



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of THOMAS (TOM) MCCOY

Born February 20, 1932

Modeler starting in 1942

AMA #7972



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Written & Submitted by TM (08/2004), AMA staff (2005); Edited & Formatted by JS (08/2005), Updated by JS (09/2007), Reformatted by JS (10/2009)

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## Career:

- 1944: Joined Detroit Balsa Bugs
- 1951-1954: Member, U.S. Air Force
- 1952: Joined Radio Control Club of Detroit
- With Radio Control Club of Detroit members, formed first Radio Control model show, now known as the Toledo Show
- 1960-1963: President of Radio Control Club of Detroit; editor of newsletter
- 1970: Secretary of Detroit Balsa Bugs Model Club
- Albatross design published in *Radio Modeler*, profile scale model published in *Flying Models*.
- 1972: Joined Society of Antique Modelers (SAM)
- Contest Director at four SAM Champs
- Ran monthly Radio Control SAM fly-ins in Florida
- Joined Vintage Radio Control Society
- Donated four models to the AMA museum
- 2000-2004: President of SAM
- 2004: Ran King Orange International Meet, Florida

## Honors:

- 1944: Won Cooper Brothers trophy and Junior Indoor Championship
- 1988: Won 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Wakefield Contest; received Copland trophy; inducted Radio Control Club of Detroit Life Member
- 1992: Won Large Rubber Special Event at SAM International in Italy
- 1994: Won Florida State Rubber Championship
- 1996: Won Korda Special Event; Elected to SAM Hall of Fame
- 1998: Won AMA Pioneer Award
- 2004: Elected to Model Aviation Hall of Fame

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*Tom McCoy wrote the following and submitted it to the History Project (named History Program at the time) in August of 2004.*

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## AMA Biography of Tom McCoy

I write this biography at age 72. I look fondly back on what has been over 62 years of great fun building and flying model planes. I will attempt to keep this biography a history of my involvement in this wonderful hobby. At this point, I feel it would be appropriate to give a personal background. I was born in Detroit, Michigan on February 20, 1932. I married my high

school sweetheart Millie on October 20, 1951 and we have been happily married 52 years. Together we had four children, Patricia, Betty, Michael, and Larry McCoy. All are married and live prosperous and happy lives. We have one grandson, Adam. I attended Denby High School in Detroit. At age 19, the Korean War erupted and I enlisted in the Air Force. I spent four years as a flight instructor and also served as a gunnery instructor. After my military service, I attended Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and began a business career in the floor-covering industry as a retailer, then a district manager for Kentile Floors, New York. The last eleven years were spent as general sales manager for Armstrong Carpet, a division of the R.D.C. Corporation.

I will attempt to put my model airplane history in some kind of order. As I think back, this all really began as a young lad of ten years old. I witnessed a young adult flying a rubber model at a school yard. This model really flew. I recall the winding process with a hand drill, a take-off from the smooth ground of the baseball diamond and a truly magnificent flight. This event sold me a dream which has lasted a lifetime. There was a hardware store about a mile from my home that had a little model department. It sold small rubber kits, dope, glue, brushes, and model tissue. I purchased a ten-cent Comet kit and so it began. I built four or five stick models with very little real success.

My father cut out an article from the newspaper outlining a summer program that would teach model building. It was on Saturday for two hours for six weeks held at a city recreation center about two miles from my home. The program required \$2.00 for supplies. We went down and signed up, and my dad lent me the \$2.00 with a promise from me to pay it back. I recall I cut a neighbor's lawn a few times and helped another polish his car to pay back Dad. This model building class really sent me on my way. It gave me the basics of how it is done and, albeit rudimentary, skills to build models. It mostly let me succeed at learning the skills of model building.

At age 12 an important event occurred. I heard of a model club which met on Monday night in the basement of a local hobby shop. I attended a meeting and to my delight, I was invited to join. The club was the Detroit Balsa Bugs. As I think back, the club had members of all ages, mostly adults and young adults. They accepted me as an equal and they all really helped me to become a better modeler. This group of young men helped me build better models and, most importantly, helped me grow in the right path as a young adult. Many of these men are still active modelers and I still have contact with them, which is something truly special. With their help and a member, Harold Laclair, who was my mentor, I won the Junior Indoor Championship. I also won the Cooper Brothers trophy. The Coopers owned a Detroit funeral home. I had my picture in the local newspaper; a picture in the Detroit paper is really a boost for a young modeler.

My teen years were filled with model flying buddies, chasing girls, working on cars, and flying Free Flight and Control Line. At age 19, the Korean War erupted and I joined the U.S. Air Force for four years, highlighted primarily by two years as a flight instructor and also as a gunnery instructor. I built models during this period and competed in one Air Force Nationals. The Air Force also sent me to college. I attended Cornell University in upstate New York. The most important event in this period was my marriage to Millie, my high school sweetheart. We have

had fifty-two years of a really ideal life. We raised four children. Millie and I built a life together, raised kids and I even found time to do modeling. I think we were able to teach our children to work with their hands. My son, Michael, is an active modeler. He has a great job with General Motors at their Tech Center.

In 1952, I became interested in Radio Control models and joined a new group of modelers that became the Radio Control Club of Detroit. I consider myself a pioneer. I worked with Dick Brachner, who developed early reed radios and later produced Radio Control equipment under the name "Bramco." With three other club members, we formed the first Radio Control model show, which is now the Toledo Show. The Radio Control Club of Detroit made me a life member in 1988.

In 1972, I discovered the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM). This group was just starting to grow. I was fascinated by the history of modeling and it has been great fun to recreate the early models and fly them with the early model engines. It is, I suppose, a group for functioning antiques. For the last thirty-two years, I have primarily flown antique reproductions. SAM has grown into a rather large organization of over 2500 members in the U.S. It also has groups in Canada, England, Italy, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Australia, and New Zealand. I have flown in SAM contests around the world. I was fortunate to win the 50<sup>th</sup> Wakefield Anniversary contest the Copland trophy at Middle Wallop, England in 1988. I also won the Large Rubber event at the SAM International held in Gorizia, Italy in 1992. I was honored to win the Korda Special Event held at the AMA field in 1996. There were over 65 contestants flying at this event. This model is now in the AMA museum. I was the Florida State Rubber Champion in 1994, a season-long event.

I am still an active Free Flight rubber flyer and compete on a local and national level. I also fly Old Timer Radio Control SAM models. This is great fun and, as I get older, this is a less physical model activity. I am afraid chasing Free Flight models is for the younger fellows. I also belong to the Vintage Radio Control Society. This group flies the early Radio Control designs. They hold contests and fly-ins. These get-togethers are really social affairs and are a lot of fun.

As a life-long modeler, I recognize it is necessary to pay back to the hobby. I am a contest director and run at least one large model meet each year. This year I will run the King Orange International Meet held yearly in Florida. I have been contest director at four of our SAM Champs and I run a monthly Radio Control SAM fly-in at my local flying field. I have been a part of every Gathering of Eagles the AMA has hosted at the Muncie facility. I have donated four models to the AMA museum and am proud to see them there.

As primarily involved with SAM models, I have pretty well limited myself to recreate the old designs. I have found time to create some of my own. One of my designs was published in Radio Modeler, an English magazine. It was a climb and glide model (Albatross), a low-cal designed indoor model. My profile scale was published in Flying Models. I also compete with a Mulvihill rubber model I designed called the "Bull Teaser" and I have shipped plans for the model around Europe. (Photos enclosed)

I have been fortunate that my fellow modelers have asked me over the years to manage model groups and organizations. I was president of the Radio Control Club of Detroit for three years in the 1960s. I also edited a newsletter for that group. I served as Secretary of the Detroit Balsa Bugs Model Club in 1970. Beginning in 1972 until this writing, I have been active in the management of SAM. I have served on the design-verification committee and rules committee. I worked as an assistant contest manager for three SAM Champs and was elected as President of SAM in 2000.

From time to time, I have submitted short articles in model publications. Most prominent is my President's column in *SAM Speaks*. I have also prepared a paper for two symposia for the National Free Flight Society (NFFS).

I have been very fortunate to win many contests and my shop walls are full of plaques. These are really just reminders of a good time with my friends. There are some awards that really mean a lot to me. In October of 1996, I was elected to the SAM Hall of Fame, and joined a group of model pioneers, a really special award to me. In September 1998, I was awarded the AMA Pioneer Award. I was very please. On August 4, 2004, I was elected to the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. This award is really special as it is managed by the other members of the Hall of Fame. It is very flattering that the other special modelers think I belong.

I am enclosing photos of my models and me and honestly think the best is still to come.

All My Best,  
Tom McCoy

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*The following was printed in Model Aviation's AMA News column about the 2004 Model Aviation Hall of Fame winner. (February 2005)*

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### **Tom McCoy**

Tom McCoy's interest in model aviation began when he was 10 years old. He built rubber ROG models and at the age of 12, he won the Junior Indoor Championship. As a youngster, he flew Free Flight and Control Line, joining the Detroit Balsa Bugs when he was 15.

"This group of young men helped me build better models and, most importantly, helped me grow in the right path as a young adult," Tom wrote. "Many of these men are still active modelers and I have contact with them; that's truly something special."

Tom enlisted in the Air Force when he was 19. During his four-year period of service, he continued to build models and competed in one Air Force Nationals.

Marrying Millie, his high-school sweetheart, was the most important event in his life. Together they raised four children and Tom even found a little time to devote to modeling.

Tom was an early member of the Radio Control Club of Detroit, serving at one time as its president. In 1954, he and three other club members formed the first Radio Control model show, which became the Toledo Show.

In 1972, Tom joined the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) and has remained in this field since. He has served as CD in a number of events, including several SAM Championships and Florida Winter Fly contests, a popular SAM winter contest.

Tom served as the SAM president and while SAM does not have a formal team in the FAI program, Tom did act as manager of a group of fliers representing the United States in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Wakefield contest in Great Britain.

As president of SAM, Tom wrote a monthly column in the organization's newsletter, *SAM Speaks*. He has authored several other pieces, including a plan and construction article on the Albatross, a vintage Free Flight model he converted to Radio Control. *Building a Modern Old-Timer* was published in the NFFS *Symposium*.

Tom was inducted into the SAM Hall of Fame in 1996. He received the AMA Pioneers award in 1998. He helped with three Celebration of Eagles events, directing the field activities and speaking at the awards presentation.

Realizing that a permanent restroom facility was needed at AMA's National Flying Site in Muncie, Indiana, Tom began a member-funded program to build such a facility. The "Outhouse Fund," to which he personally donated \$1,000, helped finance the new structure.

As a competitor, Tom is most proud of winning the Copland Trophy (Middle Wallop, England), the SAM Internationals Large Rubber event (Gorizia, Italy); the SAM Champs Korda Special event (1996); the Toledo Show (eight times placing one, two or three); and the Florida State Champion award in Rubber (1994). He has won at the King Orange and the Fiesta of Five Flags in Pensacola, Florida, placing first, second, or third in these two events more than 80 times.

Tom has placed more than 25 times in the SAM Championships, notably in Free Flight Scale. He placed first in the Korda Wakefield event in 1994 and first in the same event at the AMA Nats in 1993."



*(Above) 1994: Dick Korda and Tom McCoy at the SAM Champs in Muncie, Indiana Tom won the Korda Event*



*(Left) Tom McCoy's Mulvihill model, Bull Teaser, 300 square-inch wing, number 7 in the series*

*(Right) 2003: Another shot of Tom with his Ellila Wakefield at the Palm Bay King Orange International Meet. His Wakefield was a winner.*



*(Right) 2002: Tom at the Gathering of Turkeys  
He won the Large Cabin event with his Korda  
Dethermalizer.*



*(Left) July of 2002: Tom with his Free  
Flight Wakefield Jaguar in July of 2002  
in Palm Bay, Florida This model was  
donated to the AMA's National Model  
Aviation Museum.*

*(Right) February 2001: Tom with  
his Lanzo Radio Control I O+R CO*



*(Right) July 2001: Tom with his Mulvihill model, the Bull Teaser, in Palm Bay*



*(Left) 2004: Tom with Scram, his antique model with Brown Jr.*





*(Left) December 28, 2003: Tom McCoy with his Ellila Wakefield at the 2003 King Orange International Meet in Palm Bay, Florida.*

*(Right) 2003: Tom as SAM President with Paul Schmitz, SAM Radio Control Grand Champion.*





*(Above) March 2004: Tom with his Live Wire Sr., a vintage Radio Control rudder-only model.*

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**AMA History Project**  
National Model Aviation Museum  
5151 E. Memorial Dr.  
Muncie IN 47302  
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511  
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

