

## Fred Rohr and his Drop Hammers

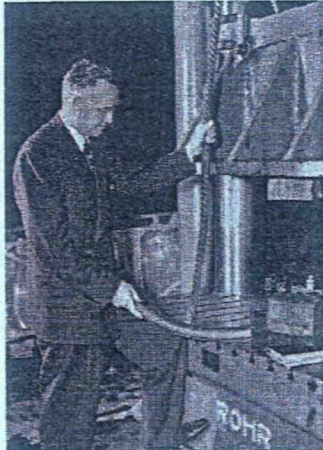
We all know the eventual impact on Chula Vista when Fred Rohr decided to move his infant aircraft parts manufacturing operation from San Diego to Chula Vista in the summer of 1941. He began his operations with 750 employees. Six months later, Pearl Harbor was attacked and the rest is history. By 1944 Rohr Aircraft had some 9,000 employees working in Chula Vista. That, plus the need to tear up lemon groves and vegetable fields for thousands of temporary war-time housing units, started Chula Vista on its way from being an agricultural community to the "bedroom community" it is today.

Rohr Aircraft (now, Goodrich Aerospace Corp.) has been, and continues to be, the largest private employer in Chula Vista since 1941. But Fred Rohr was famous for more than heading up an aircraft parts manufacturing company with his name on it.

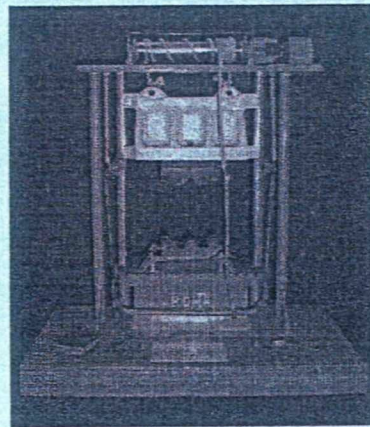
In the 1920's Fred Rohr was a young production worker with Ryan Aircraft in San Diego. As you know, Charles Lindbergh's "Spirit of St. Louis" was built by Ryan here in San Diego. The "Spirit" is mostly covered with fabric, as were most planes of that era, but they decided to cover the nose with metal. In any photograph of the "Spirit" the metal covering of the nose (where the extra gas tanks were) is clear. Fred Rohr supervised the making of that metal cover, and he never tired of telling visitors that his handiwork hung in the Smithsonian!

In the early days of aircraft manufacturing, there was very little forming to be done on the metal parts of an airplane. This was because planes were mostly wood and fabric. As stronger and lighter metal alloys became available, aircraft engineers incorporated more metal parts into their designs. In the beginning these were pounded out by hand on form blocks.

As more and more planes came to be covered with metal, Fred Rohr designed the first drop hammer to be used in the aircraft industry. This greatly increased the efficiency of making metal parts. Given the lightness of the metal and the more complex shape of metal used on airplanes, the drop hammers commonly used in other industries could not be used. K.W. "Bud" Maynard was a long-time Factory Manager for Rohr Aircraft. Upon his retirement, a working model of a Rohr drop hammer was presented to him. That model (shown below) will soon be on display in the Chula Vista Heritage Museum as the center piece of a tribute to Rohr Aircraft and its 63 year (and still counting) contribution to Chula Vista's history.



Fred Rohr and one of his drop hammers



Model of a Rohr drop hammer

### **Chula Vista Heritage Museum**

360 Third Avenue, Chula Vista 91910

Founder: Frank Roseman

Manager: Kim Laru

Phone: (619) 427-8092

#### Hours:

Thursday 1-4 pm

Friday, Saturday & Sunday

11-2 pm

EQUIPMENT INVENTORY ~~3-2041~~ <sup>3-2042</sup> *A*

ITEM: 3000 lb. Drop Motor 3-2042  
VENDOR: Rohr Assembly  
with GE 10 HP, 220/440 V, 60 cy, 3 ph, 1150 rpm  
motor No. 5618527  
DATE OF ACQUISITION: Feb. 25, 1941  
PURCHASE PRICE: \$4,226.11 INSTALLATION:  
INV. NO.: 9119 FREIGHT:  
P. O. NO.: MODEL NO.:  
SERIAL NO.: TYPE OF MARK:

*D. Hazen  
12/25/41*