

Guide to the
Leonard J. Povey Papers
1904-1984

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Prepared by

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

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Biographical Sketch

Leonard James Povey was born February 1904 in Nashua, New Hampshire. Povey's career in aviation spanned several decades and includes, but is not limited to, serving in the U.S. Army Air Service, barnstorming, building the Cuban Air Force, and as executive vice-president of Mackey Airlines based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Povey's aviation career began when he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Service in 1922. Although only a sergeant, Povey obtained permission from Billy Mitchell to take flight training, learning to fly under Lt. E.H. Barksdale at Mitchell Field. While serving with Barksdale, Povey assisted him in laying out a model of the first transcontinental airway between New York, Seattle, and San Francisco.

Povey left the Army in 1925 and took a job as a road tester with the Springfield, Massachusetts division of Rolls Royce of America. While working full-time for Rolls Royce, he managed find time to barnstorm using a Curtis Flying Boat to put on aerial displays around various lakes in New York and New England.

From 1930-1932 he was the test pilot for the famous Bee Gee racing planes. He also was an aerobatic exhibition pilot with the Brinton-Bayles Flying Circus, and in 1933 he joined the American Air Races flying with Wiley Post as well as other notable aviators. It was sometime during his stint as a barnstormer that Povey earned the nickname "Upside Down Povey," an appropriate nickname because he thrilled the spectators by flying his plane upside down; no small feat because the flight controls work opposite that in normal flight.

In 1934, while performing in an air show in Florida, Cuban representatives sent to the United States by Batista, who had recently taken power, observed Povey's flying skills as he put his aircraft through a series of loops and intricate maneuvers. He was taken to Cuba to meet Batista and was accepted the offer to organize and build the Cuban Air Force. Povey was put in charge of training and operations and in addition, was Batista's personal pilot. Every September fourth, the anniversary of Batista's revolution, Povey would put on a flying demonstration, and on the fourth anniversary of the revolution, he awed the spectators by writing in the sky "Viva Batista Para Cuba."

As technical advisor, Povey built the Cuban Air Force from scratch. Starting with fifteen candidates, five made it through ground school and began actual flight training. Initially, Povey conducted both ground school and flight training until he had enough trained and qualified men to help with training.

While serving in the Cuban Air Force Povey accidentally invented an aerobatic maneuver while performing in the All-American Air Maneuvers in 1937. According to Povey, "I was supposed to be doing a double snap roll on top of a loop. But my crate got going too fast to snap. I had to do something-so I laid the ship on her side and did a half roll at each end of a loop." Upon landing, the judges asked Povey what that maneuver was supposed to be. He thought fast, responding, "that's a Cuban Eight."

Povey left the Cuban Air Force in 1938, and upon returning to the United States, was appointed aeronautical and flight test engineering inspector for the Bureau of Commerce. In 1940 he was appointed chief of the Airman Unit of the CAA and civilian pilot consultant to the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Air.

In 1941 Povey became Vice-President of Embry-Riddle School of Aviation where he was in charge of all four of the schools operated by Embry-Riddle. Three of the schools trained pilots for the United States, one trained pilots for Great Britain. In all, the four schools combined, trained over 19,000 students.

From 1944 to 1946 Povey worked as manager of military sales for Fairchild Aircraft Division. While there he helped develop of training aircraft for the Air Force and Navy and demonstrated the planes at military training facilities. He also was responsible for demonstrating the C-119 military transport to the Air Force. Povey left Fairchild in 1952 to join Mackey Airlines and became executive vice-president in 1953.

Len Povey was a member of the Charlotte, North Carolina Hanger of the Quiet Birdmen and was inducted into the OX-5 Aviation Pioneers Hall of Fame in 1973. He passed away in 1984 and is buried in Highlands Memorial Cemetery, Macon County, North Carolina.

Sources

“Upside-Down Povey, Ex-Springfield Airman, Now One Man Air Corps of Cuba.”
The Springfield Sunday Union And Republican, 30 August, 1936, 2 (E).

Robinson, Art. “His Heroism Has Comic Side.” *The Miami Herald*, 11 April 1954, 2 (BR.).

Andronicos, Bill. “Old-timers Still Remember Feats of ‘Upside Down Povey’.”
Springfield Daily News. 8 November 1961, 17.

Scope and Content Note

The Len Povey Collection consists of four folders. Folder one consists of newspaper clippings arranged in chronological order ranging from 1933-1961; two of the newspaper clippings are from Cuban newspapers and are printed in Spanish. Folder two contains two black and white photographs. One image is a group shot of Povey, President Mendieta of Cuba, Col. Batista, and Comdte Lopez; the other image is of President Batista and Captain Povey. Folder three contains two newsletters, undated; one published by Beechcraft, the other by the National Waco Club. Folder four contains four advertising brochures; one from Eclipse Aviation Corporation, First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Broward County containing a newspaper clipping of Povey and President Fulgencio Batista of Cuba, and two brochures on Waco aircraft.

Provenance Statement

The Leonard J. Povey Collection was donated to History of Aviation Collection, Special Collections Department, McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas by Leonard J. Povey.

Restrictions

There are no restrictions placed upon the materials in this collection by the donor or his heirs.

Literary Rights Statement

Permission to publish or reproduce in any form the materials contained in this collection must be obtained from Special Collections Department, McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas.

Note to Researcher

The newspaper clippings are fragile and must be handled carefully.

Container List

H9-83 Leonard J. Povey Papers

Box 1

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title, Dates, and Description</u>
1	Newspaper clippings, 1933-1961. Clippings highlighting Povey's aviation career, two are from Spanish language Cuban newspapers.
2	Photographs. Two 8 x 10 images; one group shot with Povey, President Mendieta, Col. Batista, Comdte. Lopez, and an image of Povey with President Batista.
3	Newsletters; 1976, 1978. Incomplete newsletter from Beechcraft dated 1976, containing an article about Povey. A second newsletter, dated 1978, entitled <i>Waco Pilot</i> , contains handwritten notes by Povey commenting on aircraft shown and an article on Povey.
4	Advertising Brochures; one dated 1933, the rest not dated. 1933 magazine advertisement by Eclipse Aviation Corporation, First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Broward County, Brochure for a 1929 Waco ATO – J-5 Taperwing and on verso, a Waco BSO J 6-5 Straightwing, and an advertisement for the Sport Waco.