

HISTORY MAKER

ZACHERY SMITH REYNOLDS

Born: Nov. 5, 1911
Died: July 6, 1936, Winston-Salem

Known for: His solo flight from England to China in 1931-1932, mysterious death and the foundation created in his name by his siblings and uncle.

Smith Reynolds came of age in the golden era of aviation. His family's resources and connections gave him access to some of the giants of that world, including Charles Lindbergh.

His personal skills and passion for flying, however, allowed him to earn his pilot's license at 16 and a recommendation from the Federation Aeronautique Internationale, signed by Orville Wright himself.

Just four years later, he proved those skills further with little more than a compass and land maps when he completed an impressive 128-day solo flight that was mechanically and physically challenging. He left London Dec. 21, 1931, flew to Paris, Milan, Rome, across the Mediterranean to Cairo then on to Badhdad. He saw the Taj Mahal in India and a full lunar eclipse in Calcutta before flying on to Hong Kong. His record of that journey is published as "Log of Aeroplane NR-898W."

The youngest child born to R.J. and Katherine Smith Reynolds, he was named for his mother's beloved father, farmer and real estate investor Zachery Smith of Mount Airy.

Smith Reynolds was close with his three siblings, according a 1980 interview with his sister Nancy, but idolized the eldest, Dick, who became an amateur pilot and eventually founded Reynolds Aviation, based at Miller Municipal Airport.

Reynolds, emulating his brother, learned to fly and sky dive. The brothers honed their flying at barnstorming events where they raced and flew daredevil stunts.

"He was so intelligent and so adult in his thinking," sister Nancy Reynolds said in 1980. "He was a very strong character, Smith was. To do the things he did in aviation ... He had a mechanical, mathematical type of mind. Inventive."

His potential in the growing air transportation industry was never realized.

Smith Reynolds died of a gunshot in Reynolda, his home. The only people known to have been present were a good friend and his second wife of less than a year. Whether murder, accident or suicide, the case was never solved. But his siblings and uncle ensured that his name would not be forgotten.

The airport where young Smith spent so many hours now bears his name, arranged by his idolized older brother when he was mayor.

But the more impactful legacy is the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, created by his siblings with their portions of his estate to improve lives in North Carolina, a mission that continues 90 years later with millions of dollars invested in initiatives from education to public health and more.

—KATE RAUHAUSER-SMITH

