



Smithsonian

National Air and Space Museum

George Schnitzer USS *Shenandoah* Collection

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2023

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Collection Overview

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|-------------------------|--|
| Repository: | National Air and Space Museum Archives |
| Title: | George Schnitzer USS <i>Shenandoah</i> Collection |
| Date: | 1922-1925 |
| Identifier: | NASM.2002.0030 |
| Creator: | Schnitzer, George C., 1894-1925 |
| Extent: | 0.18 Cubic feet (1 flat box (11 x 14 x 1 inches)) |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | This small collection consists of material relating to George C. Schnitzer, Jr. (1894-1925), Chief Radio Operator of the US Navy airship ZR-1 <i>Shenandoah</i> . The collection includes five letters written by Schnitzer to family and friends while aboard the <i>Shenandoah</i> ; two newspaper clippings; and several photographs, panoramic photographs, and color post cards by photographer R. S. (Rell Sam) Clements depicting the <i>Shenandoah</i> and the US Navy airship ZR-3 <i>Los Angeles</i> at or near NAS Lakehurst, New Jersey. |
| Digital Content: | Image(s): NASM-9A19803: "Dirigible Moored to Mast on U. S. S. Patoka, Lakehurst, N. J." US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" moored to the USS Patoka (AO-9); circa mid 1924. |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

George C. Schnitzer, gift, 2002, NASM.2002.0030

Related Materials

See related collection [ZR-1 Shenandoah Christening Invitation, NASM.1988.0054](#) .

The radio used by Chief Radio Operator George Schnitzer aboard the *Shenandoah* is now part of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum collection: [Receiver, High Frequency Radio, Experimental, Airship, Shenandoah, A19590205000](#) .

Processing Information

Arranged and described by Patti Williams, 2002; revised and encoded by Melissa A. N. Keiser, 2023.

Preferred Citation

George Schnitzer USS *Shenandoah* Collection, Acc. NASM.2002.0030, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

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Biographical / Historical

Plans for the construction of the US Navy airship ZR-1 USS *Shenandoah*, the first rigid airship to be built in the United States, were begun in September 1919; her parts were manufactured at the Naval Aircraft Factory and then shipped to NAS Lakehurst for final assembly. The assembly began on February 11, 1922, and the *Shenandoah* was christened on October 10, 1923. Despite her relatively short life of two years, the *Shenandoah* achieved many firsts during her operational career. She was the first rigid airship to be inflated with helium; the first to use water recovery apparatus for the continuous recovery of ballast from the exhaust gas of fuel burned; and she completed the most extended operation accomplished by an airship up to that time, completing 57 flights, logging 740 hours in the air, and covering about 28,000 miles on flights designed to train crewmen in the science of handling large airships in naval missions. Sadly, the airship was to meet a tragic end. Before dawn on the morning of September 3, 1925, over eastern Ohio, the *Shenandoah* encountered a severe storm. She broke in two; the control car separated and fell to the ground while the forward section of the ship rose to a great height and remained in the air for the greater part of an hour before making a free balloon landing at Sharon, Ohio, with the bulk of the airship crashing near Ava, Ohio. Fourteen of the 43-person crew were killed.

George Conrad Schnitzer, Jr., born April 9, 1894, in Newport, Rhode Island. Schnitzer enlisted in the Navy in 1912 and served as the Chief Radio Operator of the USS *Shenandoah*, from which he dropped letters to friends and family as the airship was in flight over Newport. Schnitzer was killed in the crash of the *Shenandoah* on September 3, 1925.

Photographer R. S. (Rell Sam) Clements was born September 22, 1886, in Meade County, Kentucky. After service with the US Army, Clements worked out of the Washington, D.C. area before moving to Lakehurst, New Jersey, in the early 1920s where his skills with panoramic photography made him well-suited to capture views of the new US Navy airships based at NAS Lakehurst. Clements died on June 22, 1963, age 76.

Scope and Contents

The collection includes five letters handwritten by George Conrad Schnitzer, Jr., to family and friends while aboard the USS *Shenandoah*, and two newspaper clippings from the Friday, September 4, 1925, edition of the *Newport Herald* reporting the crash of the *Shenandoah* and Schnitzer's death. The collection also includes six colorized post cards, nine photographs, and three panoramic photographs by photographer R. S. (Rell Sam) Clements (plus one unattributed photograph) depicting the *Shenandoah* and the US Navy airship ZR-3 *Los Angeles* at or near Naval Air Station (NAS) Lakehurst, New Jersey. The name "R. F. Schnitzer" on the backs of several of the post cards is assumed to be that of Schnitzer's brother Robert Ferns Schnitzer Sr.

Arrangement

The material is grouped in folders by type.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Aeronautics
Airships
Naval aviation
Radio in aeronautics
USS Los Angeles (ZR-3)
ZR-1 Shenandoah

Types of Materials:

Clippings
Letters
Photographs
Postcards

Names:

United States. Navy -- Aviation
ZR-1 Shenandoah (Airship)

Container Listing

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | NASM-9A19801 to 9A19806: Post cards, 1924-1925 Notes: Post cards by freelance photographer R. S. (Rell Sam) Clements, colorized illustrations based on photographs; includes views of US Navy airships ZR-1 <i>Shenandoah</i> and ZR-3 <i>Los Angeles</i> , NAS Lakehurst (NJ) Hangar No.1, and the US Navy Airship Mooring Vessel <i>Patoka</i> (AV-6). |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | NASM-9A19807 to 9A19815: Photographs, 1922-1925 |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Correspondence, July 1925 Notes: Letters from George C. Schnitzer handwritten aboard the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" to family members living in Newport, Rhode Island. Letters addressed to Mr. and Mrs. R. F. Schnitzer ("Bob and wife") are to Schnitzer's brother and sister-in-law Robert Ferns Schnitzer Sr. and Alice Gertrude (Nelson) Schnitzer. Mentions of "Althea, Dot and baby" refer to Schnitzer's wife Althea S. (Parker) Schnitzer and their young daughters Dorothy Fern ("Dot") Schnitzer and Marilyn Nanette Schnitzer. Letters addressed to Mr. and Mrs. James Meliff ("Aunt Ellen and Jim") are to James and Ellen Meliff. |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | NASM-9A19816: Letter to Robert and Alice Schnitzer [brother and sister-in-law], July 14, 1925 Notes: Letter dated July 14, 1925, handwritten by Chief Radio Operator George C. Schnitzer while aboard the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" to his brother and sister-in-law Robert F. Schnitzer and Alice (Nelson) Schnitzer, Newport, Rhode Island. "Dear Bob, Wife & All; Dropping a few lines to say Hello. All's well up here, nice flying expect to remain at Patoka over night heading for Lakehurst in morning. Althea & Dot are fine send Oceans of Love Hugs & kisses to all as ever. Your loving brother Geo. P.S. A bit choppy making writing shaky, write once in a while. If congratulations are still in vogue here comes ours for a long & happy wedded life. Don't forget you visit in the fall--." Includes original USS SHENANDOAH mailing envelope. |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | NASM-9A19817: Letter to James and Ellen Meliff [aunt and uncle], July 14, 1925 Notes: Letter dated July 14, 1925, handwritten by Chief Radio Operator George C. Schnitzer while aboard the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" to his aunt Ellen Meliff and her husband James Meliff, Newport, Rhode Island. "Dear Aunt Ellen & Jim. Just dropping a few lines to let you know I am still around. All well at home & trust this finds you as it leave me enjoying good health. Love Geo." Includes original USS SHENANDOAH mailing envelope bearing US 2 cent stamp canceled at Newport, RI, July 14, 8:30 PM. |

Box 1, Folder 3

NASM-9A19818: [Letter to James and Ellen Meliff \[aunt and uncle\], July 15, 1925](#)

Notes: Letter dated July 15, 1925, handwritten by Chief Radio Operator George C. Schnitzer while aboard the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" to his aunt Ellen Meliff and her husband James Meliff, Newport, Rhode Island. "Dear Aunt Ellen & Jim: Dropping a few lines to let you know all is well up here. I dropped a message over the Ocean Drive way, not seeing anyone run after it gave it up as lost. We are all well & trust this missel finds you all enjoying good health. Now bound for sea & Lakehurst will see more of us this summer. Love & regards to Newport & all as ever. Your loving nephew Geo." Written on U.S.S. Shenandoah letterhead. Reverse carries address and note "Be good enough to deliver. Thank you."

Box 1, Folder 3

NASM-9A19819: [Letter to Robert and Alice Schnitzer \[brother and sister-in-law\], July 15, 1925](#)

Notes: Letter dated July 15, 1925, handwritten by Chief Radio Operator George C. Schnitzer while aboard the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" to his brother and sister-in-law Robert F. Schnitzer and Alice (Nelson) Schnitzer, Newport, Rhode Island. "Mr. & Mrs Robert F. Schnitzer: Just dropping a few lines to let you know all is well at home and trust this carries the same good news. If congratulations are still in vogue you have ours for a long happy & properous wedded life. Am expecting to have you & wife with us this fall, so plan accordingly for a stay of your whole vacation. So now with regards love & best wishes from Althea, Dot & I as ever, Your loving brother Geo." Written on U.S.S. Shenandoah letterhead. Reverse carries address and note "Find please deliver this missel to addressee & Oblige an Airman."

Box 1, Folder 3

NASM-9A19820: [Letter to Robert and Alice Schnitzer \[brother and sister-in-law\], circa July 1925](#)

Notes: Undated letter (circa July 1925) handwritten by Chief Radio Operator George C. Schnitzer while aboard the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" to his brother and sister-in-law Robert F. Schnitzer and Alice (Nelson) Schnitzer, Newport, Rhode Island. "Dear Bob & Wife:- Dropping a few lines while passing over, trust this finds you all well as it leaves Althea, Dot & baby. The little "Old Town" looks about the same from the air as one would picturize it, quaint and smug on the little old isle of Rhode. Homeward bound now - expect to arrive at Lakehurst about 6 pm we are going to fly over as many New Jersey cities as possible on return, "Aviation Day" in state. So with 7 3's & love to all, Geo."

Box 1, Folder 4

[Newspaper clippings \[Newport Herald\], Friday, September 4, 1925](#)

Box 1, Folder 5

Oversized Photographs, 1923-1925

Box 1, Folder 5

NASM-9A19871: [\[Untitled; US Navy airships ZR-1 Shenandoah and ZR-3 Los Angeles inside NAS Lakehurst Hangar No. 1\], early to mid 1925](#)

Notes: Photograph, 11 x 16 inches (28 x 40 cm). Rear view of US Navy airships ZR-1 "Shenandoah" (left) and ZR-3 "Los Angeles" (right) berthed in Hangar No. 1 at Lakehurst Naval Air Station (NAS Lakehurst), Lakehurst, New Jersey; early to mid 1925.

Box 1, Folder 5

NASM-9A19872: [Crew of U.S.S. Shenandoah, Naval Air Station -- Lakehurst, N. J., circa 1923-1925](#)

Notes: "Crew of U.S.S. Shenandoah, Naval Air Station - Lakehurst, N. J." Panoramic group photograph, 8 x 23.25 inches (20 x 60 cm). Crew of the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" posed outside Hangar No. 1 at Lakehurst Naval Air Station (NAS Lakehurst), Lakehurst, New Jersey; circa 1923-1925. Note on reverse: "George C. Schnitzer, First Row Standing -- FIFTH from Left."

Box 1, Folder 5

NASM-9A19873: [Crew of U.S.S. Shenandoah, April 1924](#)

Notes: "Crew of U.S.S. Shenandoah, April 1924 [Clements #7945]". Panoramic group photograph, 10 x 28.25 inches (25 x 72 cm). Crew of the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" posed outside a hangar at Lakehurst Naval Air Station (NAS Lakehurst), Lakehurst, New Jersey; April 1924. Note on reverse: "George C. Schnitzer, First Row Standing second from right."

Box 1, Folder 5

NASM-9A19874: [\[Untitled; NAS Lakehurst Hangar No. 1 with US Navy airship ZR-1 Shenandoah\], early to mid 1925](#)

Notes: Panoramic photograph, 10 x 38.5 inches (25 x 98 cm). Left side view of the US Navy airship ZR-1 "Shenandoah" under control of ground crew, being walked into Hangar No. 1 at Lakehurst Naval Air Station (NAS Lakehurst), Lakehurst, New Jersey; early to mid 1925.