

The Aero Club of
Northern California

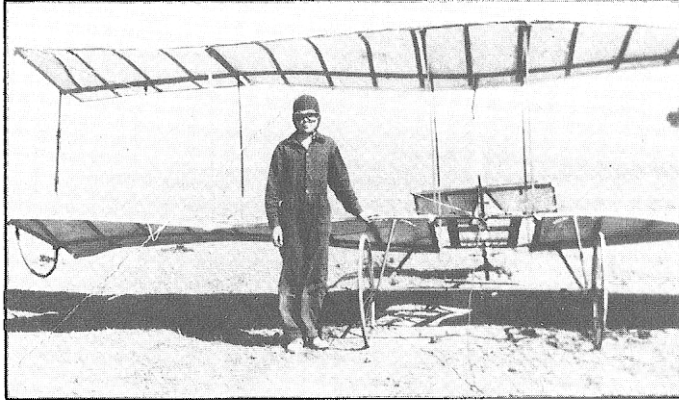
1987 Award Winner

JAMES M. NISSEN



JAMES M. "JIM" NISSEN

Following his graduation from engineering school at the University of California, Jim Nissen became a naval aviator (1936 - 1940). In 1940 -41, he flew with Pan American Airways, after which (1941 - 1946) he was a research test pilot with the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), the forerunner of NASA. In 1946, he was an experimental test pilot with North American Aviation.



(1925)

On learning to fly:

"I went out to Alameda Airport and Johnny Johnston had his C-2 Aeronca which we'd seen some time before at air shows. I had \$32 saved up from working that summer, so I went up to him and said, "I got \$32 and I want to start flying." And he said the rent would be 6, no 7, no \$8 an hour. What he was doing was figuring out what number was divisible by 32, which was 8. That's how I rented it for 8 dollars an hour. If I had \$30 I probably could have gotten it for \$6 or \$5 an hour."



(1937)

On Navy flying:

"There would be short formation cross countries in Squadron 2. Sometimes you'd take an apple along and two cadets went in every airplane, so while one cadet was flying sometimes one would walk out on the tip of the wing and the other guy would too, from the other airplane. One would take a bite of the apple and hand it over to the fellow in the other airplane and he'd take a bite."

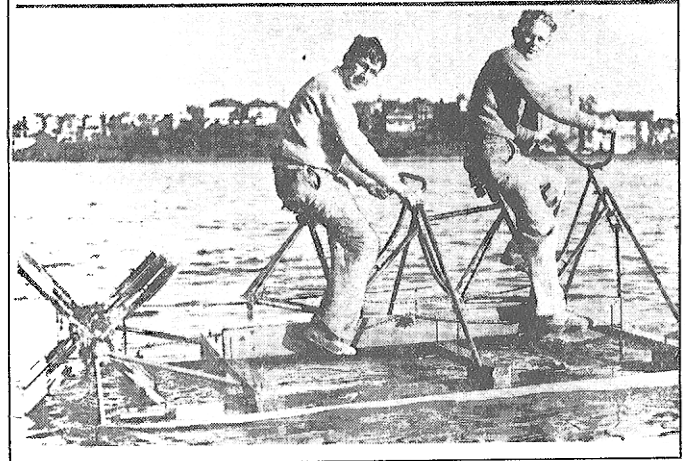
That same year, he founded San Jose Airport, i.e., San Jose International Airport, and from 1946 until his retirement in 1975, served as its manager and Director of Aviation, taking the Airport from its infancy through its growth and developmental years to become the major JETPORT of the South Bay and second busiest of the three Bay Area airports.

Nissen On Nissen

On earliest flights:

"I started building gliders in the seventh grade. They weren't very good gliders. My uncle was in a wheelchair, and he had a good supply of wheelchair wheels, so I used those for the landing gear. Since I broke them up every once in a while, I was a little bit hard on his supply."

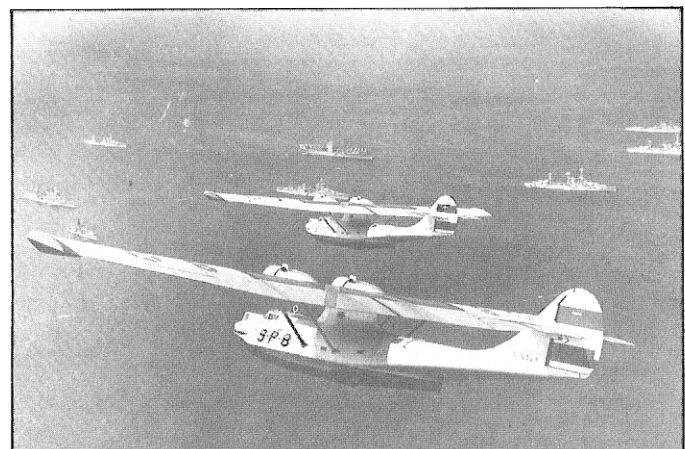
DOWN TO SEA IN BICYCLES



So what? So it's a bicycle on Lake Merritt, believe it or not and two U. C. sophomore engineering students, James Nissen and David Zuckerman (in the rumble seat) does the heavy pedaling while Nissen steers a course. Full speed ahead is "ok" with Zuckerman, he says, but the "full speed astern" maneuver means a drenching. The paddlewheel churns half of Lake Merritt over his back. — Tribune photo.

On joining the Navy:

"I didn't particularly care for military airplanes. But I decided well, I'll probably fly most of my life, maybe I'd better go ahead and learn right. So that's when I decided I would go into the Navy."



Navy PB4Y's



Jim & his double.

On testing the P51:

“The problem occurred shortly after takeoff. We weren’t up more than about 300 to 500 feet. My right tow cable released from the Black Widow airplane and came back at my airplane. My P51 was towed from the prop shaft. I ducked down when it hit the cockpit and then I came back up and here was the other tow cable coming back. The cables wrapped around the airplane. I’d overshot the flight strip that I wanted so I rolled it out and just headed for the gravel pit. I went under the big power lines that went to the hospital. However, halfway up was a heavy telephone cable and I hit that and snapped off both poles and ended up in the gravel pit. The airplane was slightly totaled.”

On flying Pan Am China Clippers:

“If they flew the airplanes today the way we did, I wouldn’t even ride them. But the things we did, we thought they were funny, really they were very stupid. You’d crawl out in the wings, look behind each engine on the Boeing. And you had a spiral staircase coming up on the deck. On the flight deck, the two pilots, the navigator, the radioman, and the flight engineer, would be on duty at all times. Say the Captain was going to bring somebody up, so we’d put it on automatic pilot and all run over and hide in the wing. When they came up on the flight deck there wasn’t a soul on the flight deck.”



Test pilot, Jim Nissen.



1948 - Inaugural commercial flight to San Jose Municipal Airport.

On the San Jose Airport:

“I started the Airport in the fall of ’45. Now Ernie Renzel, he was the real father of the Airport getting the land originally himself. Jim Mathiesen was interested in it with me, and then Ray Stephens said he was interested. So we formed a company, California Aviation Activities Incorporated, and signed a lease over to it. The lease was for one year with a one year option with the City of San Jose.

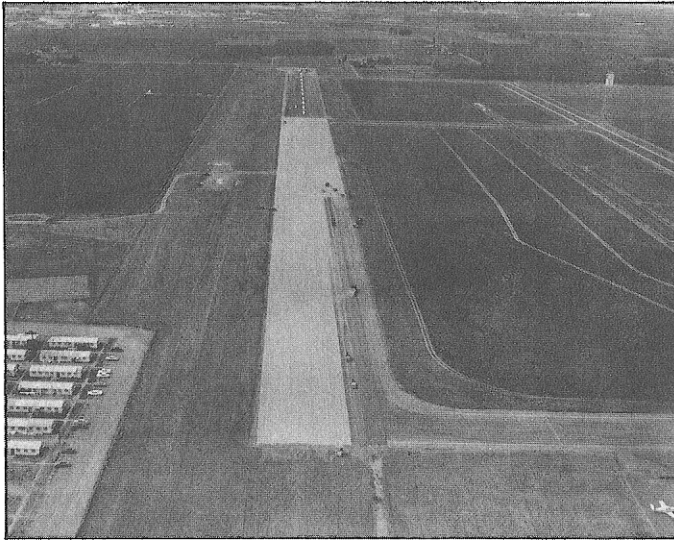
We wanted some damages from the City if the lease was less than five years, and the City was going to give us more, but some joker in the front row of the Council Chambers stood up and said the City could not commit itself to a dept greater than its income from the thing. So we had to call a halt and go into the City Manager’s office and talk it over, so I decided to take that risk.”

On flight work for Henry Kaiser:

“For the publicity parts he (Kaiser) came out to the Oakland Airport and led the contraption around. He kept trying to fly it. He flew against traffic. I kept having to slap his hand to pull the throttle off, to keep us from getting into trouble. But he did have a personal interest in it.”



Why is Nissen the only one with a parachute?



Early San Jose Airport. Note wartime housing at left.

On the terminal building:

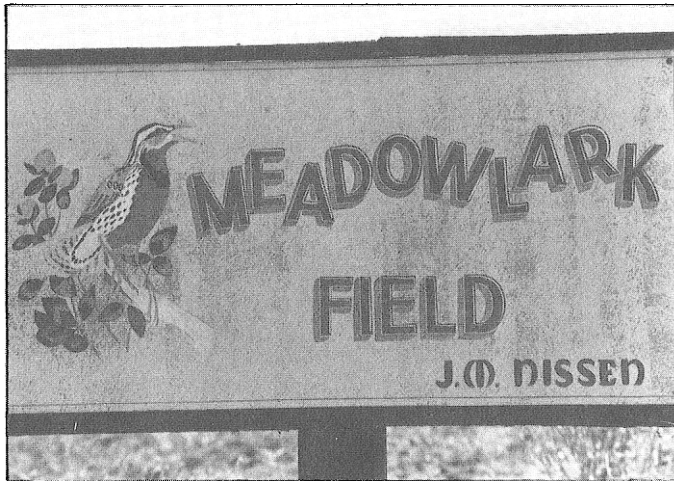
“We took the philosophy that we did not want it to look like a big building or the Taj Mahal. We felt we could do better service and get more passengers if we made the terminal look small. If we tried to make it look big, then we lost the selling point that we had for convenience.”

On early airport management:

“I sold out my private interests to another party, and then took the job as manager of the airport for the City in 1946. We all felt it was going to be slow progress, but we felt that we would get there. We would get air carrier service here, and that was the whole reason for doing it. If it were not for that, the City would never have gotten in the airport business at all. They would have just left it to private airports.”



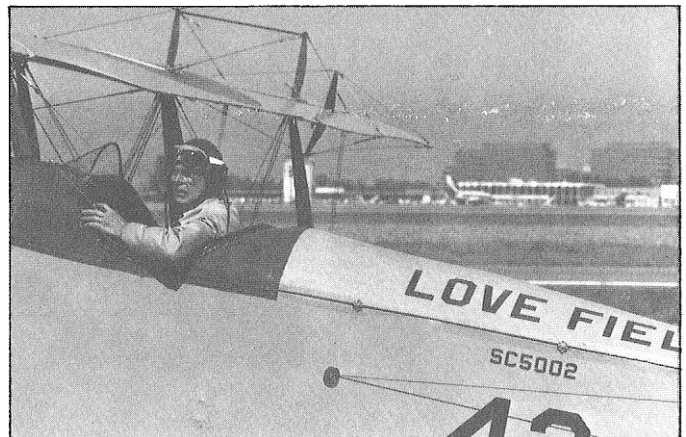
San Jose Airport as it looked when Jim Nissen retired.



Retirement certainly wasn't the end to Jim's involvement with aviation.

On living in Livermore:

“The hangar went up first and was finished the same time or before the house was up. We thought we either make the move then or we'll never do it. So we did, we sold the house here and moved over and used the Cessna 172 for commuting. I always said not many people could say the best part of their job was commuting to work, but that flying back and forth really was nice.”



Jim in his restored Jenny.

Our Special Thanks to:

Hillis Printing Company

Chuck Hillis

Sandra Brunett

Peggy Shea

Steve Lopes

Jerry Bennett

Tom Leonard

Dave Mendez

Jennifer Donahue

Shirley Bonkowski

Kate Snow

Vicki Wagner

Marily Mora

San Jose International Airport "Archives"

The Aero Club of Northern California was formed to promote those activities which advance aviation and aerospace within Northern California.

As a chapter of the National Aeronautic Association, (NAA) which is the oldest independent, non-profit aviation organization in the United States, and the sole U.S. representative to the

Federation Aeronautique International.

We embrace the goals of our parent organization in our efforts to support a vigorous aviation and space program for students at all levels of learning, and to recognize and honor those who make outstanding contributions to the advancement of aviation and space flight.

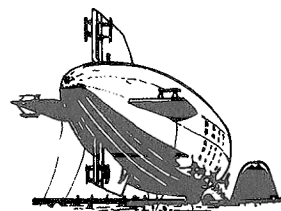
About our logo ...

Incorporated in the logo of The Aero Club of Northern California are some of the most significant contributions the area has made to the art and science of flight.



Montgomery Flight - 1904

Often referred to as "The Father of Basic Flying" Dr. John Montgomery was a true aviation pioneer. San Jose was the site of many of his historic achievements. Alexander Graham Bell noted that, "All subsequent attempts in aviation must begin with the Montgomery Machine."



Moffett Field - 1933

Dedicated April 12, 1933, Moffett Field continues to be the United States guardian of the Pacific. It is a part of northern California's defense commitment to aviation.



China Clipper - 1936

Lifting from San Francisco Bay waters on November 22, 1935, the Clipper became the first airplane to fly the Pacific non-stop. Cutting over 15 days off the best surface time from San Francisco to Manila it led to the elimination of the barriers of space and time.



NASA Ames Research Center - 1982

Northern California's continued contributions to involvement in man's quest for his ultimate destiny is assured by the ongoing advancements in aerospace technology at NASA's Ames Research Center.

Fifth Annual Awards Presentation

The Aero Club of Northern California

February 14, 1987
San Jose, California

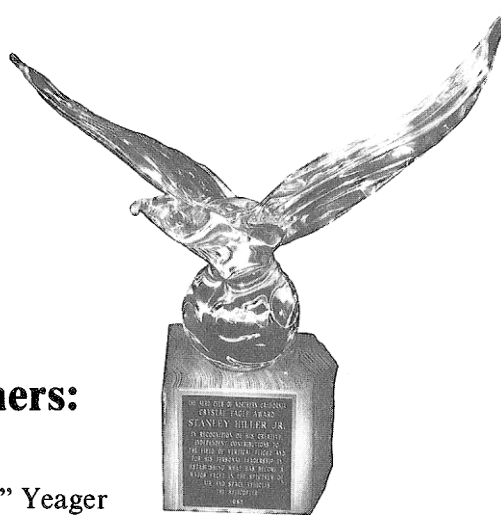
Welcome Roger S. Coen
President
Introduction of Guests Fran Fox
Master of Ceremonies

DINNER

Presentation of Aero Club of Northern California's
"James M. Nissen Scholarship Award" Tom Leonard,
SJSU Aeronautic Dept.
Guest Speaker Lt. General Aloysius G. Casey
Presentation of Aero Club of Northern California
Crystal Eagle Award to Jim Nissen Roger S. Coen
Introduction of 1987 officers Jerry Bennett

The Crystal Eagle Award

The Aero Club of Northern California Crystal Eagle Award is presented annually to recognize and honor an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of aviation or space flight.



Crystal Eagle Award Winners:

1983: General James "Jimmy" Doolittle
1984: Brigadier General Charles E. "Chuck" Yeager
1985: Stanley Hiller, Jr.
1986: William "Bill" Lear, Sr.

About our Speaker:

Lieutenant General Aloysius G. Casey

Lt. Gen. Casey is the commander for Space Division, Air Force Systems Command, Los Angeles Air Force Station, CA. He is responsible for managing the research, design, development and aquisition of space launch, command and control, and satellite systems.

The general is a master navigator with more than

3,000 flying hours and wears the master missile badge. His military decorations and awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with two oak leaf clusters, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with nine oak clusters, and Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters.
