



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of HOWARD CRISPIN, Jr.

Modeler starting in 1935
November 7, 1925 - July 31, 1996
AMA #22901



Written & Submitted by HC (06/1996); Transcribed by NR (09/1996); Edited by SS (2002)

Career:

- AMA Leader Member
 - AMA Contest Director
 - Free Flight Competitor
 - Judge for Radio Control, Pattern, and Scale
 - President of U.S Pattern Judges Association (USPJA)
 - Associate vice president for District IV
 - District IV Vice President for 10 years
 - Chairman of the AMA bylaws Committee
 - Writer and Researcher for 10 years - Wrote Sound and Model Aeronautics
 - Member of the Special Interests Group (SIG) Special Committee – AMA/ IMAA Liaison
 - Spent 22 Years in USAF in Aviation
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My life began, as most in the mountain community in the Alleghenies of western Pennsylvania, with attention primarily directed toward school and the fundamental tasks of living in those times. Aviation was something we read about, and occasionally we saw an early airline aircraft fly over the valley.

Later in the 1930s, we had closer views as some private fliers from the general area began to appear. The only radio we had was an Atwater-Kent operating on batteries, so it was not used much. Aviation news and information came from the Sunday edition of the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, Grit and, for me, Flying Aces magazine.

Moody's five-and-dime store in Brockway, was the only source of the few modeling supplies of any sort in the area. In late 1935, on one of my six miles walks to Brockway, I saw these for the first time. This exposure and discovery of model aviation in the magazine, and especially the page each week in the Post Gazette whetted my appetite to build and fly model aircraft. The designs by Roy Nelder and Dick Korda were among some of the models built in those years. I knew no one else in model aviation from that time until I moved to Tonawanda, New York in 1942.

That was a rather short period because of entry in the Army Air Force in December 1943. In any event, I built and flew many rubber-powered models during this period. There was never an opportunity to do anything other than fly alone. Living on a farm, as we did, enabled me to have many pleasant hours of activity, and led me to a career in aviation as well as a life long association with aeromodeling.

Moving around, barracks life and the conditions of the time, did not provide much opportunity to pursue model aviation. This period did form the basis for my career, though, and also provided the push later for a more active period in model aviation. I was discharged in March 1946 and went to school in Los Angeles until the fall of 1947. The school period was also aviation oriented and helped to shape my future. I then went back into the Army Air Force (which shortly became the United States Air Force or USAF), and spent the years until the end of August 1965 on active duty, finally discharged officially after a further period of retired reserve in 1975.

Many interesting assignments took place, enabling me to see much of the world, but also included periods of activity, which precluded much model building or flying. This is not to say that there was none, because this was a part of my life whenever time allowed for such recreation. Reading of modeling was something that was always there for free moments. Such assignments as the Berlin Airlift and Korea also took time away from the activity. There were a few interludes that permitted some building, such as a period at Tachikawa, Japan before moving from there to Celle, Germany for the Airlift. This was my introduction to the Japanese engines and kits of the day.

After the Airlift came assignment to Neubiberg AFB, just outside of Munich. There was not much noticeable activity in the area, except for some magnet steering groups in the mountains, and I became acquainted with this type of flying. A very short time back in the USA found me with orders to proceed to Korea. There appeared to be a bit of a fracas going on there. After Korea I was sent to Loring AFB, Limestone, Maine and all of the years of frustration came together with a great group of individuals, both on and off base, very active in the sport.

This period, in 1954, was still the times of Free Flight and Control Line flying. There was enough of Radio Controlled (RC) to attract some interest, but not any real activity. Anyway, the period from 1954 was filled with much enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment in model aviation.

My activities were in the area of Free Flight until 1954. Most of the time until then was not in any way associated with competition, except for a period in 1946-1947. When I had time away from school, I became acquainted with Paul Gilliam. Paul was also in school, but he also worked at a hobby shop in Glendale. This was not far from where I roomed, and I found myself going there quite often. Paul and I also met frequently at breakfast and went to a number of contests together. Paul was getting into his Civy Boy designs, and this influenced my Free Flight models for some years. Later, while at Loring AFB, Chanute AFB and at Hamilton AFB I designed a number of models, from 1/2 through C based on that general layout. Most were successful. I continued flying Free Flight actively until 1967, when work again slowed down that aspect.

The move to Loring AFB, after Korea, brought other changes. I became a member, and an officer in the Loring AFB Gooneybirds. Free Flight and Control Line were the major activities, and there was a lot of that. I became an AMA Leader Member and Contest Director at that time, and ran quite a number of Control Line contests, including the very first Record Trials for the new Control Line Endurance category. I worked with Russ Gardner in designing and building the first model specifically for that event. We also took part in other serious competitions, attending FAI regional down in Orange, Mass. And, in 1956, four of us drove down to Ellington AFB to represent SAC in the USAF World Wide Championships.

Many top modelers came out of those meets, and it was certainly a privilege to compete there. I only managed one first place – in A Free Flight. I never made the team to the Nationals through the USA meets, mainly because of no ability to fly Control Line. I went to instructor school at Chanute AFB after leaving Loring and I became vice president of the club at that station. This was a rather short interlude and most activity was at club events, with a little bit of exposure to RC. From there it was off to Hamilton AFB and instructor duty.

The transition to several aircraft kept me busy, but weekends were free for the most part. I participated in Free Flight contests in the area, primarily in the Sacramento area (Mather AFB and at Winters). Some of the top Free Flight people in the country were active in that area and this was an experience for all.

I had met my future wife at Loring, and we got married in June 1958 in Washington, D.C. while I was on leave from Hamilton. I then had someone to share my time and actively provide support for all of this model aircraft sport. All good things end just when you think you have a position for the rest of your career. Hamilton was a great place to be, what with people such as John Tatone, John Pond and others around.

We transferred to Kadena AFB, Okinawa for almost two and one half years. Okinawa is a rather small island, and the only association with model activity was among the people on the bases there. There was enough to keep the appetite whet and supplies were plentiful with many new items arriving all the time from Japan. Tokyomokei was the usual supplier, and a good contact for much needed equipment. RC was coming along at this time (1961-1963), and OS had a very good reed-relay system on the market at a very good price. A number of kits were on hand, both from the USA and from Japan. The most unused airfield at Yomitan provided a good site for all activity, and Kadena had a paved Control Line circle on base. Once again, I was an officer in the club.

One outstanding experience at this time was shortly before I returned to the United States. I was called into my Detachment Commander's office and he said he had an unusual request from Fifth Air Force headquarters. It seemed that the Pacific Air Force Model Championships, which used to select a team to go the World Wide, had a problem. John Brodbeck had gone over to Japan for a number of years to run this event, which consisted of all the AMA rulebook categories. John fell ill and could not make the trip in 1963. Special Services, Fifth Air Force, contacted AMA asking for the name of any contest director in the Pacific area to get up to Tachikawa and run the meet. That resulted in the call to my commander - what a thought - to be the only person available!

An OK from my commander, a transmission off to Fifth Air Force, a quick packing job, and it was off to Tachikawa. I had a full day to spare before the start of the competition. I even made the pages of Koku Fan Magazine for this one!

I returned to the U.S. and Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. for my last two years in the Air Force, and once more spent time as an officer in the local club, made up of Air Force and local civilians. We met on the base and also mostly flew on the base. We did occasionally fly at Apalachicola,

although this was as much for the oysters!

Most RC flying away from Tyndall was at Eglin AFB whose group was headed up by Jim Kirkland. We also did a lot of Free Flight flying at Pensacola, Fla. and up at Fort Rucker, Ala. This was a great two-year period, and I took part in the Air Force World Wide in 1964 and 1965. The last was just two months before I retired from the USAF.

I moved to Charlottesville, Va. and helped to organize a club here. I was secretary/treasurer for almost 20 years. During this period, I flew Free Flight when the opportunity presented itself, and especially the last two contests sponsored by the Aero Club of Washington and held at Andrews AFB. I got more into RC by this time, and eventually most of my activity was in this area.

Among other things, I became an active judge for aerobatics and scale. I eventually became president of USPJA, the national judging association, and judged at countless contests. This included several U. S. F3A Team selections. I also judged at the World F3A Championships in the Netherlands in 1985. I worked as a contest director periodically during this time, and flew actively in competition in soaring and other events as well.

I served as an associate vice president for a number of years and became vice president for District IV effective in January 1984. I have served in that position continuously and have missed only one Council meeting in those years. I travel approximately 30,000 miles per year on AMA related affairs.

John Grigg appointed me Chair of the Bylaws Committee, and I've held that position for 10 years. Many changes to the Bylaws and the Standing Rules have taken place in that period of time. This was not done in terms of necessarily improving the status of the Academy so much as bringing things into line with changes in technology and times. The fundamental premise of the AMA and its purposes have not been altered.

I complained about the lack of progress concerning noise reduction from model aircraft engines, and John Grigg said if I wished to complain I could also take the responsibility. That was in 1985, and I have attempted to maintain interest in that project ever since. I feel that much awareness and progress have been made over the years. We were able to initiate the very first true study on the effects of propellers during that period, encouraged the development of new, efficient and quiet designs and especially the APC type propellers.

The efforts of the AMA have also encouraged the development of adequate mufflers for some manufacturer provided units and for a large number of very good mufflers as after market sales components. The fact that we have managed to place an article on the subject in every issue, save one or two, in Model Aviation magazine says something about the staying power of the effort. I was instrumental in having published a handbook on the subject, believed to be the first technical publication published entirely under the AMA logo. That was the result of much study and research on the subject of sound laws governing the generation and control of sound levels, and some applications to assist the average modeler.

All of this has generated untold numbers of letters, phone calls, presentations, and conversation

here in the United States and abroad. This is one area where I feel I have served the membership in a most useful manner, and have a great deal of satisfaction in being able to do so. I have never considered myself the expert on the subject, but I probably have accumulated more data than was thought available on the subject.

I also serve as a member of the Special Interest Group Recognition Committee and the Giant Scale Special Committee Liaison. I worked in this latter capacity to help develop the existing rules for inspection, test flying, and certification of aircraft weighing between 55 and 100 pounds. These are flown under strict exhibition conditions.

PERSONAL TIME: I am married and have three grown children. I married my wife in 1958 while stationed at Hamilton AFB, California. I transferred to Kadena, Okinawa at the beginning of 1961 and my wife and first daughter joined me a couple of months later. We transferred back home to Tyndall AFB, Fla. in the fall of 1963 and my youngest daughter was born there in December. I retired from there at the end of August 1965 and moved to Charlottesville, Va. where I went to work as Manager, Field Engineering for Teledyne Avionics. My son was born there.

I had a varied career in the service. The first part, from December 1943 until in March 1946, was spent at a number of bases doing flying and maintenance on a wide variety of aircraft. These included the C-45, C-60, AT-6, AT-10, B-24, B-29, B-32, PT-17, P-39, P-47, and P-51. I got out, went to school until October 1947, and reenlisted. The service changed from United States Army Air Forces to the United States Air Force shortly after this time. My first assignment was to what has become one of the most famous wings in the Air Force - the 509th Bomb Wing at Roswell, N.M.

The wing, at that time, was flying B-29 aircraft and was also the only nuclear bomb wing in the world. I left Roswell (Walker, as it became known) and transferred to Tachikawa, Japan. During this period, I worked on instruments and auto pilot systems on various aircraft including the command aircraft for General MacArthur and other command officers. Among the aircraft, there were the F-15, C-47, C-46 and C-54 and even an occasional OA-10 (Navy PBY-5A). Note that the F-15 Reporter was the photo version of the P-61. Work on the C-54 got me a transfer to the 317th Troop Carrier Wing and a little side trip to Germany for the Berlin Airlift. When that ended, I was kept in Germany for a couple of years and spent that time with the 86th Fighter on F-47s and later with a transition to F-84 Thundejets. This got me a very short stay back in the States later on.

I came home to McChord AFB, Tacoma, Washington where I worked on C-124, F-89, and F-94C aircraft. The F-84 shortly got me free transportation to the 69th Fighter Bomber Squadron, K-2, Taegu, Korea in time for the last campaigns of that little fight! I had flight line maintenance for 28 F-84 G aircraft. After Korea, it was off to SAC and Loring AFB, Maine.

The aircraft were different and all big! The B-36 was the basic aircraft with some KC-97s for transient refueling. The B-36 was the last Air Force aircraft on which I flew on flight orders. Later we transitioned to B-52 and after a couple of years, I transferred as well. I went to instructor training, eventually becoming a master instructor after attending the Air University,

and spent the remainder of my career as an instructor in automatic flight controls, instrumentation, and electronic fundamentals.

The aircraft were varied as were the assignments, from the F-89, F-86D, and the brand new out-of-the-box F-104. Later the F-101B replaced the F-89s and I got it as well. Transfer to Okinawa continued with the F-101 series aircraft. This time it was the F-101C, along with the F-86D and later the F-105D. Back to the States and it was back to the F-101B and the F-106.

Going to a civilian job was not all that different. I was in on the development of the auto throttle system (properly called the Specialties Engine Control System, or SECS, and the thing was that if you could not sell SECS you could not sell anything!). This was initially intended only for the U.S. Navy for carrier landing, especially with an eye toward fully hands off landings on carriers, which we ultimately did accomplish. The aircraft got a brand new type of angle of attack transmitter with this system.

I traveled the world, in and out of Vietnam area, Japan, the Philippines, Europe, and the Middle East. The aircraft included the F-4, A-3, A4, A-6, A-7, RA-5C, and test work on others. We also did terrain following work, Category 3 landing systems and Rotate-Go-Around System for heavy weight KC-135 (in fact all C-135 series including Air Force One).

We also did Angle of Attack/Mach buffet systems in business jets and some commercial aircraft. The business jets included the Lockheed Jet Star, Cessna Citation, HS-125 (also as the BH-125), Aero Commander Jet Commander, The North American SabreLiner, Dassault Falcon, Lear Jet, and others. There were more and, after all is said and done, this was an extremely interesting period to be associated with such a great number of the latest and best in the world of aviation.

I believe that I have had about as interesting a career in aviation as anyone could hope. Along the way, I managed to meet, talk to, and associate with some of the most prominent names in aviation for the past 50 or more years. Many are now gone, but I will always cherish those memories.

*Howard Crispin, Jr.
4 July 1996*

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