

Guide to the  
Robert E. Lee Papers  
1886-1973

.21 linear feet

Accession Number: 71-02  
Collection Number: H71-02

Prepared by

Paul A. Oelkrug  
March 2003

CITATION: The Robert E. Lee Papers, H71-02, Box number, Folder number, Special  
Collections Department, McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas

Special Collections Department  
McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas

**Contents**

Biographical Sketch ..... 3  
Sources ..... 4  
Additional Sources ..... 4  
Series Description ..... 4  
Scope and Content Note ..... 4  
Provenance Statement ..... 5  
Literary Rights Statement ..... 5  
Container list ..... 5

## Biographical Sketch

Robert Edward Lee was a pioneer aviator, born in Midland, Texas March 9, 1886 and is a direct descendent of the famous Civil War General, Robert E. Lee. Lee's aviation career parallels the growth of aviation and spans two world wars. He also had a successful career in the oil business, holding patents on inventions for use in oil fields.

Lee became interested in aviation when he watched a balloon ascension in Philadelphia in 1907. Wanting to learn more about aviation, Lee attended the Thomas Aviation School in Ithaca, New York and after graduating, moved to Los Angeles where he built his own airplane. His home-made plane managed to reach an altitude of 500 feet and a speed of fifty miles per hour. He also crashed twice, fortunately without injury.

After two crashes, Lee decided he needed flying Lessons, so he enrolled in the Wright Flying School, owned and operated by Wilbur and Orville Wright. The course consisted of four hours of instruction costing Lee a total of 400 dollars. He graduated in 1915 with the first graduating class of the Wright Flying School. Getting his pilot's license in 1915 earned him a spot in the Early Birds club, an organization of pilots who received their wings prior to 1916.

In WWI, Lee commanded the 47<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron in France. His squadron's area of operations meant that they often went up against the Red Baron's Flying Circus. In fact, Lee himself encountered the Red Baron on an observation mission. Upon spotting the Red Baron's plane, Lee stated "I just ran away from him. . . . I did not feel up to fighting him."

While serving in France in WWI, Lee was shot down twice. The first time he was shot down, he was wounded in the leg; nearly losing it; the second time was the day before the Armistice was signed. Lee suffered severe burns as a result of the second crash.

With the outbreak of WWII, Lee again entered the United States Army Air Force, serving as the commanding officer of the 55<sup>th</sup> Air Depot, Des Moines AAF. Upon separation from the U.S.A.A.F. at war's end, Lee had obtained the rank of Lt. Colonel.

As a civilian, Lee was involved in the oil business. He invented the Lee Angular Drill for which he received a patent, and is credited as one of the first to work with airborne magnetometers. After WWII, Lee founded the Lee Geophysical Company, a firm involved in geophysical exploration.

Lee was active in several organizations and institutions including the Masons; commander of American Legion Ray Post number 231 in Coleman, Texas; industrial counselor for the Research Institute of Oklahoma University; member of the American Geophysical Union, Geochemical Society; Society of Organic Chemistry; Early Birds, and served as an advisory member to the History of Aviation Collection at the University of Texas at Dallas McDermott Library Special Collections. He also participated in the

groundbreaking for the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. Lee passed away at the age of 87 in Coleman, Texas, on September 13, 1973.

### **Sources**

The *Abilene Reporter-News*, 9 November, 1967.

The *Coleman Democrat-Voice*, 18 September, 1973.

The Robert E. Lee Papers, H71-02, Box 1, Folder 6, Special Collections Department of the McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas.

### **Additional Sources**

Penttinen Collection, Box 51, Folder 1, *USAS Squadron Histories* page 1006, Special Collections Department, McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas.

George H. Williams Collection, microfilm, Series E, Roll 8, Special Collections Department, McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas.

### **Series Description**

The Robert E. Lee Papers consists of one series containing 13 folders for a total of .21 linear feet and is described at the item level. See container list for description of folders and their contents.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The Robert E. Lee Papers is a small collection covering the years 1910-1973. The material in this collection includes newspaper clippings highlighting the life of Robert E. Lee; an engine data plate from a Wright Flyer; documents from the Wright Flying School; military records; Correspondence from Orville Wright, King George V, Aero Club of America, and Dwight D. Eisenhower; and photographs of Lee, his aircraft, and a photo of Lee in an air race with Glenn Curtis.

**Provenance Statement**

The Robert E. Lee Papers were donated to the History of Aviation Collection, McDermott Library Special Collections by Richard R. Lee, Jr. on 12 December 2002.

**Literary Rights Statement**

Permission to publish, copy, reprint, digitize, orally record for transmission over public airways, or use in any and all other current or future developed methods or procedures, must be obtained in writing from the Special Collections Department of the McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas.

**Container list**

Begins on page 6.

H 71-02

ROBERT E. LEE PAPERS: CONTAINER LIST

Box 1

3E2

Folder

Title, Dates, and Description

- 1 Scanned image of an engine serial number plate from Wright Flyer Type B, No. 10 (actual item is in the department safe)
- 2 The Wright Company, July 6, 1915-July 21, 1915. Facsimile of Howard M. Rinehart, experiential pilot for the Wright Flying Company; The Wright Company School of Aviation brochure; original and facsimile of an invoice for four hours of flying instructions; original and facsimile of a training agreement between Lee and the Wright Flying Co.; original and facsimile of Wright Flying Co. flying reports; facsimile of two letters from the Wright Flying Co., one signed by Orville Wright.
- 3 Military Procedures Pamphlets. *Notes on Rigging for Air Mechanics* by the Army Air Services, 1917; *Notes on Flying* compiled by the O. C. 19<sup>th</sup> Wing of the Royal Flying Corps.
- 4 Military Records, April 1915-June 1946. Facsimile of Discharge from the United States Marine Corps; facsimile of appoint to rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in Aviation Section of the signal Officer's Reserve Corps; facsimile of an Honorable Discharge from the U. S. Army; original of Lee's military record, 47<sup>th</sup> aero squadron; facsimile of an Honorable Discharge from the U. S. Army, 1919; facsimile of Lee's military record in WWI; facsimile of Separation Qualification record, 1946; facsimile of Military Record and Report of Separation Certificate of Service.
- 5 Medals and Ribbons. Color and black and White photocopies of military ribbons and medals.
- 6 Clippings. Typed fact sheet on Robert E. Lee and Lee's obituary, and clippings about Lee.
- 7 Correspondence, February 1909-December, 1957. Includes postcards and letters, one from King George V. and one from Dwight D. Eisenhower.
- 8 Organizations, 1915-1940. Aviator's Certificate from Aero Club of America, Aero Club of America identification card; Aero Club of America dues receipt; and a roster of The Early Birds members.
- 9 Programs, September 1910-December 1918. Harvard- Boston Aero Meet, 1910; Official Program of the Vanderbilt Cup Race, 1915; Anniversary Dinner, 47<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron; 47<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron Christmas dinner menu.
- 10 Ephemera. Post card of the Eiffel Tower, passenger list from the French Line, and a guide book to the Palace at Versailles.

H 71-02

ROBERT E. LEE PAPERS: CONTAINER LIST

Box 1

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title, Dates, and Description</u>
11	Photographs-Pioneer Flyers Plaque. Photograph of a plaque entitled <i>Pioneer Flyers Who Were Trained at Wright Brothers Field</i> , With Lee's name underlined in red ink.
12	Photographs-Portraits of Lee, WWI-WWII.
13	Photographs-Lee With Aircraft. Lee flying a Wright Flyer; photo entitled, <i>When 55 M. P.H. Was Fast!</i> , taken at the first Air Meet at Los Angeles with Lee identified as flying the second-place plane behind Glenn Curtis; several photos of Lee standing by or sitting in his Wright Flyer; photograph of an unidentified biplane, image of the commanding officer of the 47 <sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron sitting in a biplane; image of two unidentified men standing next to a biplane with Hat-in-the-Ring marking.