

**THE
COLONEL
RICHARD GIMBEL
AERONAUTICAL
LIBRARY**

**UNITED STATES
AIR FORCE ACADEMY**

The Gimbel Library, which is housed in a secure and humidified area, comprises an amazing array of items pertaining to the history of flight.

Five-thousand-year-old seals carved from semi-precious stones and used to make clay tablets, and some of the first printed allusions to flying document man's earliest dreams of flight. There are drawings, rare commemorative medallions and many books about early experiments with wings, initial balloon ascents, first parachutes, kites, pyrotechnics, historic aviation flights, imaginary voyages in space, and primitive rockets which contribute to a kaleidoscope of the history of man's aeronautical triumphs. Early flight manuals, catalogs of aircraft equipment, and other materials

The Minerva: 1803. A proposed airship for an expedition of 60 scientists. Designed by "professor" Robertson, it's presumed he was indulging in a bit of "leg-pulling."

relating to airships, military aviation, and air accidents record the technological progress and problems of modern aeronautics. Remarkably too, several most unusual media in the Gimbel Library convey the depiction of aeronautical events - chinaware artifacts; book-ends; snuff boxes; bowls; clippings; fans; military insignia; model airplanes; match boxes; playing, greeting, and post cards; postage stamps; children's games and toys; and even valentines!

French and English editions predominate among the approximately 6,000 books in the Collection which encompasses more than fifteen languages. Eight books

are priceless incunabula (books printed before 1501) and one-fourth of the editions in the Collection were printed before 1850. Many of the books, in addition to their aeronautical significance are bibliographic treasures because they are superb examples of fine book binding, printing, illustration, and typography. One of

the many exciting and fascinating topics extensively covered in the Gimbel Collection is the idea of imaginary voyages in space. Speculations on this theme abound in numerous editions, including Roger Bacon's treatise on wonders of the world *De Mirabilibus Mundi* (1542), Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Paltock's *Peter Wilkins*, and several works by Jules Verne.

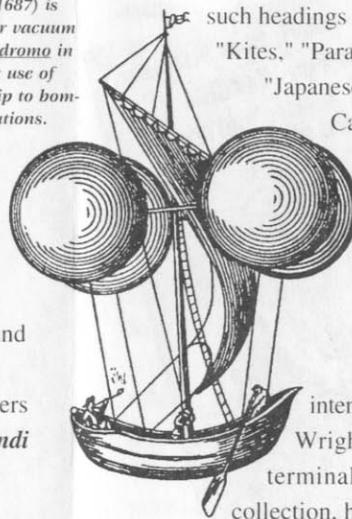
Autograph enthusiasts can scrutinize with great interest the more than 250 autographs, holographs, and inscriptions in the Collection. There are many important letters written by pioneers of flight: Blanchard, Bleriot, Langley, Lunardi, Montgolfier, Pilatre de Rozier, Santos-Dumont, the Wright brothers, and Count Zeppelin. There are also extremely rare handwritten letters from the Siege of Paris (1870-1871).

The Gimbel Library is greatly enriched by approximately 3,000 prints, portraits, and views, and includes

This version of the airship of Jesuit Lana De Terzi (1631-1687) is borne by four vacuum balls. His Podromo in 1670 forecast use of the aerial ship to bombard fortifications.

engraving, etchings, woodcuts, lithographs, and drawings in black-and-white and in color. The prints are grouped in 49 categories, making a truly unique pictorial history of aeronautics, and containing

such headings as: "Blanchard and Lunardi," "Kites," "Parachutes," "War Balloons," "Japanese Prints," "Aeronautical Cartoons," "Posters and Playbills," "Sheet Music," "Moon Material," and "Currier and Ives." A superb example of fore-edge painting is a special prize.

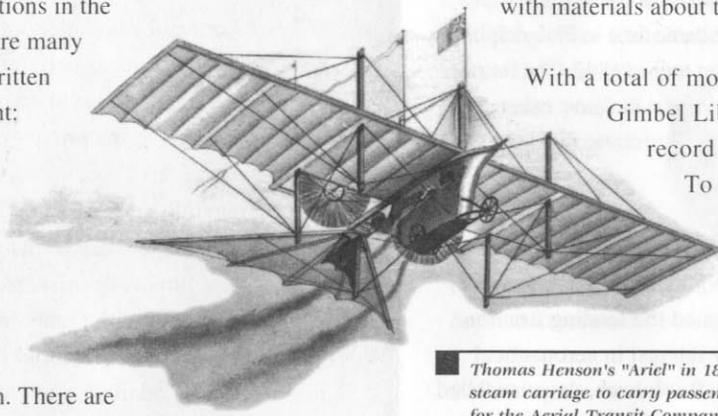


Although Colonel Gimbel had intended the historic first flight of the Wright brothers to be the original terminal point of his aeronautical collection, he later expanded his holdings to include the post-1903 period including the accomplishments of Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart, and also juvenile works, aeronautical fiction dealing primarily with the World War I era, and concluding with materials about the American lunar landing.

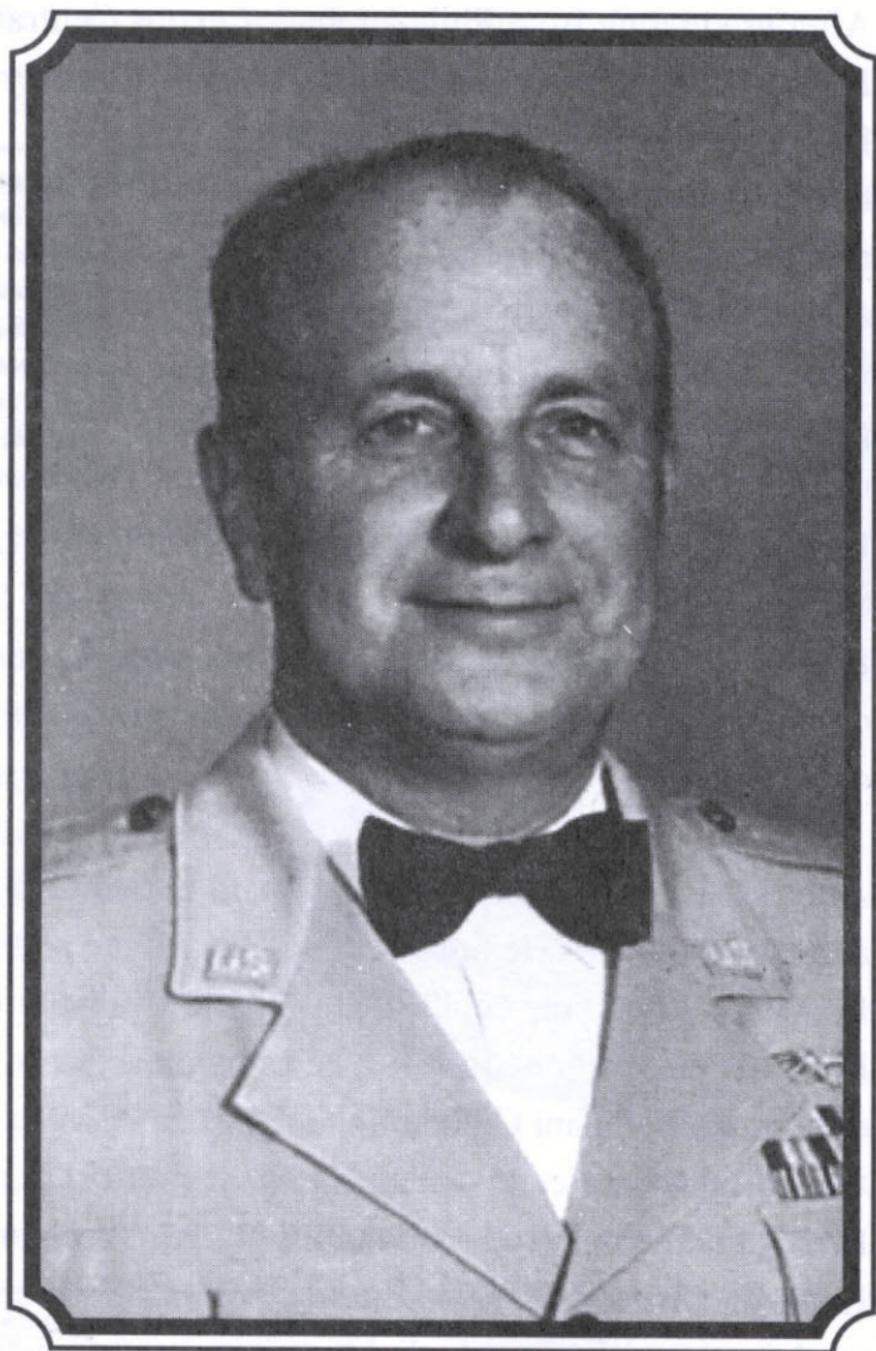
With a total of more than 20,000 items, the Gimbel Library is a comprehensive record of aeronautical history.

To this collection we added approximately 500 rare books that were already in the Academy Library collection and about 400 items donated by Richard Upjohn Light. Items are also

Thomas Henson's "Ariel" in 1843. A steam carriage to carry passengers for the Aerial Transit Company.



being added by purchase and exchange. These additions contribute to the goal of making the Gimbel Library definitive in the era prior to heavier-than-air flight. A printed catalog is a goal for the future.



Colonel Richard Gimbel
1898-1970

Colonel Richard Gimbel was born on July 26, 1898, in Atlantic City, New Jersey. His father, Ellis A. Gimbel, was one of the Gimbel Brothers who established the famous chain of department stores. His mother, Minnie Mastbaum, was the daughter of one of Philadelphia's most wealthy families. Richard grew up in Philadelphia. He proudly remembered seeing his first air meet when he was 12 years old. In 1912, his father sponsored the first inter-city airplane race between Philadelphia and New York. Richard was thrilled to meet the pilots and decided to become a pilot himself.

After graduating from Philadelphia's famous Central High School in 1916, he enrolled in Yale University. During World War I, Richard served briefly as a 2nd lieutenant in the Field artillery. After the war, he returned to Yale and graduated in 1920. Richard joined the family business as a junior executive. He progressed to Vice President of the Gimbel Corporation and succeeded his father as President of the Philadelphia store.

In 1937, Richard Gimbel organized his own chain of department stores throughout Florida and the deep south.

After leaving Gimbels in 1935, Richard turned his attention to flying. He bought a Fairchild plane and flew it all around the country. He also flew in balloons and helicopters. In 1940, he came on active duty as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Corps with the rating of Service Pilot. During World War II, Richard Gimbel served with the Eighth Air Force in England. On June 22, 1943, he participated in the first daylight bombing of the Ruhr Valley, the heart of Germany's industrial complex. In 1944, Colonel Gimbel was re-assigned to the United States as Special Project Officer for Air Service Command.

Following the war, Richard Gimbel served in the 13th and 20th Air Forces in the Pacific and in the 10th Air Force at Selfridge Air Force Base. In 1951, Colonel Gimbel was assigned to Yale University as Professor of Air Science. He retired in 1953, after 27 years of active and reserve duty.

This poster demonstrates how hydrogen for the early balloons was produced in numerous barrels by passing sulfuric acid over iron filings. The gas was fed to a central pipe, then into the balloon bag. This poster advertised the third and final flight of the Italian Joseph Tardini. He died in a fall from the balloon.

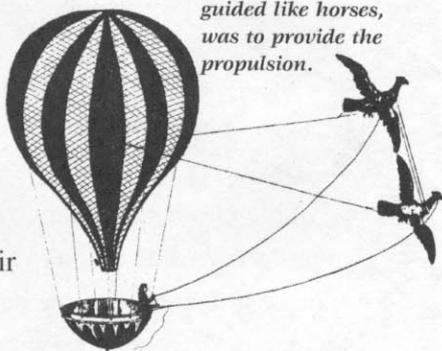
Yale University appointed Gimbel as Curator of Aeronautical Literature, and he served in this capacity until his death. Over a period of more than fifty years,

Richard Gimbel had developed four extensive collections. The focus of three of his collections was on individuals all associated with

the city of Philadelphia. Thomas Paine, the eminent pamphleteer and propagandist for the American and French Revolutions, had been brought to Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin. Edgar Allen Poe lived in Philadelphia while writing some of his best known works. Charles Dickens spent some time in Philadelphia during his celebrated American tour in 1842. The fourth collection, focusing on aviation, was the most extensive and included over 20,000 items illustrating flight over a five thousand year period.

The genesis of Gimbel's aeronautical collection began in 1942 when he visited a bombed-out book store in London. Gimbel soon informed the leading London rare book dealers of his new interest in aeronautical materials. From Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, the unexcelled doyen of American rare book dealers and collectors, Richard Gimbel acquired a sense of the pure joy and excitement of collecting as well as an understanding of the significance of rare materials in the realm of scholarship.

A small book published in Vienna in 1801 presented this idea. A team of eagles, guided like horses, was to provide the propulsion.



Richard Gimbel died on May 19, 1970 in Munich, Germany while on a European tour. In his will, Gimbel bequeathed his fabulous aeronautical collection to the Air Force Academy Library. He left his Dickens collection to Yale University. His Poe collection was given to the City of Philadelphia. The American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia received the Thomas Paine collection. The aeronautical collection was transferred to the Air Force Academy Library in 1971, and it is now used by faculty, cadets and other scholars.

In donating his collections to the scholarly world, Richard Gimbel was following the tradition set by many American philanthropists and book collectors like Widner, Huntington, Folger, Morgan and others. Unlike these donors, however, Richard Gimbel did not establish an endowment fund for the maintenance of his collections and their continuing development. Over the past two decades, the Gimbel Aeronautical Collection materials began to show signs of deterioration. The conservation and preservation of the Gimbel Collection became the prime goal of The Friends of the Air Force Academy Library, Incorporated. Since 1987, The Friends have pursued this preservation and conservation project with financial assistance from their membership, and with grants from the El Pomar Foundation of Colorado Springs and the Boettcher Foundation of Denver. The Friends, using their own funds as well as memorial funds, continue to purchase rare aeronautical materials to expand and further enrich the Gimbel Collection.