



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of FRANK PARMENTER

Born February 18, 1922

Started modeling in 1931

AMA #431



Written & Submitted by FP (01/1998); Updated (08/2002); Transcribed & Edited by SS (08/2002), Updated by JS (10/2008), Reformatted by JS (11/2009)

Career:

- 1938: Joined the AMA
- 1939: Won second place at a Brams Department Store contest in Gary, Indiana
- 1940: Discovered the effectiveness of stab title on a sailplane
- December 1941: Went to work for NACA at Langley Field, Virginia, building test model planes
- 1942: Organized the Brainbusters Model Club and became its first president
- 1943: Won first place at a class C hydro contest, setting a new national record
- 1947: Elected AMA District IV Vice President; served for two years
- Participated in every finals team selection for 21 years in both FAI power (until winning his place on the Wakefield team in 1965) and in Wakefield events
- 1955: Participated in the Open Champion at the King Orange Meet in Florida
- 1961: Won first in Mulvihill at the Nationals and set a new record
- Member of numerous Brainbuster Nationals Teams
- 1965, 1969, 1971, 1973: Member of the Wakefield team
- December 1978: Retired from NACA/NASA after 36 years
- His Jaysbird (designed with Vic Jays) was named model of the year by the National Free Flight Society (NFFS)
- January 1997: Donated the Jaysbird plans to the NFFS

Honors:

- 1998: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1998: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame

I have been most fortunate and honored by my achievement. I think most and foremost was the support that my father and mother gave to me in my formative years – the late 1930s and early 1940s. My modeling was to provide my being hired at NACA (which later became NASA) as an “Under Aircraft Modelmaker” at \$1,260 per annum in 1941, which was a major milestone for my future. To be one of the hundreds of model builders from all over the country hired in the early 1940s was a great and fun experience for me. In a small way, we contributed to the war (World War II) effort. The AMA and NACA worked together in this major recruiting effort. Everyone was a winner as model builders provided skills and aviation knowledge and the model makers were taught new skills and were provided a career if they so chose to stay with NACA/NASA.

NACA provided total support to the model builders from the top on down. Many model builders advanced into supervisory and major positions within the NACA/NASA over the years. Literally thousands of model builders have been associated with NACA/NASA over the years. In addition to NACA-Langley, there were many model builders at the Cleveland, Ohio laboratory and at

AMES at Moffett Field, California. I retired from the Johnson Space Center, Houston, Texas, in December 1978 with 36 years of service.

I have been an AMA leader-administrator, contest director since 1947, an early National Free Flight Society (NFFS) member, and a member of the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM). I have supported all these organizations with various donations and attendance to their championships.

I have contest directed innumerable contests and been on two FAI Free Flight team finals juries. As a member of the U.S. Wakefield teams in 1965, 1969, 1971, and 1973 World Champs, it was a great experience and honor.

I have also made presentations and displays at some schools and civic organizations promoting AMA and model building as a creative hobby.

I was fortunate to have had so many wonderful experiences in modeling and with NACA/NASA.

I would like to thank all the wonderful people, model builders and NACA associates that I have been privileged to know and for my many longtime friendships.

Modeling Milestones of Frank Parmenter

1931 – Started with 5- & 10-cent store solid scale models at age nine.

1933 – Graduated to built-up stick and tissue rubber scale models first bought at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.

1936 – Received my first gas model as a gift from my high school English teacher whose son had gone to college. It was a five-foot Rearwin Speedstar with an early Baby Cyclone engine. It never ran well, nor was it flown.

Early 1938 – After Baby Cyclone and Gwinn Aero engines, I finally got my first dependable engine – a Brown B.

1938 – Joined the AMA. Was at the 1938 Midwestern States contest and was set up near Carl Goldberg and Dick Obarski when they flew the first Zippers. Goldberg's Zipper looped all over the sky with his Dennymite-powered prototype, Zipper. Obarski's Baby Cyclone-powered plane won first place.

1939 – Won my first major contest prize at Brams Department Store Contest in Gary, Indiana. Large contestant entry for first place prize was \$100 cash. I placed second and received \$50 cash – big money in the Depression-era times.

1940 – My Ohlsson 60-powered sailplane discovered stab tilt as an effective glide trim adjustment. It became a major trim adjustment still used to this day and a major development that I have been credited with and with popularizing its usage.

1940 and 1941 – Attended Nationals in Chicago.

December 1941 - Left Chicago area to work for NACA at Langley Field, Virginia.

1942 – Was one of the first organizers of the Brainbusters Model Club and its first president.

1943 – Won first place in class C hydro contest, setting a new national record.

1945 to 1946 – Was in U.S. Army Air Force service – one year in the States and one year on Okinawa.

1947 – Won second place at the Minneapolis Nationals in Wakefield event.

1947 to 1948 – Was elected AMA District IV vice president; it was mostly an honorary position at that time.

1951 – Got married to Cassie Reeder; still married. Three children and nine grandchildren.

1953 – U.S. started participating in FAI power at World Champs. I was second for a team place in Eastern Zone that year. Participated in every finals team selection for 21 years in both FAI power (until 1965 when I made the Wakefield Team) and in Wakefield events.

1954 – Was a proxy flyer for George Upson of Great Britain at World Champs in Long Island, New York.

1955 – Was Open Champion at the King Orange Meet in Florida.

1957 – Member of Brainbusters Nationals Team champions; won second in FAI power.

1958 – FAI tal Charmer, FAI power model design published in June 1958 American Modeler magazine. Original version is now Nostalgia Legal.

1958 – Nationals: Second place class A with FAI tal Charmer; third place FAI gas new rule FAI tal Charmer.

1961 – Nationals: First in Mulvihill with Langley design and new record; second FAI power. Member of Brainbuster National Team champions.

1962 – Langley Wakefield/Mulvihill plans published in July 1962 in American Modeler – popular design flown by many well-known modelers.

1962 – Transferred from NASA, Langley Field, Virginia, to NASA Houston, Texas. Left machine shop at Langley and moved to technical services division, planning and scheduling branch.

1964 – Nationals: Second in Wakefield. Won 1965 Wakefield team member for 1965 World Champs in Finland with Langley design.

1965 – 1965 World Champs highest placing U.S. Wakefield team member. Maxed out with 12 others; eventual seventh place after bad launch. The U.S. team was third place.

1965 to 1986 – Totally involved in Wakefield team endeavors. Was on 1965, 1969, 1971, and 1973 U.S. Wakefield teams for the World Champs. My son, Mark, went with me to the 1971 and 1973 World Champs as my helper.

1973 – Charisma Wakefield design named by NFFS as Wakefield of the year. Plans donated to NFFS.

My U.S. team participation was incredible. Working for NASA, I always carried NASA souvenirs (pictures, decals, space pins, and mission-stamped first day envelope covers). I was sought out by many foreign competitors and made many new friends. One team manager called me “Ambassador.” I feel I was a good representative of the U.S., the AMA, and NASA. There were many associated stories and experiences.

December 1978 – I retired from NACA/NASA after 36 years of service.

1980 – Moved to Georgetown, Texas, 30 miles north of Austin, Texas, the state capitol.

1986 – Stopped competing in Wakefield FAI competition.

Determined there were other events that would be more fun and less intense than FAI programs. Took up AMA power, Old-Timer rubber, coupe, and nostalgia gas.

January 1992 – My submission and authenticating of Vic Jays’ Jaysbird FAI was approved as nostalgia legal by the NFFS.

1996 – NFFS awarded the Jaysbird design as the large gas “Model of the Year” to Vic Jays and Frank Parmenter.

1996 – At the 1996 Nationals, Mr. Dick Kennison of the National Model Aviation Museum, requested that I provide any information I had regarding the NACA recruiting of model makers in the 1940 to 1945 time period. At the NACA reunion in 1996, Deborah G. Douglas, NASA Historian, also asked me for this same information. I provided both of them with what detailed information I had. I did receive nice thank-you letters from both parties.

January 1997 – Jaysbird plans in six sizes were donated to NFFS.

December 1997 – Received thank-you letters from Gary Prater and Joyce Hager for contribution to the Percy Pierce Collection Fund December 3, 1997 and June 8, 1998.

1998 – Attended that Nats on Muncie, Indiana. At the NFFS banquet, I was inducted into the NFFS Hall of Fame.

1998 – Attended the AMA Gathering of Eagles celebration and was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

1999 – Due to the interest of Dick Kennison of the National Model Aviation Museum and Deborah G. Douglas, NASA historian (refer to 1996), I wrote an article, which was published in the AMA's magazine, Model Aviation, March 1999 issue entitled, "NACA and the Under Aircraft Modelmaker." I received many nice comment letters as well as letters to the editor of Model Aviation. Publication payment (\$500) was donated to the National Model Aviation Museum.

*(signed) Frank Parmenter
January 28, 1998*

Tom McCoy submitted the following with his application for Frank Parmenter to be in the NFFS Hall of Fame on May 16, 1997. Frank was inducted in 1998.

May 16, 1997

*To: The National Free Flight Society
Subject: Hall of Fame Nominees*

Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to nominate a fellow modeler and friend, Frank Parmenter, for your consideration to the National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame.

On the occasion of the King Orange International model meet last December, I mentioned to Frank I wanted to nominate him to our Hall of Fame and asked that he supply me with a biography I could use to get all the dates correct. I received a package from Frank, which, quite frankly, was overwhelming. It contained a well-documented history of his modeling life. I was so impressed I am copying most of it and enclosing it.

Frank has a calling card he uses for his modeling activities (which I am enclosing). The information on this small card alone should be enough to warrant your consideration in our Hall of Fame. [Note: The information on the card included the years Frank worked for NACA/NASA, served in the Air Force and the years he was on the Wakefield Team.]

NFFS has been a love of Frank's since its beginning. I would draw your attention to his calling card. He recently donated the Jaysbird plans to our NFFS plans service to help reduce our deficit. The Jaysbird is the NFFS large gas model of the year.

Frank is a fierce competitor on a local and national level. His innovations have changed the way models are adjusted and their flight patterns.

Frank's life has been shared by his lovely wife, Sandra, who has been very supportive. She is truly Frank's best friend and partner. They have three great children (two boys and one girl) who have given them nine grandchildren. For those of you that know Frank, you can attest to his great sense of humor, his quick smile, and his infectious laugh. I guess this shows us how much fun modeling is. Those of us who know Frank hold him in very high regard as a modeler and friend. He is truly a gentleman.

I would hope my presentation is persuasive and you agree with me that the Society should include Frank Parmenter in our Hall of Fame.

For additional information or comments, please contact me.

*Tom McCoy
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