



Figure 1

Bill Schneider of Rahway, New Jersey, began his business in aviation photography in 1926—the same year he began collecting airport souvenirs. In the world of U.S. aviation, it was also the inauguration year of the aeronautics branch of the Department of Commerce—perhaps not a complete coincidence.

The air commerce act, approved 20 May 1926, charged the Secretary of Commerce with the responsibility of encouraging and regulating the use of aircraft in commerce. The act provided for the establishment and maintenance of civil airways and their equipment, including intermediate landing fields, beacon lights, and other aids to air navigation; and various levels of inspections, licensing, and dissemination of information. In three years, air transport miles doubled; airplane miles altogether tripled—and Bill Schneider was right there, usually at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, to record all flights and to collect souvenirs from any that might be historic.

Schneider's 'modus operandi' was this: he would take many consecutive photos of the pilots and their airplane (he had a bulk-loaded camera, see the only photo of him, Figure 1) sometimes on takeoff, sometimes

Yesterday in USSN: **William Schneider, Jr.** **– Aviation Photographer**

by Diane DeBlois & Robert Dalton Harris

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at official dedication—and then sell them to the aviators or to the press. If the flight was historic, he would later send prints to the aviators asking them to autograph and return the photos for his collection. Often they would then request some for their personal use. Because Schneider was also buying souvenir covers, he sometimes asked aviators to autograph those after the event.

Some aviators were a little “testy” about such an intrusion on their own commercial souveniring endeavors. Ben and Joe Adamowicz wrote Schneider after their 27 June 1934 attempted nonstop flight New York to Poland (they ran out of fuel near Caen) that they wouldn't sign anyone else's covers but intended to sell signed ones for \$5 and unsigned ones for \$1.25. Another collector added to the bottom of the letter: “What tight wads, Bill. Who do they think they are? Kings Da Boom Ya?”

Some aviators helpfully corrected some of Schneider's assumptions: Jimmie Mattern pointed out that one of the photographs sent was of the Vega airplane flown on the New York to Berlin segment of

the ‘Round the World’ flight, but that the other was another Lockheed Vega belonging to Standard Oil of New Jersey in which he finished his solo flight. “My plane was never recovered from the crash site on the Arctic Circle near Anadyr Siberia.”

Most aviators, apparently, complied with Schneider's requests, and some even began a friendship with the intrepid photographer. A poignant aspect of his combined hobby and vocation was that some of the aviators crashed and died soon after Schneider photographed them, giving his work memorial status.

Schneider closely followed the career of fellow New Jersey-ite, William P. Odom, who was based at Teterboro Field. In 1947, Odom made a record round-the-world flight in a converted Douglas A-16, the “Reynolds Bombshell,” (Figure 2) in 78 hours 55 minutes 56 seconds. Odom was pilot, Carroll “Tex” Sallee engineer, and Milton Reynolds navigator.

Reynolds was also the sponsor of the flight—he manufactured pens in Chicago. Schneider took several photographs of the Bombshell and the aviators at LaGuardia Airport

Figure 2



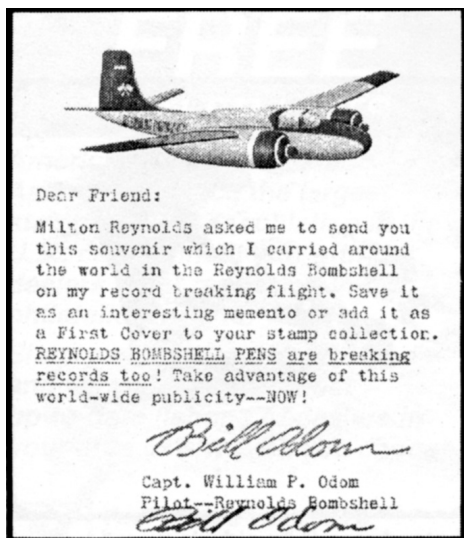


Figure 3

and had them autographed by Odom and Sallee.

Schneider later had Odom autograph a card (Figure 3) advertising “Reynolds Bombshell Pens” which was mailed along with a souvenir cover and an illustrated circular describing the flight.

The circular reproduced a letter from Deputy Second Assistant Postmaster General Robert Burgess 26 March 1947 to Reynolds explaining the Post Office Department regulations, following the passage of the Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938, allowing for the carriage of uncanceled souvenir covers only.

Odom described how they produced souvenirs under this restriction in a note to Bill written the day the

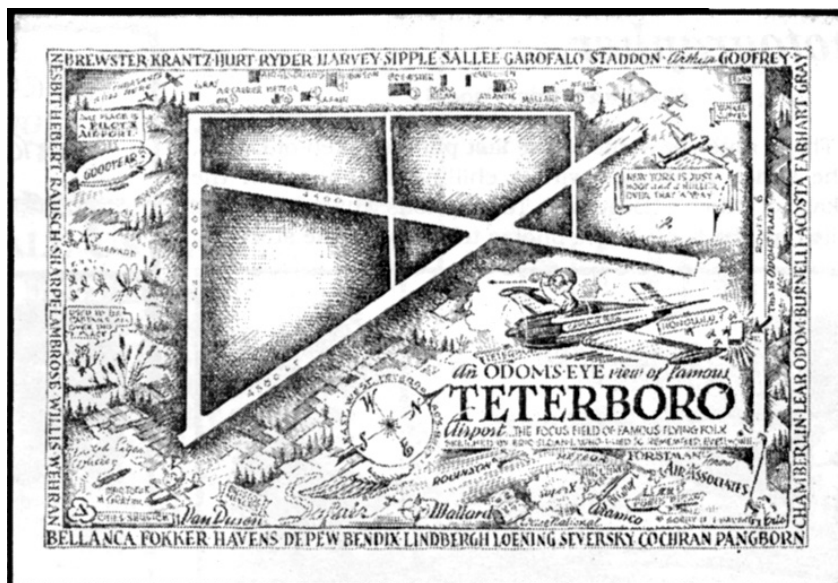


Figure 4. Souvenir card depicts “An Odom’s Eye view of famous Teterboro Airport...the focus field of famous flying folk.”

Bombshell returned to New York, 16 April 1947: “Bill, Reynolds had about 35,000 covers on his plane, they were not cancelled and we sent them into N.Y. for postmark; large envelopes with his picture on and all addressed to himself at Cg.”

In August of 1947, Odom made a record solo round-the-world flight from Chicago, also in the Bombshell—elapsed time just 73 hours.

Back in New Jersey, Odom sponsored himself; he owned Odom Aviation Corporation based at the Teterboro Air Terminal, apparently also running the restaurant, bar, and soda fountain (Figure 4), in a Beechcraft

Bonanza airplane called “Waikiki.”

On 13 January 1949, he flew from Honolulu to Oakland, a world distance record for light planes—2,400 miles nonstop. On 8 March he broke his own record in a 4,957 mile nonstop flight from Honolulu to Teterboro in 36 hours. Later in 1949, at an air race, Schneider took a whole series of photos of the “Waikiki,” painted with the statistics of the flight (Figure 5); of Odom’s racing plane, number 7 the “Beguine” (painted with music to the song “Begin the Beguine”); and of Odom with fellow aviators Ben Howard, and Bill Eddy.

These must be some of the last

Figure 5. Bill Odom and the “Waikiki”. A closer view shows statistics, including the “Great Circle Distance 4,957.24” mile flight.





Figure 6

photos taken of Odom, for the series continues with a chilling 12 images of the wreckage of Odom's "Beguine." The captions, which Schneider penciled on the back of the photos, tell some of the story:

"Beguine dove at 45° angle from right just missing roof of white house" (Figure 6)

"Part of plane by street, some pieces flew up on porch of house upper left starting fire. 2 men, right center, bring pump to pump water out of hole so digging could continue"

"2 tractors unable to pull motor parts out of hole"

"Largest pieces of fuselage. Bars of music can be seen on piece at right" (Figure 7)

"Highway Patrolman inspecting remains of prop after being dug out of ground 7 ft deep"

"Baby, killed, was playing with toy tractor, center, and toy auto, right. Refrigerator & washing machine, center, blown out"

And, finally, "Dusk—about 8 pm. Digger, shoulder showing by shovel blade, placed pieces of Odom's body on shovel, then put into rubber bag held by 2 men, background."

Schneider, the retired professional photographer, kept his head and recorded the tragedy. Schneider, the committed philatelist, wrote from the Metropolitan Air Mail Cover Club to Odom's lawyers to see if he could purchase a Hawaii-Teterboro souvenir cover. The reply, 26 September 1949, was that none had yet been found "which I understand were made up in pamphlet form" but that one would be sent "in due course...In the meantime, I am sending you two airmail covers for Captain Odom's two round-the-world flights and would appreciate your accepting them for the consideration you have sent."

Schneider also wrote to Tex Sallee in November and received a reply that Tex remembered meeting him at the Air Races and would enjoy a visit.

In 1951, a fellow collector wrote exclaiming: "So you have seven albums of covers—what a collection!!" Since it's clear Schneider continued to collect into the 1970s, it really must have been quite a trove.

Occasionally, Schneider ran afoul of other collectors who were doing the same kind of thing. In an 18 July 1932 letter from J. Errol Boyd's secretary, he was advised that a cover he sent to be authenticated was not

LARGEST PIECES OF FUSELAGE
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ODOM 691



Figure 7. Back of photo shows Schneider's pencil note.

carried by Boyd on his historic Montreal to New York flight. "Captain Boyd has a letter in his files from the addressee, Meyer Biddleman, asking him to autograph an envelope which out of kindness, he did, not realizing that advantage would be taken of his compliance with this request. Upon closer inspection you will see that the typewriting is done over the signature, a proof that the work was done after the autographing."

Occasionally, Schneider also ran afoul of the various postal authorities. In a letter of 28 June 1929 from the Postverkets Frankotechenexpedition for Samlare in Stockholm his request was denied to have letters sent on the Ahrenberg-Floden flight Stockholm to New York as he didn't enclose the proper amount of money. His request to have a letter carried on the Herdon-Pangborn Around the World flight 18 July 1931 was also denied by the sponsoring corporation.

Although Schneider created many of his own souvenirs—both by preparing covers to be flown on historic flights and by photographing the aviators—he also purchased souvenirs. He wrote the various members of the 43rd Bomb Group out of Davis Monthan base in Tucson after their 26 February 1949 nonstop round the world flight of B-50 "Lucky Lady II." They each told the story of a rushed departure, no time to take souvenirs with them, and their reluctance to part with the five covers each they were presented by the communications officer who had the wit to place them on board.

Donald Traugh's reluctance had led to a bidding war which he claimed had reached over \$400, and he asked for Schneider's offer. Roland B. Bonner wrote that he could sell Schneider a cover autographed by all the crew for \$300 and apologized for the price. Schneider, the avid collector, sent him a check.