sixteen became POWs. On 29 September 1942 most of the surviving members of the three squadrons transferred to the U. S. Army Air Forces as members of Squadrons 334, 335, and 336 of the Fourth Fighter Group. Seventy-seven of them gave their lives as members of the RAF and another 31 as members of the US Army Air Corps.

A few years after the end of World War II the surviving members of the units formed the Eagle Squadron Association and annual reunions were initiated. The Association agreed to make The Friends of the Air Force Academy Library their official home

## THE RALPH O. SEARLES COLLECTION

Christopher Schreck

Ralph O. Searles was the commanding officer of the Gulf to Pacific Flight of 1919. This cross-country US Army Air Service mission was intended to make observations for a proposed transcontinental aerial mail route following World War I. Searles' crew of eight men and four De Havilland DH-4 planes flew from Ellington Field in Houston, Texas, to San Diego and back, making a series of scheduled stops along the way. The round-trip flight of 3,300 miles took less than 33 flight hours, reaching top speeds of over 140 miles per-hour and altitudes of over 14,000 feet.

Friends' contractors recently processed a 1919 photo album from this mission, which includes the earliest known aerial photographs of Houston, the Grand Canyon, and other cities and towns along their route. The Grand Canyon crossing, the first ever by airplane, included the first recorded negative-altitude flight. One of the pilots flew 600 feet below the canyon rim, fighting erratic winds and unpredictable updrafts along the way. This mission was also part of a Hollywood publicity stunt to sell war bonds. A silent motion picture film, *One Hundred*

for records, memorabilia, photographs, and the like. In the late 1970s, now retired Brigadier General Philip Caine, with the support of the Association, decided to undertake the monumental task of writing a comprehensive history of the three Eagle Squadrons. His efforts brought to light a great deal of additional information about the Eagles from the members and their families. His research resulted in three books: *Eagles of the RAF*, *American Pilots in the RAF*, and *The RAF Eagle Squadrons*. The latter contains a biographical sketch of each member of these historic units.

When Gen Caine donated his research material to the existing Eagle Squadron collections, it became the most comprehensive archive in the world on the RAF Eagle Squadrons. The collection is housed in the Special Collections Branch of the Air Force Academy Library. It includes logbooks, official records, photos, personal diaries, and various memorabilia of a significant number of the Eagles. This treasure trove of material is extensively used by researchers and cadets who are interested in these units and their members as well as the air war in World War II.

*Percent American*, was flown from California back to Ellington Field. The film was presented to the flight crew by famous actress Mary Pickford (pictured), and photographs from this exchange can be seen in the album. Autographed photos of Pickford and several other prominent silent film actresses, including Phyllis Haver and Marvel Rea, are also included.



The Ralph O. Searles Collection was donated to the Academy by Michael W. Bennett in 1981, but was "rediscovered" by The Friends' contractors in the 2022 comprehensive inventory. This collection, which provides unique insight into an event that helped shape the history of early American aviation, is preserved in Clark Special Collections. A complete finding aid is now available to cadets and other researchers on the library's website.

## LIFE PATRON AWARDS

*Life Patron* status was recently earned by three donors through their cumulative monetary donations of at least \$1,000. These individuals join a group of other dedicated supporters of The Friends, now numbering over 100, who have been the key sustainers of our support to the Library over the years.

We also award Life Patron designation to individuals for exceptionally significant in-kind donations (e.g., material of extraordinary research value to cadets and faculty or of noteworthy historical importance). These new Life Patrons, include Ulana Steck, Barbara Wyatt, and Robert Arnold.

Ulana Steck donated *The Wartime Log of Walter (Wally) Steck*. Walter Steck was a POW in Stalag Luft III, 1944–1945. The collection includes some 40 pages of drawings and poems/songs from shows put on for the prisoners by his band “The Fly-

ing Syncopators”, revealing a truly unique perspective on the POW camp experience.

Barbara Wyatt donated materials she acquired directly from returned POWs as well as other pertinent documents as part of her research for her book *We Came Home: POWs of Vietnam*. The collection includes letters, photographs, and narratives furnished by each of the 465 POWs who responded to her request for information about their experiences as prisoners.

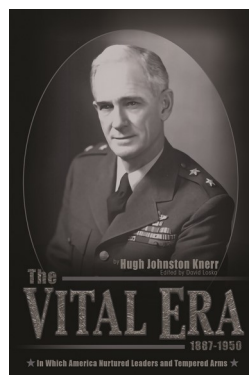
Robert Arnold has over several years donated more than one hundred personal letters written by General of the Army (Air Force) Henry H. Arnold. Spanning his career, from his time at West Point (Class of 1907) until just before his death in 1950, these letters to family members provide unparalleled insight into the life and times of one of our greatest airmen and wartime leaders.

## HUGH J. KNERR

Hugh J. Knerr was one of a small group of airpower advocates who helped keep alive and expand on General Billy Mitchell’s theories of air warfare. In 1934, as Hap Arnold’s Executive Officer, he helped lead a squadron of B-10s round-trip from Bolling Field to Fairbanks, Alaska. He then served as Major General Frank Andrews’ Chief of Staff in the newly formed GHQ Air Force where they pushed for the development and purchase of the B-17 Flying Fortress. For his outspoken advocacy on this and other issues, Knerr, and later Andrews, were banished to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to the same assignment (and desk) previously held by Billy Mitchell.

In 1939, Knerr was medically retired from the Air Corps and worked for Sperry Corporation Research Laboratories. At the same time, he embarked on a writing campaign advocating for air independence. In 1942, Knerr was recalled to active duty first serving as Deputy Commander of the Air Service Command at Patterson AAB, Ohio and later moved to England under General Carl Spaatz, where he completely reorganized the maintenance and supply systems. In 1945, Knerr returned to Wright Field to command the Army Air Force’s Air Technical Service Command. It was in these logistics positions of command and reorganization that he made the most impact. He retired again in 1949.

The Clark Special Collection is home to the Hugh J. Knerr Collection, ten boxes of manuscript material arranged in five series. It includes Knerr’s 1971 unpublished manuscript, “The Vital Era, 1887-1950.”



David Loska, a 2019 recipient of The Friends’ Clark-Yudkin Research Fellowship used the Knerr collection, among others, for an article titled “Eighth Air Force Depot Maintenance & Logistics Leadership in World War II” (Air Power History, Fall 2019). He edited Knerr’s manuscript and published *The Vital Era, 1887-1950, in Which America Nurtured Leaders and Tempered Arms* (Air University Press, 2021). Loska noted that Knerr was the “Air Force architect who tore down the archaic general staff system of the Eighth Air Force in World War II to build a new, decentralized, mission-focused organization, leading to what one officer at the time dubbed, ‘the war of the staff organizations.’ A war within a war, giving the maintenance and supply logistics of the ‘Mighty Eighth’ Air Force teeth to defeat their foe.”

## UPDATE FROM THE MCDERMOTT LIBRARY'S DIRECTOR

Diane Klare

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Over the past 12 months, we have made significant progress in our efforts to provide high quality library services to cadets, faculty, and staff at USAFA. I'm very pleased to be able to update you on several exciting projects and staffing changes.

Beginning in November 2022, I initiated the library's most comprehensive collections inventory of its collections in its nearly 70-year history. Staff are busy taking stock of our general circulating collections, so that we know exactly what's on our shelves and correcting any of our online records to ultimately reflect what is in the McDermott Library. Using this data, we will be better positioned to leverage our existing resources in the curriculum and to help meet the Academy's strategic goals. With the generous support of the Friends, I can also report that Clark Special Collections continues to expand its efforts to document the history of USAFA and the Air Force. By working to enhance Special Collections' online presence, staff are also making it easier to connect cadets, faculty, and other researchers with key resources.

Recent additions to our staff are already contributing their special expertise to the library's operations. Rebecca Orozco comes onboard as our first ever data services librarian, serves as the library's liaison to the Basic Sciences, and is working to support several key data initiatives. Melissa Robohn has taken up the role of electronic resources librarian to help manage our digital resources. Melissa is no stranger to the McDermott Library, having worked as a Friends independent contractor between 2013 and 2019. We are excited to have her back

on the team and look forward to filling more positions with talented candidates in the coming year. We also anticipate hiring an archivist to work on both physical and digital donations later in 2023. This position was made possible through a recent retirement and an evaluation of priorities within Special Collections.

Last year, I reported that we were working with architectural and engineering teams on a planned redesign of the McDermott Library. There have been many new developments in the past several months, and we expect to have a completed and approved design in early 2024. We hope the project will be funded in the 2025 budget. The new design reimagines our physical space to create a modern and innovative research library, in line with our most advanced peer institutions. The current proposal also includes relocating Special Collections to the library's main floor to better highlight the Col Richard Gimbel Aeronautical Collection and our other unique resources that are only available at the Air Force Academy.

**Visit our website at:  
[Friends.usafalibrary.com](https://Friends.usafalibrary.com)**



**The Friends Annual Luncheon will be held on 19 May.**

**Use the enclosed RSVP form or register online at:**

**<https://FOTL-Luncheon.eventbrite.com>**