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# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ALBERT (AL) L. LEWIS

1915 - August 16, 1974      Started modeling in the 1920s

AMA #3



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Compiled, Transcribed & Edited by SS (11/2002), Reformatted by JS (10/2009), (07/2010), Updated by JS (06/2013)

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## Career:

- 1929: Joined the Junior Aviation League of Boston
- 1937: Editor of *Model Aviation* magazine
- 1938: Served as second president of the AMA
- 1939-1942: Served as AMA Secretary-Treasurer
- July 1939: Helped create the Hobby Industry Association of America
- 1940s: Editor of the *Daily Blurb* (a comical Nats newsletter)
- Was the editor of *Wing Overs*, the weekly publication of the Junior Aviation League of Boston
- 1945-1946: Served as AMA Executive Director
- Served in the military during World War II
- Became editor of *Air Trails* magazine, which later became *American Modeler* magazine; also edited *Air Progress* and *American Modeler Annual* at the same time
- Managing editor of Aerofile Books
- Wrote free-lance articles for publications such as the Christian Science Monitor and the Boston Herald-Traveler

## Honors:

- 1970: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- Recipient of the Hobby Industry Association Meritorious Award

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*The following biography on Albert L. Lewis came from "The History of the Academy of Model Aeronautics: Including Part One and Part Two From the Beginning to the Year 1966" written by Willis C. Brown and Dick Black that was published first in 1966; the second part was published in 1967. This biography comes from Part One written by Willis C. Brown. It was completed by November 1965.*

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## Albert L. Lewis

President number two of the American Academy of Model Aeronautics elected to serve from January 1, 1938 to December 31, 1938. At that time, he was editor of *Wing Overs*, a weekly publication of the Jordan Marsh-Boston Traveler Junior Aviation League and member of the advertising department of Jordan Marsh Company.

Motivated by the enthusiasm and admiration that followed the famous Lindbergh flight in 1927, "Al" Lewis, as he is known to his myriad of friends, lost no time in joining the newly organized Junior Aviation League of Boston in 1929. He was attending and graduated from Somerville High School in Massachusetts. Few people know of Al's early model plane interests.

He was one of the top builders of those exact and beautiful "flying scale models" in the Boston area. This specialty was soon complemented by his growing interest in writing. He wrote for his

high school publication, he wrote, wrote, wrote, and soon took over the editorship of the Junior Aviation League publication, *Wing Overs*, when its previous editor, John Bartol, went to Annapolis to train for a career in the U.S. Navy.

Al's freewheeling style of writing soon became well known nationally in the famous *Daily Blurb* issued for banquet distribution in Boston and at the Nationals. The 1939 Nationals *Daily Blurb* looked like a commercial job with improved layout and better lettering techniques, etc. The editors that year were Al Lewis, Avrum Zier, and John Kubilis.

Al now worked in the advertising and sales promotion department of the Jordan Marsh Company, department store of Boston, where he did routine advertising work, running the Junior Aviation League's program of events and writing the newspaper publicity to help Gunnar Munnick who followed Willis Brown as league director.

How Al found time to attend classes in journalism at Boston University in the evenings is hard to understand. This was in addition to doing free-lance writing for the *Christian Science Monitor* and other periodicals such as the *Boston Herald-Traveler*. He was editor of *Model Aviation* magazine in 1937, which held the Academy together. His first real opportunity came about when he attended the first technical conference of the Academy in Washington, D.C. in March 1938.

In Al's words, "Bill Enyart (NAA contest committee chairman) had me fly down from Boston on an airline 'space available' pass (with that you waited around for an empty seat – not a long wait in those days), and by paying the small tax, you were flown by the hungry airline. After we got to D.C., Enyart had us put up at a good hotel, had an afternoon tea for the boys with all the pretty NAA stenos serving as hosts. Then he gave us a grand tour of Washington's aviation facilities (Bolling Field, Anacostia, Smithsonian, etc.) behind a screaming motorcycle escort of about 12 cops – a real flying edge just like the President gets. Well – I am telling you – all that was just too much for this 23-year-old Bostonian. I was ripe. I had felt the Enyart touch. So, off to Washington, D.C. I soon went."

Al left his department store work where he was assistant direct mail advertising manager (long title – short salary) to be secretary-treasurer of the NAA Model Division and to help the Academy at the same time. He received the magnificent starting salary of \$1,800 in 1939. He and Walton H. Grubbs soon had things humming. A year later in April 1940 they were able financially to take on Bruno Marchi as technical director.

In the meantime, Al had become executive director, which as Al says, meant that "I acted as chief office boy, ran the mimeograph machine, licked stamps, did a little two finger typing, gave out with some publicity and served as the Academy's D.C. welcoming committee, etc." This, of course, was an understatement of his increasing worth to the field of model aviation.

The NAA Model Division merged with the Academy in 1940. Al says NAA's contribution to the Academy in its early days was far more than most NAA officers or AMA'ers realized then or now. With William R. (Bill) Enyart a power in NAA Headquarters and thoroughly sold on the value of model aviation to the youth of American, and with Gill Robb Wilson as president of NAA and Bill Redding from Denver as NAA "watchdog," things were right for AMA's

advancement. “Let the adults pay – we’ve got to look after the modelers,” Bill Redding would thunder in board meetings.

The International Gas Model Airplane Association had earlier been merged with the Academy and with this country’s entry into World War II the new Air Youth of America organization was also bequeathed to NAA and ended up as part of the Academy. Bruno Marchi had joined the military ranks and in the summer of 1942, Al left the AMA for military service, ending up in that garden spot of the world – North Africa. His delicious chow there taught Al where the term “sandwich” came from. He says two slices of bread with desert sand blown between them must have been the original sandwich. Another achievement he learned while going to code school was to drink tea with milk already in it.

An expert in encoding and decoding messages for the U.S. Army Air Force, Al soon straightened out Rommel’s Panzer Divisions, and when General Eisenhower got the other details of the war cleaned up, Al returned home a victor on a troop transport, which landed him at Baltimore where he debarked and was de-loused. His first port of call was Washington, D.C., where he received a cordial welcome from the AMA and NAA staff.

With Al at his old desk and swivel chair in the Academy of Model Aeronautics section and Russ Nichols handling the Air Youth of America division, Al toyed around with putting out three periodicals with one hand and wondering what to do with the other. His energy seemed boundless, and his experience in the U.S. Army Air Force gave him a chance to hatch up more ideas.

Soon Al cast the die and decided to take on the big city of New York. He was employed by the Polk Brothers as advertising manager on his way to becoming editor of *Air Trails* magazine, which in turn became *American Modeler* magazine. Time hung heavy on his hands, so he also edited *Air Progress* and *American Modeler Annual*. He may have another magazine by now.

He keeps up his many friendships in the model industry and particularly with the Hobby Industry Association of America. In July 1939, he helped create this organization with his Academy publication, *Model Aircraft Industry Coordination Bulletins*.

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*The following was written by AMA staff, published in the Model Aviation publication, October 1946 issue.*

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### **Nichols Takes Over as AMA Executive Director; Lewis Leaves for Post in Model Industry**

Russell W. Nichols, Academy secretary-treasurer, assumes the post of Executive Director; it was announced in Washington recently by AMA headquarters and the National Aeronautic Association. Mr. Nichols takes over the position held until now by Albert L. Lewis, past president of the organization and one of the original founder members.

“Russ” Nichols is well known to Aeromodelers, having acted as headquarters director for the Academy during the war years. In addition, he is director of NAA’s Air Youth Division. He has

been active in the establishment of junior aviation programs for the Air Scouts (BSA), Wing Scouts, and other youth organizations.

“Al” Lewis has been identified with the Academy and the Junior NAA organization since 1936. He was an early editor of “Model Aviation” and served as second president of the AMA. In 1939, he went to Washington to handle Junior NAA activities; in 1941, the Academy absorbed these and set up as the model division of NAA. Mr. Lewis will enter the model industry as sales promotion manager for Polk’s Modelcraft Hobbies, a leading hobby house with offices in Chicago and New York City.

Russ Nichols and Al Lewis have worked together since 1940 when the former was active in the Silver Springs (Md.) Aeronauts club. Later he organized a metropolitan council, the Association of Model Airplane Clubs of Washington. Russ was born and educated in Melrose, Massachusetts and attended Boston University, Southeastern University, and American University. Prior to his work with NAA and the Academy, he was with the Farm Credit Administration, a federal agency.

Like Russ, Al Lewis was born in Massachusetts and educated in the Somerville schools. He attended Boston University and worked on Boston newspapers and as assistant direct mail advertising manager for the largest department store in the northeast. Lewis became AMA director in 1941; he was on leave of absence during the war when he served overseas with the Airways Communications System of the AAF. He will continue his associations with the AMA as chairman of its International Coordination Committee; recently he was appointed the American member of the Model Commission of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale.

He will devote spare time to the completion of several projects: a history of model aviation, an American aeromodeling yearbook, and a “who’s who” of U.S. model aviation.

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*The following article about Al Lewis ran in the Boston Traveler newspaper on May 24, 1935.*

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### **Veteran Junior Flier to Announce at Garden**

Albert Lewis, who officiated so capably last year, will be heard tomorrow in Jordan-Traveler Junior Aviation contest

Tomorrow morning at 9 a.m., Albert Lewis, veteran member of the Jordan-Traveler Junior Aviation League, will announce to the gathered thousands the start of the sixth annual New England championship model airplane contests, held in the spacious Boston Garden.

### **Did Well Last Year**

Albert, 19, and resident of Somerville, did such a splendid job last year that even spectators who were not versed in the language of the aviator were able to follow each event with ease.

This year he has a tougher job on his hands as model enthusiasts from the six New England states have entered and threaten to give the leading flyers of the J-T League’s 4,000 members stiff competition.

More than 200 entrants have already signed up and have their craft all tuned up, ready to smash existing records and establish new ones.

Al does not take part in active competition now, but in the past has constructed some very capable models and was a record holder during the infant days of the league.

When he was active, he was many times complimented and cited for the original designs of his outdoor ships.

However, though he does not spend much time building and flying scale models nowadays, he is far from slothful so far as the J-T League is concerned.

Everything that tends to further the aims and ideals of the league, Al is in “up to his ears” with interest.

### **Edits *Wing Overs***

He is the editor of the club’s weekly magazine, *Wing Overs*. And that news organ is the oldest model airplane weekly in the world.

The editor is well known to all of the members and his keen desire for all manner of air knowledge makes his work a joy. Every single phase of model aviation work appeals to him and he has been the means of preparing newcomers and novices for competition.

He misses John Bartol, another outstanding hero of the league, who is at present attending the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. John used to help Al dabble in printer’s ink and together they turned out copy that attracted much attention.

In addition to his work on the weekly, Al gets about quite a bit and is known to airmen all over New England. He maintains extensive correspondence with builders all over the world and has a most interesting clipping bureau that he keeps carefully filed.

His fellow members honored him by re-electing him president of the Boston junior chapter of the National Aeronautic Association. That is the organization that is sanctioning the meet at the Garden and at Harvard practice field on Sunday.

Al has advised that he is “in voice” and will soon be ready and willing to go the moment the first event is called.

So be prepared to gain in knowledge as far as air matters are concerned, for Al points out many interesting features that the average on-looker would miss.

He will not forecast probable winners, for, as he says, “Can’t tell when a spill or a collision in mid-air may ruin a fellow’s chances.”

Well, everything is in readiness at the Garden. We just want to remind the contestants again that they should be on hand early in order to prepare the machines for the events in which they are entered.

First event, gliders, hand-launched, is scheduled for 9 a.m. Then follow the stick and fuselage type machines, all topped off by the spectacular flying circus.

Admission to the Garden is free and you do not need a ticket to enter. The events will run from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Six prizes await the highest sextet in each event, boys and girls; they are handsome prizes worth shooting for.

After the Garden events, the young aviators face the outdoor contests at Harvard field from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m. on Sunday. Many like the outdoor events more than the inside ones for the graceful ships are not limited to a 60-foot roof.

In fact, last year several soared high and away from sight, far over the Harvard stadium. Many times the owner of the model must be a good walker as well as a flyer and chase long distances after his ship.

Now just a reminder to any of the last-minute men – if your entry is not in, hurry, and we will see you at the Garden at 9 a.m. tomorrow.

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*The following information ran after Al Lewis' death in the December 1974 issue of Model Aviation magazine. At that time, a Model Aviation section was printed in American Aircraft Modeler magazine.*

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### **Albert L. Lewis** 1915 – 1974

The second AMA president, executive director of the AMA in its early days, member of the Model Aviation Hall of Fame, Hobby Industry Association Meritorious Award winner, editor of *Air Trails* magazine (from which the current [in 1974] *American Aircraft Modeler* magazine grew) and most recently managing editor of Aerofile Books, Al Lewis died on August 16 at the age of 59.

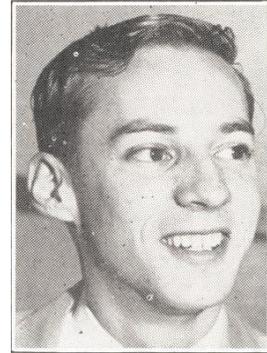
Probably no one has done more than Al for the AMA. Because of his early interest and direct participation, AMA got through its growing pains and emerged as *the* national association for all aeromodelers. The fact that AMA now is the world's largest sport aviation organization may be traced directly to Al's work in the 1940s as president and executive director.

Lewis was raised in Boston, Massachusetts, where he became interested in modeling following Lindbergh's flights to Paris. When the Jordan-Marsh Department Store and Boston Traveler newspaper joined hands to form a Junior Aviation League in 1929, he lost no time in joining. With an interest in journalism, he became editor of *Wing Overs*, the league's weekly publication, in 1934. Three years later, he took employment in Jordan-Marsh's advertising department while

simultaneously attending classes in journalism at Boston University. Exemplifying the boundless energy, which was Al's all during his life, was that he also continued his work with the Junior Aviation League plus free-lance writing for the *Christian Science Monitor* and other publications such as the *Boston Herald-Traveler*.

Al was elected AMA president in 1938 and moved to Washington in 1939 to become executive director. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II, ending up in North Africa. After the war, he returned to AMA Headquarters' employment for a short while, but then moved to New York to become advertising manager of Polk's Model Craft Hobbies.

In 1949, Lewis became editor of *Air Trails* magazine, which subsequently went through several changes of ownership and title to emerge as the current [in 1974] *American Aircraft Modeler* magazine. Many of today's relative "oldsters" know and respect Al most for his stints with AMA and *Air Trails* magazine where he developed a reputation as an innovator, pacesetter, worker of long hours, and a wonderfully interesting man to know. He also was editor of *Air Trails Annuals*, which now are collector's items, and in recent years, he was editor of *Air Progress*. His magazines always were the envy of competitors.



Albert Lewis

*Photograph of Al Lewis from the 1940 Nats program.*

Al leaves behind for all of us a great example of creativeness, leadership, dedication, and inspiration.

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