

**Ormer Leslie Locklear Collection**  
**History of Aviation Collection**

**Biographical Sketch**

Ormer Leslie Locklear

Born: Como, in Hopkins County, Texas, October 28, 1891

Died: Cecil B. DeMille Airport, Los Angeles, CA, August 2, 1920

Education: Jennings Avenue School

**Aviation Background**

- 1911 During childhood Locklear's family moved to Fort Worth, TX. where at twenty years old the future stunt pilot had his first experience with aviation. On October 18, Calbraith P. Rogers, in transit during the first transcontinental flight, landed in Ft. Worth because of a clogged fuel line. Witnessing this event inspired Ormer to become an aviator. While working as a mechanic and shop foreman at Massie Motor Supply and Key Company, Ormer and his brothers designed, built, and flew a glider.
- 1911-14 Performed stunts on a two cylinder Indian motorcycle and later made jumps with the 1914 Panther City Motorcycle Club.
- 1915 On June 29, married Ruby Graves.
- 1917-18 On October 25, enlisted in the Air Service at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX. On January 5, 1918 entered the University of Texas School of Military Aeronautics in Austin and then transferred to Camp Dick, Dallas (TX) Fair Grounds. Two months later arrived at Barron Field (near Ft. Worth) to complete flying course with Service Squadron B, formerly 106<sup>th</sup> Flying Squadron. Here he flew a Curtiss JN-4D, a "Jenny".

An early flying incident, reported in Fort Worth Star Telegram (August 3, 1920), suggests that “Lock’s” stunts may have originally been born of necessity. While in flight the aviator climbed over the front cockpit to replace a dangling radiator cap. Art Ronnie’s book reports a similar situation where “Lock” left the cockpit to replace a loosened spark plug wire.

November 8, 1918, Locklear, according to The Billboard, June 28, 1919), became the first man to transfer from one plane to another in mid-air.

On December 16, Second Lt. Locklear succeeded Lt. Horace J. Smith as Commander of Squadron “B”. When Captain George M. Church, who headed up flying at Barron Field, reorganized Squadrons “A-D” into a Flying School Detachment, he put Locklear in charge of cross-country flying.

1919

Before Locklear left the service May 7, he met William H. Pickens, press agent who would jettison the barnstormer into both national and international fame. “Lock” performed the first public exhibition of plane-changing at Uniontown Speedway in Pennsylvania as documented by A. Ronnie in AAHS Journal (Spring 1974). Other transfers, according to The Billboard, were May 24 at Pan-American Aviation Congress; a week later at International Flying Circus at Sheepshead Bay Speedway in New York City; June 7 at Charter Oak Park, Hartford; June 14-15 at Erie Expo. Grounds; June 17-19 at Lake Front Park, Chicago.

In the interim Lock received on June 8 a call from Hollywood requesting that he star in the movie “The Great Air Robbery,” the script of which included most of his stunts. On July 26 the barnstormer made first successful transfer from an automobile to an airplane during the shooting of

this film by Universal Film Company. While in Hollywood he met Viola Dana, the movie star with whom he established a personal relationship.

On October 17, he performed at Dallas Fair for residents of Dallas and Ft. Worth. At airshows Lock was billed as "The Man Who Goes Up in One Airplane and Comes Down in Another."

1920

On August 2 while performing a stunt with Milton Elliott for the filming of "Skywayman," Locklear and Elliott died in a flash of flames. On August 7, Locklear's body arrived in Ft. Worth, and On August 8 funeral services were held in Mulkey Memorial Methodist Church. The body was interred at Greenwood Cemetery in Ft. Worth.

### **Honors**

On March 12, 1975 at the world premier of "The Great Waldo Pepper," produced and directed by George Roy Hill, Hollywood saluted the first movie stunt fliers. At the Pacific Cinerama Dome the movie, starring Robert Redford, was dedicated to Ormer Locklear as pictures of him flashed upon the screen.

### **Provenance**

This collection was donated in the late 1970's to the History of Aviation Collection at Austin, by Anita Mae Locklear. Though Ms. Locklear flew with the WASPs during WWII, the materials focus rather exclusively upon her famous brother. During his lifetime Locklear, a former resident of Fort Worth, Texas, was dubbed "America's Greatest Airman," "The Master of the Skyways," and "The Kingpin of the Stunt Fliers." On November 8, 1918, "Lock" as nicknamed, distinguished himself as the first man to transfer from one plane to another in mid-air. While starring in the movie "The Great Air Robbery," he made the first transfer from an automobile to an airplane. On August 2, 1920 "Lock" as well as Milton Elliott died performing a stunt at night for the film "Skywayman." Considering that Locklear's aviation career lasted fewer than nine years, and his barnstorming fewer than two years, the researcher finds that the one oversize box and the one manuscript box contain considerable documentation of the wing-walker's life.

The collection contains materials generated by, for, and about Ormer Locklear. Of the approximately 600 items, most are photographs which number 390 plus, and clippings.

The photographs are contained in folders, two albums, and two scrapbooks, the second of which is oversized. The photographs document the stunt flier's younger years as well as the ones of fame. The clippings, on the other hand, rarely refer to his youth. A few letters and postcards are found in scrapbook number 2.

Among the items in the Locklear Collection are articles written by Art Ronnie. Mr. Ronnie used the Locklear family collection in compiling research for his book entitled Locklear: The Man Who Walked on Wings. Press releases, photographs, and reviews of the volume appear in the collection. Another source of information about Locklear's life is a biographical sketch written by his mother.

### Box 1

1	Register	
2	Correspondence: Locklear Family	1920
3	Correspondence: Art Ronnie photographs, reviews	1973
4	Articles by Art Ronnie	1972-74
5	The life of Ormer Locklear by his mother	
6	Review: "The Great Air Robbery"	1920
7	Viola Dana, Art Ronnie & Dedication "The Great Waldo pepper"	1973-75
8	Clippings: Ormer Locklear	1946, 70
9	Book reviews: Art Ronnie, <u>The Man Who Walked On Wings</u>	1973
10	Obituary: <u>Fort Worth Star Telegram</u>	1920
11	Memorabilia: Honor badge	
12	Portraits	1918-20
13	Pickens; Locklear; W.H. Howard	1920
14	Viola Dana & Locklear	1919-20

15	Publicity photographs	
16	Locklear changing aircraft in mid-air	
17	Stunts	
18	Funeral: Omer Locklear	1920
19	Old Photographs: Aircraft: Curtiss, Professor Langley's, Alexander G. Bell's tetrahedron; Lincoln Beach's (1 <sup>st</sup> two decades of 20 <sup>th</sup> century)	
20	Air Service Crashes	1918-19
21	Personal: Glider built by Locklear	1910-11
22	Barron Field, Ft. Worth	1918-19
23	Army crashes	
24	Army aircraft	
25	Aerial photographs	
26	Ruby & Ormer Locklear	
27	Locklear & Viola Dana	
28-29	Army snapshots; Hollywood stars; Locklear's two films	
30	U.S. Army Air Service	
31	Ormer Locklear	
32	Short; Locklear; Elliott	
33	Viola Dana	
34	Dorothy Phillips	
35	Jack Dempsey; Locklear & Viola Dana	

36	“The Great Air Robbery”	1919
37	Aerial stunts	

**Box 2 (Oversize)**

1	Publicity photographs	
2	Aerial “Dance of Death”	1919
3-4	“The Great Air Robbery”	
5	“Skywayman”	1920
6	Funeral: Los Angeles Procession and Fort Worth	1920
7	Aircraft parts: Wreckage	1920
	Scrapbook Number 2	
8-9	Clippings & photographs: Army, films, Viola Dana, Funeral, Telegrams	1918-20