
Biography of WALT BILLETT

Modeler, Organizer, Promoter of Model Aviation, Writer, Publisher

Modeler for: 80 years (1881-1969)

Age: 88 (1969)

Written & Submitted by BEA (6/97)

Transcribed by NR (6/97)

Edited by SS (2002), updated by JS (10/07)

Career:

- Published and paid for the newsletter *Let's Go*
- Owned and operated a local hobby shop
- Persuaded other hobby shop owners to help and support local contests
- Created and gave out trophies for these meets, called the "Walt Billett Trophy"
- Wrote the first AMA History; took five years to write
- Made identification models for the Navy, 6,000 in all
- Created the first Table of Organization for the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA)
- Started the "Eight Ball Club" and the trophy that went with it

Honors:

- 1960: AMA Fellow
 - 1969: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
 - 1969: AMA Distinguished Service Award
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About the biographer: Bruce Anthony, a close friend of Walt Billett, submitted this biography of Walt Billett. It is a collection of material that he has collected about his friend and presented here by him.

This is a sample of a newsletter Walt Billett produced for young modelers in his area. Keeping them informed on what was happening in local and National events, encouraging them to participate and compete.



Let's Go

A monthly publication devoted to the building up of model airplane clubs and all model airplane activities in the greater Minneapolis and St. Paul Area.

Vol. III, No. 7
July 1960

July

July the month of bangety, bang, bang, boom, bang a few years ago, but these years only a couple of bangs and the chances are that one of them is an automobile back-fire.

Luckily, I came through all those banging years to a "safe and sane 4th" (providing I stay out of an automobile). But it is not near so much fun Cedric. You know Cedric Adams, our Star columnist, is the father of the Minnesota Safe and Sane Fourth Law.

We have a new kind of bang for you now. Get a big “bang” out of taking part in the PAA-Load Meet, July 17 at Journey’s End Airport. Lots of prizes and a wonderful day’s outing. An application blank enclosed. Send it in at once. If you do not fly, come out anyway and see this wonderful exhibition. Plenty of room for family picnics. Refreshment stand on the grounds. Be seeing you.

Uncle Cy

Sez the world may be your oyster, but you've got to crack the shell yourself.

Publication date of Let’s Go pushed ahead a few days so this should reach you in time to read the AYSC story and then decide to take in the Mankato Meet regardless of what we said about its being too late. YOU could be in IT.



What and Why PAA-Load

PAA-Load, pronounced “Pay-Load,” created 13 years ago by Pan American Airways loses none of its attractiveness but gains in popularity each year.

The name indicates the type of model, one that will carry a paying load and also the name PAA stands for Pan American Airways.

“The PAA-Load events are designed to provide aviation education. They emphasize Air Transportation - the art and science of carrying people and goods through the sky. They teach by the practical method of doing.

“For economy the ‘vehicles’ used are model airplanes. For depth of understanding, both propeller and jet power principles are used. For width of application, the PAA-Load program is worldwide. For sportsmanship, the activity is conducted competitively. For tangible reward, valuable prizes are awarded to winning contestants. For the future, foundations are laid for productive aviation careers.

“The whole is an attractive program for the youth of today's Air Age, sponsored by Pan American World Airways – ‘The World's Most Experienced Airline.’”

The above last three paragraphs are taken from the PAA-Load Rule Book which contains lots of valuable information and pictures as well as the complete PAA-Load Rules.

Why don't you send a card right now requesting this booklet? Walt Billett, 4 West 26th Street, Minneapolis 4, Minn. It will be sent to you FREE of charge. It will help you greatly in case you enter the PAA-Load Meet, application for which is enclosed. Still time to build a model or two to collect some of the fancy “loot.” We go way down the line, not only 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, but in some events as far as the 10th.

We have George Gardner, Pan Am's Educational Director and Dallas Sherman, Pan Am's Technical Director to thank for all this wonderful event, The 12th Upper Midwest PAA-Load Meet. Come out and see us even though you do not enter.

Don't get the idea that in these days of automation you can replace the ladder of success with an escalator. You will still have to climb the hard way.

What is the AYSC?

This is the second year of AYSC, American Youth State Championships, a project conceived and promoted by the Hobby Industry Association of America. This Association is composed of practically all of the manufacturers and jobbers in the model aviation hobby business, plus the better retail hobby shops of America.

The AYSC project sends one junior flyer from each of the 50 states to the Nationals each year by plane, all expenses paid and is the largest promotion of its kind ever undertaken and as time goes by promises to bring our model plane activities to the position, where they rightfully belong. This of course helps us all, particularly the flyer, as it will give the public a better understanding of what it is all about, paving the way towards making it possible to get better facilities for flying, such as fields, badly needed.

In addition to the all-expense trip, the winner is decked out with an Official AYSC jacket, shirt, pants, and field shirt to wear at the Nats and all future meets.

Of course as you read this, it is now too late to compete in the Minnesota run-off at Mankato, July 10. However, it is not too soon to set your sights for the honor in 1961.

Get in there at all the meets for the balance of this year and start early next year. You do not need to win; you are still going to have a lot of fun in perfecting your flying game. You well know that there is a certain element of luck in this game and you could be it.

Remember too that the stores that belong to the HIAA are supporting this vast program and are worthy of your patronage. The members of the Association of Twin Cities Hobby Retailers are all HIAA members.

P.S. One of those meets you can still get in some good licks is PAA-Load, Sunday, July 17. Send in that application NOW.

The Heat is On

By Allan MacDonald's Ghost Writer

Walt Billett says; write me a story about PAA-Load for *Let's Go*. Well, here it is:

I, Allan MacDonald, proprietor of Hobby Craft House, 6238 Lyndale Ave. (wonder how Walt will like this commercial), do hereby affirm that as the duly appointed Contest Director for the big and wonderful PAA-Load Meet, I will do my very best to see that each and every one of the contestants and visitors will get a "fair shake." If I cannot I will call on someone larger than I am to shake everyone up, but good. (Ha! I guess that will shake Walt.)

Seriously, we have a dandy meet, oodles of prizes with R.C.A. Transistor Radios at the top, Travel Clocks and Travel Kits for second and thirds.

Still time to contact Walt Billett for a ride to the Dallas Nats even though you did not meet the Nats deadline of July 3rd for application. Get busy.

Address all communications to *Let's Go*
2608 Nicollet Ave. – Minneapolis, Minnesota

A PAA-Load Message

Well fellows - this is Al "Mac" Mac. A lot of you are my customers or at least know who I am. Personally, I am your CD (Contest Director) for PAA-Load this year and am trying to make this the biggest and best meet we have had in a long time.

Flying a model is fun and to fly in a contest and compete against other contestants whether they are friend or foe is the ultimate.

In case you have never flown in a contest, make this one your first. Everyone has been a novice at one time.

The prizes help to boost your ego after eliminating a competitor. We've got lots of them. I think this is going to be a terrific meet, so get those planes ready and we'll be seeing you at Journey's End Airport, Sunday, July 17.

We will be there ready and willing to please you as contestants or as spectators.

Will you be a spectator or a contestant?

Allan MacDonald, CD

Buzz Bugs Ukie Championships

The Minnesota State Fair Grounds was again the site of a very successful model meet. On June 26, the Buzz Bugs again promoted and directed the Minnesota U-Control championships sponsored jointly by Lightfoots Hobby Shop and by the Buzz Bugs.

This has been the 3rd U-Control meet at the Fairgrounds in the past two years so you might say it is getting to be a hot contest site and it is a real natural with excellent facilities. The weatherman again was on our side with plenty of sunshine, no rain, and everybody either got a good sunburn or added to their tan. The wind being on the strong and gusty side was the only drawback and it made it rough for most of the contestants. We had quite a few casualties in the stunt circle and all due to the wind velocity coming out of the south and dipping down from the building tops. Sure hated to see those beautiful stunt jobs wrecked, as I know there are lots of man hours connected with these planes.

Besides the Black & Decker drill motors that were given out for the three high point champions, something new was added to this year's meet. This new item came in the form of two large and beautiful trophies to be awarded on a rotating basis to the junior high point winner and the senior-open combined high point winner. These trophies are inscribed, "Walt Billett Let's Go" trophy and were donated by our good friend and devoted model airplane enthusiast, Walt Billett. Speaking for all the Buzz Bugs, I want to express our thanks to Walt for this generous contribution.

The winners this year were James Beck, St. Paul, in the junior division and Jack Langholz, Worthington, was high point contestant in the senior-open division. Congratulations to those two fellows and we are looking forward to seeing them return next year to defend their title as meet champion.

Buzz Bug Reporter

Sunday June 26, 1960

You remember what we told you last month about our big program for the 1960 Minnesota U-Control Championships?

Well, things didn't turn out quite as planned. The governor lost his micrometer and hence he could not attend; the Grecian Olympic runner who was to bear the Olympic Torch got turned in direction and while distracted by a towline glider he tripped on a clod in the road and burned over a million acres of pine forest in Norway. This later came to be known as the Nordic event.

The Russian Air Force said they weren't ready to give us a nuclear demonstration yet but if we hollered "you too" at them any longer they would give us several free nuclear demonstrations at selected spots in the United States. The flyovers of military aircraft had to be cancelled due to the recent cuts in the defense budget so this left only a contest in which the top Control Line flyers from Minnesota and the neighboring states competed with their model airplanes for championship honors and hence the St. Paul Dispatch didn't feel this was important enough news to include in their paper.

However, the contest went on successfully anyway. A southern wind, which produced large turbulence behind the buildings made flying somewhat bumpy but otherwise the weather was

excellent. Fifty-two contestants showed up with one contestant coming all the way from New Mexico. Who was he? None other than former Buzz Bug member, Dick Olwin. He proved that he is still unbeatable in stunt in this area of the country.

Jim Beck made the rest of the juniors eat his dust by winning the junior high point award again this year and the senior high point was won by Gary Oakins. Last year's winner of Open High Point John Baltes failed to repeat this year with Jack Langholz copping this year's honors.

A set of prizes unexpectedly by all showed up at the contest when Walt Billett arrived and donated a pair of Perpetually Rotating Trophies for Junior and Senior-Open High Point Champions to be awarded each year to the High Point winners of the Minnesota U-Control Championships. Many thanks, Walt.

Thanks are also due to all club members and other personnel who gave assistance to the organization and operation of this yearly contest. A list of the winners follows this article. See you next year.

Don Monson, AMA 14192, Contest Director

Winners List

Senior-Open Rat Race: 1st - James Blaedom; 2nd - Melvin Roy; 3rd - Jeff Lang

Junior Rat Race: 1st - John Zgodava; 2nd - James Swearingen; 3rd - William Dent, Jr.

Senior-Open Combat: 1st - Gerald Wright; 2nd - David Kruse; 3rd - Zack Fehling; 4th - Tom Bernier.

Junior Combat: 1st - Jeff Welliver; 2nd - James Swearingen; 3rd - Clark Martin; 4th - William Vyn

Open Proto Speed: 1st - Maynard Doeden, 79.44 mph; 2nd - Ronald Markman, 76.57 mph; 3rd - Jack Langholz, 70.01 mph

Junior-Senior Proto Speed: 1st - James Beck, 83.69 mph; 2nd - Gary Oakins, 73.00 mph; 3rd - no flight completed

Class A Speed, (Ages Comb.): 1st - Ronald Markman, 85.68 mph; 2nd - Jack Langholb, 4~9.70 mph; 3rd - no flight completed

Class B Speed (Ages Comb.): 1st - John Baltes, 128.06 mph; 2nd - James Beck, 105.84 mph; 3rd - Jack Langholz, 93.23 mph.

Class C Speed (Ages Comb.): 1st - Ronald Markman, 142.80 mph; 2nd - Melvin Roy, 91.33 mph; 3rd - Jack Langholz, 82.16 mph.

Junior Stunt: 1st - William Dent, Jr., 392 pts.; 2nd - William Oberpriller, 382 pts.; 3rd - Jeff Batzel, 281 pts.; 4th - David Witzke, 267 pts.

Senior Stunt: 1st - Gary Oakins, 537 pts.; 2nd - Peter Hovde, 401 pts.; 3rd - Mike Olson, 129 pts.; 4th - James Bloedorn, 109 pts.

Open Stunt: 1st - Dick Olwin, 618 pts.; 2nd - James Stellicic, 555 pts.; 3rd - William Dent, Sr., 485 pts.; 4th - David Kruse, 393 pts.

Flying Scale (Ages Comb.): 1st - James Sinton; 2nd - Phillip Haley; 3rd - Howard Sidener; 4th -

David Morse.

High Point Winners: Junior-James Beck,190 pts.; Senior Gary Oakins,190pts.; Open-Jack Langholz, 330 pts.

Prizes Awarded

1st Places - Fox .35 engine

2nd Places - Fox Rocket .35 engine

3rd Places - Fox .15 engine

4th Places - Markee; Cheap Skate Airboat Kit

High Points

Electric Drill Motor plus the Walt Billett Championship Trophies for Junior and Senior-Open High Point Champions.

- End of Newsletter –

-More Below-

Below is a typical Contest announcement that Walt and his volunteers (friends) ran for the modelers of Minneapolis.

ALLAN MACDONALD, CONTEST DIRECTOR

PAUL RING, HEADQUARTERS ADMINISTRATOR

GAL CALROW, PUBLICITY

ENTRY APPLICATION

REGISTRATION
NUMBER

12TH UPPER MIDWEST PAA-LOAD MEET
ACADEMY OF MODEL AERONAUTICS SANCTION CERTIFICATE NUMBER 386

"JOURNEY'S END" AIRPORT
2 MILES WEST OF FOREST LAKE ON HIGHWAY 8

SUNDAY, JULY 17th, 1960 - 10 to 5 - RAIN or SHINE

SPONSORED BY

**PAN AMERICAN WORLD AIRWAYS
ASSOCIATION OF TWIN CITIES HOBBY RETAILERS**

TOTAL FEE
COLLECTED

ENTRY FEE:—\$1.00 all age classes for first two events if mailed before July 15. Additional events 25 cents each. LATE entry at field \$2.00.

A.M.A. LICENSE required of ALL contestants [includes insurance] - available at Registration Tent
(Print Plainly)

Name _____ Age _____ Date of Birth _____

Street Address _____ A.M.A. No. _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____ Phone _____

JUNIOR—Age up to 16 SENIOR—Age 16 to 21 OPEN 21 and over.

HAVE AIRPLANE - WILL FLY - - - in the events checked below - -

- PAA-LOAD CLIPPER CARGO .020 ALL AGES COMBINED
- PAA-LOAD GAS .020 ALL AGES COMBINED
- PAA-LOAD JET (Jetex 150) ALL AGES COMB. JET JUNIOR (Jetex 50)
- OUTDOOR RUBBER ALL AGES COMBINED
- AB GAS FF ALL AGES COMBINED
- TOWLINE GLIDER JUNIOR
- TOWLINE GLIDER SENIOR-OPEN
- HAND LAUNCH GLIDER JUNIOR
- HAND LAUNCH GLIDER SENIOR-OPEN

NO TEAM ENTRIES Less than 5 entries in any one event — No Contest in that event.

Parents Consent Waiver

As parent or legal guardian of _____ is a minor, I hereby give my full and unqualified consent to his/her participation in the 12th Annual Upper Midwest PAA LOAD MEET, and to his/her accepting any and all awards whatsoever that he/ may win, whether it involves travel or otherwise. In consideration of the sponsorship of this meet, I hereby release Pan American Airways Association of Twin Cities Hobby Retailers, and any and all organizations or persons connected with said meet, from all claims which may arise in connection with said meet.

Release

I hereby release all sponsors as listed above and any and all organizations or persons connected with this meet from responsibilities for any and all claims of damage, loss, or injury resulting from any cause while attending this meet, and I also assume full responsibility for any damage or injury caused by myself or my model airplane to any person or property.

I, the Contestant, agree to abide by the rules of the contest and the decisions of the contest officials.

Signed _____
Parent or Legal Guardian

Contestant Sign Here _____

For your own sake and to avoid congestion at Registration Tent, get your application in early. NOW in fact and you will receive a PAA-LOAD Rule Book by return mail. You need this to build and fly your PAA-LOAD entry properly.

MAIL COMPLETED APPLICATION AND ENTRY FEE TO:
WALT BILLETT, 4 West 26th Street, Minneapolis 4, Minn.



This is a testimonial written by another of Walt's friends on the occasion of his death. The message is that this man was loved by all who knew him and they grieved the loss of this great man.

In Memory of Walter H. Billett
The Granddaddy of Model Aviation
Has Joined the Great Pilot

Walter H. Billett (Walt as he was known to most of you) passed away February 24, 1969 at the age of 88 years and 10 months at Ebenezer Home where he had lived for about the last three years. Half of that time was spent in bed, but his mind was still alert up until two days before he passed away. What was he talking about? His book, The History of the AMA. He had spent five years in getting it published. Yes, he spent those five years getting writers, and gathering material and finances for it. He lived to see it published so he was happy even though he spent all of his remaining money on it.

Walt was one of the first men to get model aviation and model meets started in this area – way back in 1938. He had his hands in dawn meets (Free Flight), PAA Load, many U-Control meets in between; also Jaycee and Field House meets. He also printed almost all of the *Let's Go* column at his own expense for many years.

Walt was in the hobby business on 26th and Nicollet from 1926 to 1955, but he did not quit helping model aviation, as many of you and your fathers knew of him.

During the War years (World War II), he had a complete shop next door to his hobby shop. He turned out Identification Models for the Navy – 6,000 in all.

Although he had only one son, Richard, who was a Lt. Commander in the Navy during the War, he loved kids and loved to work with and for them. He had four grandsons, two of them are still in aviation; one is an Army pilot and another commercial pilot.

He was also a very patriotic gent. He alone got almost all of the merchants on 26th and Nicollet, some 90 in all, to put up the U.S. Flag in front of their places of business every legal holiday. Now, the American Legion puts them out, but Walt used to do it, sometimes when he could barely walk because of his advanced age.

Perhaps I knew this great man best – for 29 years he was like a father to me as we worked together on all of his projects.

God bless and keep him in the Great Blue Yonder.

Paul J. Ring

- End -