

BILL BARNES... Alive and Well at 80

by Herman L. Schreiner

"Send for Bill Barnes ... a secret cult plans the doom of civilization . . . a web of terror spins over the earth. "So would begin a typical Bill Barnes novel in the lurid pulp magazine style of the 1930s.



Winter with a Half-A powered radio control model being tested for a Scientific Co. kit in the early 1960s. It featured a single-channel radio with escapement to operate a rudder—the only control!

THE MILLIONS OF AIR ENTHUSIASTS IN THE CROSSROADS and cities of America devotedly purchased and voraciously consumed these fictional adventures in the monthly *Bill Barnes* magazine and others of its genre.

"Bill Barnes lived in the air—the earth was a place to land and refuel."

"With the speed of light, he changed his course and dropped like a hunting eagle on its prey, moving with such terrific speed that the cloud bank around him became blurred. In a second the strange ship was centered between the cross hairs of his sight and he ripped out a burst of fire. ' '1

Barnes was Rickenbacker, Fonck, the "Red Baron" and

Jimmy Doolittle rolled into one. William (Bill Barnes) Winter, at a ripe 80, who with the passing of the late Chuck Verral, is the last survivor of the Barnes phenomena. "I joined the publishing house of Street & Smith late in 1936 during the Great Depression, starting at the princely sum of \$30 a week, when the top editorial bracket was \$44," Winter recalls. "However, breakfast was a dime, lunch a quarter and the subway was a nickel," he quickly adds. In contrast, according to a *New York Times* survey at that time, Street & Smith vice presidents were earning \$34K in Depression dollars subject to the then no withholding and minimal income tax brackets. Then located at 7th Avenue and 15th Street on the fringe of Greenwich Village, Street & Smith, founded in 1865, was for many years the richest publishing house in the world. Street & Smith had a lock on the dime novel—*Buffalo Bill*, *Trank Memwell*, *The Shadow*, *The Green Hornet*, *Detective Stories*, *Love Stories*, *ad infinitum*. Winter recalls there were 85 titles in-house, and added that at least five of their dime weeklies netted one million dollars apiece.

Air Trails made its newsstand debut as a 10-cent pulp in October of 1928, and was discontinued in October 1931. Its first reincarnation as *Bill Barnes, Air Adventurer* occurred in February 1934. Winter recollects, "I rather suspect Bill Barnes was the brainchild of company group editor F. Orlin Tremaine (who wore gray spats, used a Franklin D. Roosevelt cigarette holder, and claimed to understand the Fourth Dimension), and his luncheon pal, the larger-than-life Frank L. Tinsley, S&S cover artist. Tremaine was ex-editor of *True Stories* (MacFadden), *Smart Set*, *Bunk*, and others. Tinsley, an ex-cavalryman and a prominent illustrator for westerns, sported a soaring imagination that brought Barnes to life."

On its second appearance, the "hero-pulp" *Bill Barnes, Air Adventurer*, featured exciting covers of flashy aircraft done by the multi-talented Tinsley. In October of 1935, the pulp became an 8.5x11.5 so-called "slick" entitled *Bill Barnes Air Trails*. Tinsley's captivating art provided alluring covers, story heads and illustrations plus aircraft drawings every month. There was an outstanding model department conducted by Wakefield Trophy winner, Gordon Light, an NYU aeronautical engineering student. George L. Eaton, who cranked out a 60,000-word novel every issue, actually was two people, Harold B. Montanye, a World War I aviator, and Charles (Chuck) Spaine Verral. Both writers were success-



ful novelists in the hardcover book field.

Actually, the air-minded Winter, who built his first model airplane in 1927, had already achieved recognition as a model designer. Twenty-three of his outstanding plans for rubber-powered flying scale models had appeared in various model aviation publications. The writer recalls fondly Bill's 5/8-inch-scale Stinson SR-6; in the December issue of *Flying Aces* plans comprised 11 pages! He had done his homework well, for included in the layout was a detailed scale "inboard-profile" of the luxurious cabin interior and instrument panel with dual-control wheels, plus exacting details of the 260-hp Lycoming powerplant. Rare indeed for 1935.²

Bill Winter's first freelance appearance in the enlarged *Bill Barnes Air Trails* was in the July 1936 issue via a three-page feature article for constructing a 1 1/4-inch solid scale Fairchild 45 low-wing Sedan of the Air. As if fate had decreed, his first exposure in this publication coincided with the debut of Barnes' new ship, the 500-mph "Silver Lancer," which was emblazoned streaking across the cover in a smashing Tinsley illustration backed up by his four-page feature article complete with a 1/8-inch scale three-view and detailed sectional view of the cockpit arrangement. Street & Smith had scrupulously planned the "Lancer's" debut with a price increase to 15 cents.

In May 1937 he was listed as department editor and his name appeared on the masthead as a member of the "Model Board," along with Gordon Light and Frank Tinsley. Surprised by this information in his recollections, Bill stated, "I do remember being hired on a salaried basis in December 1936 as Assistant Editor; the March 1937 issue was my first—allowing for leadtime. I vividly remember that I presided over a rolltop desk, a 275-pound bald male stenographer from the company pool (absolutely terrifying) and the omnipresent old-style flour-paste glue pot."

Old hand Frank Tinsley immediately took Bill in hand (to begin a lifetime friendship). That first day lunch is etched unforgettably in Bill's memory. He recalls, "Frank presided in his inimitable manner at one of the many colorful restaurants on Union Square with an ambience reminiscent of NYC's eateries in the '30s luncheon meccas for the great city's influentials. Frank had sauerkraut juice to start. I ordered a fish and that's exactly what I got—complete with staring eye which has haunted me to this day. Frank invented those wonderful fictional planes: the 'Snorter,' the 'Scarlet

Oct 1928 First Pulp

Oct. 1935 First "Slick" large issue.

Nov 1939 First "Giant" "PIC" size

1975 Last issue—*American Modeler* was the successor to *Air Trails*.

Stormer,' the 'Silver Lancer,' *et al.*, which Barnes and his buddies flew in the aerial adventures chronicled in the publication." Tinsley was, according to Winter, a prophet who practically lived in the future. By the mid-'30s, Frank had equipped his hero, Barnes, with infrared sights, prop-hub 37mm cannon, counter-rotating props driven by tandem 1,500-hp diesels and a retractable single float for his "Silver Lancer." Winter enthusiastically reports, "So good was Tinsley's engineering that recently built RC 'Lancers' fly like the real thing and even retract the main float. Incidentally, Tinsley did not build models.

"We called Frank The Man in the Street With His Head in the Clouds," Winter chuckled. "Years later, after some Sunday supplement stuff in *Mechanix Illustrated*, Frank was dubbed by their staff Doomsday Tinsley. In fact, he absolutely delighted Jack Parr on the Tonight Show." According to Winter, Tinsley switched from horses to airplanes as an illustrator, then becoming a pundit for national publications, doing magnetic trains, moving sidewalks, space stations, rocket probes, and so on. The man on the street with his head in the clouds had retracted his feet.

In December 1937 Winter became an Associate Editor with the famous aviator Clyde Pangborn. His advancements would quickly make him a publishing executive. In that year the title changed from *Bill Barnes, Air Trails* to *Air Trails*, with *Bill Barnes* in small print at the bottom of the September 1938 cover until the March 1939 issue, in which the last Barnes novel appeared. (The Bill Barnes series continued in another Street & Smith pulp, *Doc Savage*.)

IN OCTOBER 1939, WINTER, UNDER THEN-EDITOR C.B. Colby, who would leave to join *Popular Science*, became Associate Editor and *Air Trails* took a bold step in November of that year by going to the giant 10x13-inch bedsheet size, printed on better quality paper.

"I helped kill Bill Barnes," Winter confessed. "World War II, Pearl Harbor, and the Battle of Britain were reality. Bill Barnes was fantasy. It was great escape reading during the



Depression. World War II was anything but fantasy.”

With more layout space, bigger pictures, drawings, illustrations, and four-color flight shots of warplanes for center spreads (most by the great photog Rudy Arnold), *Air Trails* circulation jumped at the rate of 10,000 readers a month for roughly a year. Its unique hybrid composition of model airplanes and serious but popular aviation content was unparalleled in the industry. Bylined features by famous aviation personalities like “Hap” Arnold, Admiral Sherman, Igor Sikorsky and dozens of others, appeared. Winter recalled an especially pleasant and delightful chat with Ms. Bleriot, about her father (the famous English Channel Louis Bleriot) who then obligingly wrote a fascinating two-part article.

Air Trails broke stories on jet propulsion, the use of American military planes by Russia, German jets, and in spite of its three-month leadtime, its staff sometimes got to enjoy watching the entire media catch up.

At its peak year, 1944, *Air Trails* grossed \$616,000 netting \$212,000—six percent of the company net. Its peak issue that year saw 243,000 readers certified by the Audit Bureau of Circulation. At the time, S&S occupied two floors of the Chanin Building at Lexington Avenue and 42nd Street; its manufacturing plant the former old Fruhauf Trailer plant in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The *Air Trails Model Annual*¹⁵ was selling over 240,000 copies newsstand. *Air Progress*, which grew out of the old Bill Barnes *Air Trails Annual* (lasting from 1938 through 1943) had gone monthly under another editor and failed. It would come back in 1952 with Al Lewis as editor, attaining over 200,000 copies sales per issue (under the title of *Air Progress*, currently a Challenge publication).

“In 1946,” Winter relates, “John Campbell, a fellow S&S editor—*Astounding Stories*, later *Analogue*, the leading science-fiction magazine—was pushing management for a separate science magazine. Then the atom bomb fell. Unwilling to risk a new venture, management eyed a combination of the *Astounding Stories* spinoff and *Air Trails*. During the transition from war to peace, into 1946, *Air Trails* had adapted to private aviation with models as always, but had leveled off at 183,000 copies and the loss of full-scale aviation advertisers. The new magazine would be titled *Air Trails & Science Frontiers*. In mid-1946 Campbell won the toss and I

followed Bill Barnes into limbo.”

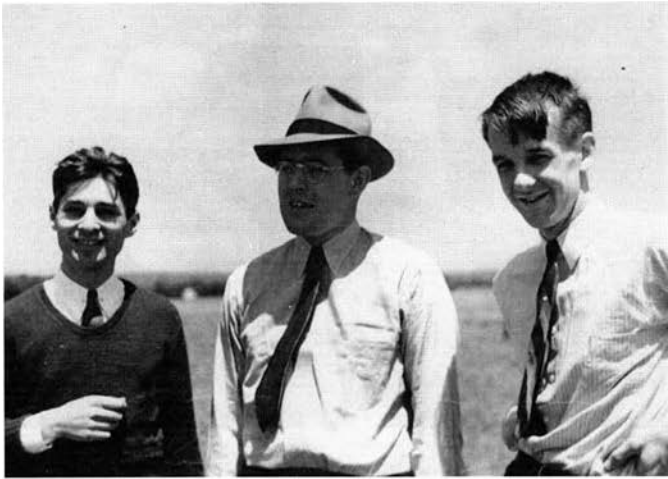
“Within months,” Winter lamented, “four-color photos of planes were replaced by full-color pages of insects and other such jarring subjects to an aero-oriented audience. The result was disaster.” From his “retirement” Winter suggested that Al Lewis (ex-director of the Academy of Aeronautics) be hired, and subsequently Al became editor of both *Air Trails* and *Air Progress*. Winter realized numerous assignments from both. In spite of his Herculean efforts, Lewis was not able in the end (1966) to save *Air Trails* which had fallen to 40-odd thousand readers because of an emphasis on slot cars, a flash-in-the-pan. However, as will be seen, both magazines had not by any means exhausted their “nine lives.”

Following Bill’s departure from S&S, *Air Trails* went through a series of title and format changes as follows, which could only serve to confuse the reader and result in decreased circulation:

- 1942 August *Air Trails Pictorial*
- 1947 January *Air Trails & Science Frontiers*
- 1947 October *Air Trails Pictorial* (return to 8.5x11.25 regular size)
- 1954 April *Air Trails Hobbies for Young Men*
- 1955 November *Young Men*
- 1967 December *American Modeler*
- 1968 January *American Aircraft Modeler*
- 1975 March Last issue.

Under the new ownership of Potomac Aviation Publications in 1967, *American Modeler*, which was once Bill Barnes *Air Trails* magazine, was published in Washington, D.C., and finally in Reno, of all places, where it took its last gasp. Amazingly, we find Winter listed as Publisher and Editor. “Editing, publishing, and writing were never a romantic picnic,” commented Winter.

DURING THE PERIOD 1946-1950, with his wife Sylvia and five children, Winter retreated into the Berkshire foothills to resume freelancing, staked by the royalties from two books. Eventually, up to the present, he would author 22 books and booklets. *The Model Aircraft Handbook*, Thomas Y. Crowell N.Y., which had appeared in 1941, was a huge success, eight printings and three editions.

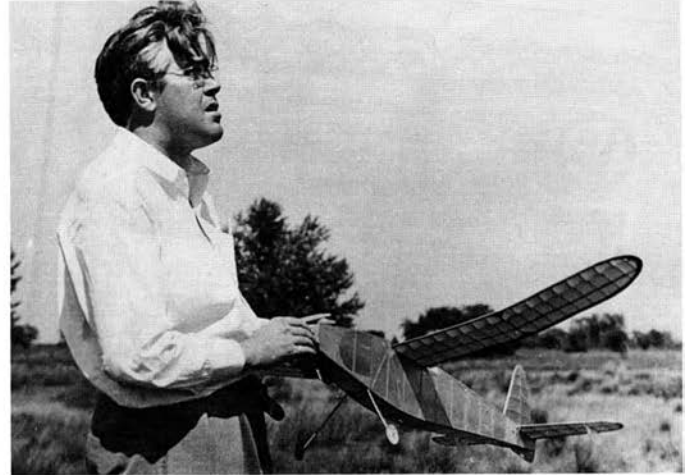


The late Jay Cleveland (L), then publisher of *MAN*, with Bill Winter, *MAN*'S editor, enjoy some levity.

Winter (L) with Alex Dawydoff, a staff editor on *Air Trails*. Bill was about to fly the Akron Aircraft Funk Model B (65 hp) for his "We Fly" series for *Air Trails*.

Ben Sheresshaw (L), renowned modeler, with Winter and Gordon Light (R), then a recent Wakefield Trophy winner and Model Department editor under Bill, for the old S&S *Bill Barnes Air Trails*.

Bill Winter with his own 1947 Wakefield design on site of present-day Levittown, Long Island, after he had left Street & Smith during four-year freelance period.



In 1959, with the challenge at *MAN* having been successfully met, Bill decided to try the waters at Ziff-Davis Publishing in response to their offer for a position on the staff of *Flying* magazine. *Flying* evolved out of the pioneer aviation magazine, *Popular Aviation* which bowed on the nation's newsstands in August 1927 following Lindbergh's epochal flight in May of that year. Winter recalled, "During the late '30s and '40s I had been a 'stringer' for both *Popular Aviation* and its successor, which became *Flying* in October 1942. The masthead in 1960 listed me as Production Director."

Actually, he lucked out. On his own again (1961-66) he freelanced two small magazine packages, *Grid Leaks* and *Model Aviation*. He ground out 80-100 pages of copy each month for departments in *Air Progress*, supplying the news section and all book reviews. There was also an R/C model kit for Scientific, two more for Jetco. A book for Fawcett. Another for Kalmbach. Each book hit six-figure audiences. Then, incredibly, in mid-1966 he chucked it all and moved to Washington, D.C. Why? He says simply, "Maybe Bill Barnes made me do it."

Conde Naste, a major fashion magazine publisher, had acquired Street & Smith to eliminate its principal competitor. Now it was anxious to shuck off both *Air Trails* and *Air Progress*. Ultimately, *Air Progress* went to Challenge Publications.

Winter's alter ego had cast him in the role of a consummate dealmaker which was never more evident than in 1965 when at Conde Naste Publications in New York, *American Modeler* was going under. In his inimitable fashion, he was able to step in and arrange for its sale to Potomac Aviation Publications, thus giving yet another "life" to the successor publication to *Bill Barnes Air Trails*.

Aware that a Washington consultant had contacted the Academy of Model Aeronautics while looking for an investment opportunity suited to a wealthy young man, Winter engineered a "deal" to establish Potomac Aviation Publications with himself as President, Publisher and Editor.

When Winter jump-started the *American Modeler* (successor to the old *Air Trails*) in D.C. in 1966, he was stuck with a totally green staff to train during working hours; he produced the magazine himself beginning at 7 A.M. and, after hours, often until 11 P.M.. Simultaneously responsible for *Model Aviation* and *Grid Leaks*, he produced all three for three months to meet his contracts—*Grid Leaks* being done with

After his departure from S&S, Winter admitted, "I produced and printed model plan books as a flat-paperback on slick stock with the same results as Napoleon's march on Moscow, albeit 8,000-plus copies were sold."⁴ While still residing in Connecticut, he became American correspondent for two foreign magazines, one of which was *Interavia*, a Swiss class aviation journal printed in four languages. The second was *Aeromodeller*, a British model magazine.

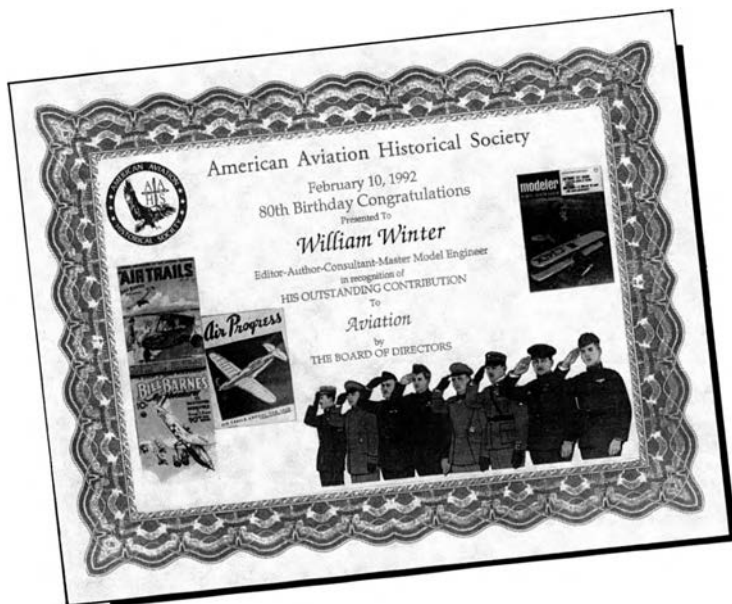
During this period, Bill expanded the scope of his editorial creativity to capitalize on his love for flying the prototypes and utilized his acquired private pilot's license to author a unique *We Fly* series which was carried in *Air Trails* for five years on an irregular basis. This series took the reader into the cockpit of contemporary private aircraft for an evaluation flight designed to appeal to both aspiring modelers and student pilots.

Fortuitously, the year 1950 saw him brought aboard as editor of the venerable *Model Airplane News* by the late Jay Cleveland (Jay Publications). Fourteen years to the day after Winter had accepted F. Orlin Tremaine's offer at S&S he shook hands on the *MAN* offer.

In his characteristic hands-on fashion, he instituted many innovations (such as full-size plans service and a "how-to" orientation) to breathe new life into the 31-year-old magazine once considered the Bible of the modeling industry. In spite of the lean \$950 per month do-or-die budget—including \$100 for noted artist Jo Kotula's captivating covers—*MAN* was turned around before the year was over.

As always, Winter in the role of an energetic, creative moonlighter, produced how-to-do-it books for Fawcett Publications, and R/C model articles for non-competitive magazines and book publishers.

With the Winter brood increasing exponentially, subsistence was a power to reckon with.



Eightieth birthday plaque presented by American Aviation Historical Society in recognition of Winter's outstanding contribution to aviation.

1987. Bill Winter alias "Bill Barnes" with a Cox "Sky Rally 42" ultralight. (.049 Cox "Dragonfly" with Cox Sanwal Cadet two channel.) Note genuine "Bill Barnes" T-shirt.

the able assistance of former pulp editor Ray Gill on week-ends.

National Aeronautics, Spring 1971, first issue of a proposed quarterly for the National Aeronautic Association by Potomac, was put together by Bill in his spare time. Additionally, *American Junior Modeler* was on the stands before his Potomac contract ended.

When Potomac moved its operations to Reno, Bill remained in Washington, producing the *Sport Modeler* (outgrowth of *Junior Modeler*) for Potomac, and the *National Aeronautics Quarterly* (later bimonthly) for the NAA. Then, in Reno, Potomac went "belly up." And the mid-'70s recession struck.

WINTER'S 1975 SUGGESTION TO AMA THAT THEY re-establish *Model Aviation* as a full-fledged magazine to fill the spot left empty by *American Modeler*, fell on receptive ears. With an investment already of some \$45,000 monthly to the now-defunct Potomac, continued newsstand access was vital to AMA if membership was to maintain its rate of growth. July 1976 was the first issue of the new *Model Aviation*. Bill Winter was editor.

After almost four years of what he calls the "fun and games" of the Association world, why not go on his own once again? At 68 years of age in that year of 1980, he left AMA. But don't ever call him "retired"! For the next five years, *Model Aviation* would lead off with his widely read column, "Just for the Fun of It." He ground out two hardback book projects, one dead ending, the other *The World of Model Aircraft*, was published by Charles Scribners Sons. The best model airplane articles and construction projects were featured in *Flying Models*, *Model Airplane News*, *Model Aviation*, *Radio Control Modeler* and *Airborne* (Australia). He became a spark plug in the expanding electric-powered RC model field. Current kits—LeCrate, Heron, RC Special, by Davey Systems—are center stage.



Bill Winter has been the recipient of numerous honors and credits, including AMA's Hall of Fame Award (1970), and this year at the WRAMS Show in Westchester, New York, the Howard McEntee Memorial Medal for contributions to the radio control field. On the plaque presented by the American Aviation Historical Society, he was exemplified as *editor-author-consultant-master model engineer in recognition of his outstanding contribution to aviation*.

He still works out of his home, now Chantilly, Virginia, where he resides with his wife, Sylvia, and an extroverted cockatiel named George. Bill is the patriarch of a "tribe" of nine children, 39 grandchildren, and 20 great grandchildren. His feverish pace slowed somewhat by a recent moderate heart attack. He shares bylines with John Hunton. "John has the processor," Bill explains. "And he is a fine draftsman as well. To be truthful, I'm enjoying a great hobby and, if folks wish to buy the results of my fun, I'm less inclined to feel the debbil's breath on my neck. When I do, I'll just call Bill Barnes."

On his 80th birthday, we recognize him for his perennially youthful perspective on our hobby, and, yes, with Bill Barnes looking on approvingly from the tarmac, we wish him many, many more. □

NOTES

1. February 1934, Vol. 1 No. 1, *Bill Barnes*, *Air Adventurer*, Street & Smith pulp.
2. Representative Winter rubber-powered flying scale plans: Boeing F4-B4, Vought V-143, Udet Flamingo, Waco "D" Export, Stinson Taperwing, Curtiss Osprey, Curtiss XFBC-1, Dewoitine D-5.
3. *Air Trails Model Annual for 1946*, with Bill as editor and Walt Schroder as associate editor, was his last annual and no doubt his best. It featured many plans of successful model designs including Winter's "Wog." (Also a kit by Megow at \$4.95. Begun in 1943 by him, the annual issue continued on for many years after his departure from S&S, a beacon of the latest technology for modeldom.
4. *Bill Winter's Model Aircraft Planbook*, \$1.00, 20 plans, 1946, Winter Publications, Inc., Cornwall Bridge, Conn.

MOVING?

If you're planning to move please send us your change of address as soon as possible. We cannot get your JOURNAL to you if we don't know where you live. To ensure uninterrupted service please let us know at least six weeks in advance. And to be sure it is *your* address we change, please include your current mailing label.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS
INCLUDE CURRENT LABEL