
Autobiography of Lt. GENERAL CLYDE D. "DICK" DEAN

Modeler, Free Flight, U-Control, RC Modeler

Modeler since 1937

Birth Date: October 23, 1930

AMA: 152926

Written & Transcribed by CDD (9/96)

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Career:

- Began flying stick and tissue, then gas and U-Control models as a youngster
 - Worked a couple of local hobby shops during his youth
 - Placed first in junior class A and class C Free Flight and first in junior class B speed at the 1946 Southwestern Championships; missed being grand champion by only one point
 - Served in the military from 1950 to 1987 when he retired as Lieutenant General, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Marine Corps
 - As an adult, got into Radio Controlled (RC) modeling
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I built my first model airplane in 1937, at age seven. It was a stick and tissue model and more advanced than I should have tried for a first model (as I suppose is typical of newcomers). Nonetheless, I did get it almost completed and ready for covering, when a visiting cousin inadvertently sat on it. So much for my first model. At the time, we were living in a rural farming community southeast of Little Rock, Arkansas, but a few miles from the current site of the annual Little Rock S.M.A.L.L. Fly.

At age nine we moved to a small rural town southwest of Little Rock, where a group of four of us about my age built many stick and tissue models over the next three years – mostly the 10-cent variety such as Cubs, Taylorcrafts, Stinsons, Ryan STs and the like. We really had a great time flying and experimenting with those planes, for we were very much a part of that generation which was (and still is) absolutely fascinated with anything aviation.

During the early 1940s I was introduced to gas-powered flight by Mr. John Sadler and H. A. (Henry A.) Thomas of Little Rock. I first met them on a Sunday afternoon at a large hayfield near Little Rock where they were flying Free Flight. Mr. Sadler was flying his famous low wing Pacemaker on that afternoon and H. A. an O&R 23 original pylon Free Flight he called the Question Mark. These were the first gas-powered models I had ever seen, other than in pictures, and I instantly became hooked.

My first engine was a used GHQ, which would occasionally “pop” but never ran (how many of us went through that experience?!). My second was a used Forster 99, which of all things did run on my first try. Hallelujah. (Although when I bought it and couldn't get back home until after dark, I still couldn't resist trying it as soon as I arrived. I foolishly set it up in my little bedroom. I was astounded when it started, belching forth billows of smoke and noise into the room. I was elated, even if almost asphyxiated before gaining sufficient composure in my excitement to jerk the battery leads off!)

My first gas-powered plane was a Pacer C (after all, hadn't Sal Taibi just recently won the Nationals – Nats – with it?). I do recall it seemed to use much more spruce than balsa, but those

were war days. In any event, I then began flying Free Flight on Sunday afternoons with Mr. Sadler, H. A. and another buddy my own age named Bob Johnson (now a retired dental surgeon in Little Rock). Bob flew an O&R 23 Ranger. Those were exciting days for me as a youngster new into gas-powered flight! And what marvelous tutors in Mr. Sadler and H. A.!

It was about this time that U-Control came onto the scene, and it seemed we all had to get into this new type flying. My first U-control was a Stanzel Super Shark – that one with the roller control in a nacelle extended on a rod. I had a time trying to keep it in level flight. I don't know whether it was the roller controller, me as a beginning U-Control flyer or a lot of both. I later put in a bellcrank (after further U-Control flying experience), and its flight improved considerably. I continued in Free Flight and sport U-Control, ultimately migrating in U-Control into B and C speed. Rather than Free Flight Sunday afternoons at the hayfield, however, our flying now was primarily on the end of Control Lines at War Memorial Park in Little Rock. And with U-Control, our number of flyers quickly expanded. It was also about this time that my family moved into Little Rock proper and not too far from Mr. Sadler's and H. A.'s homes.

Mr. Sadler was a wonderful mentor! H. A. would tell one he looked at Mr. Sadler almost as a father. We youngsters likewise looked at him almost as a grandfather. He had a small shop in his backyard, which he opened to several of us rookies from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. on any Tuesday through Friday nights we could come over. I'm afraid two of us (myself and Bob Johnson) almost lived there. H. A. occasionally would drop in, as well, when his work allowed. H. A. continuously was coming up with new and innovative ideas, and we all tried our best to emulate him. He always was willing to take time to share his new ideas and secrets with us youngsters. Even so, we never caught up with him then, nor have we ever since.

Mr. Sadler (the “Kingfish”) would sit there in his shop in the evenings with pipe in mouth, gently and with great humor tutoring us along. We knew Mrs. Sadler affectionately as “Mall,” and she frequently would bring out a plate of homemade fudge. How could it possibly be any better for aspiring young modelers? Those of us who had the immense fortune to sit at his and H. A.'s feet have much for which to be thankful, not only because of their superb examples as modelers, but for their role models as true gentlemen as well!

With the introduction of U-Control our group in Little Rock began holding periodic U-Control contests, focusing primarily on speed. I participated in these during their first year, but then moved to Dallas. In Dallas I worked in the downtown Hobby Nobby shop during the summer and in the Oakcliff hobby shop on Saturdays during school months.

Johnny Clemens' shop was located across town in Highland Park, the prosperous suburban section of Dallas in those days. Johnny's fuel he used in his Super Cyke C Speed Plane, with which he later won the Nationals, was the first funny smelling fuel I smelled among the many secret private concoctions which came to be characteristic among speed competitors during that era.

It was also in Dallas that I participated in the largest contest I've ever had the fun of entering – the Southwestern Championships in 1946. (Personal funds simply made thoughts of ever getting to a Nats during those years completely out of the question). I lucked out, principally because of the early years of tutoring I so fortunately had received from Mr. Sadler and H. A., in my opinion. I somehow came in first in junior Class A and C Free Flight and first in junior Class B speed. I missed being grand champion by one point, with Jim Bill Clem earning the championship trophy. Couldn't have lost to a finer gentleman or more deserving competitor!

I suppose during those early years I went through perhaps a typical run of engines. The GHQ, the Forster 99, a Bantam 19, O&R 23, Forster 29, Dennykite, O&R 60, Arden 19, Cub 049, Wasp 049, Hornet 049, Hurricane, Rocket 46, Madewell and McCoy 60. Later would come a Super Tiger diesel (in South America), a Dynajet, Brown C02s and Cox 01. I still have my Forster 29, O&R 60 and Cox 01 – all in great condition (as a matter of fact, the Cox is still on the card).

In 1947 we moved to Brooklyn for a year, and here my flying continued in U-Control speed. A small group of us flew at Fort Hamilton High School near what is now the Verrazano Bridge. The McCoy 60 was the rage, and we were still flying on ignition.

In 1950 I entered the military service, in which I remained until 1987. During these years, my modeling came and went as conditions allowed. One Free Flight, two U-Controls, a glider, two C02s and a Livewire Trainer with one of John Maloney's Mule single-channel systems. But always with that inner urge bugging me to get back into modeling again someday.

That came with my retirement from active military service in late 1987. [NOTE: According to his friend, Fred Mulholland, Dick served as the Lieutenant General, Chief of Staff in the U.S. Marine Corps.] Once again through H. A. Thomas, I was put in contact with Bill Winter and Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kaluf, both near Washington (although Bill Kaluf now resides in Florida). Back to Radio Control (RC) again, but this time with all the new radio and electronic technologies, improved engines, new adhesives and an array of composite building materials on the market. In many ways a new world, but still with that same gnawing inner fascination and thrill of seeing a model airplane majestically doing its thing. In my case, “wet” quickly gave way to electric, and that remains my focus today.

And as well with this transition, a thrill few modelers have had the pleasure and great fortune to enjoy – getting to fly with and know Bill Winter personally after having idolized him across all these years. Bill, indeed, has been my mentor upon returning to this great and fascinating hobby, for I had the great fortune of flying electric with Bill frequently in a one-on-one basis at Manassas and Reston, Virginia, during 1988 to 1992 prior to moving to my current location in West Virginia.

As is readily evident, I have no claim to fame as a modeler whatsoever – just another sports modeler who has and continues to love the thrill of building and flying model aircraft. But as is

likewise evident, I dare say, is the extraordinary blessing I've enjoyed by personally knowing, flying with and having been mentored and tutored by the best from the very start to the present. What modeler possibly could ever dream of or ask for more?

*(signed) Clyde D. "Dick" Dean
October 1996
Martinsburg, West Virginia*

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