Biography of HENRY A. HAFFKE

Modeler since 1933 or 1934 August 30, 1927 AMA Number: GEEBEE

Transcribed & Edited by SS (12/02)

Career:

- Built display models for local stores as a youngster
- After his first airplane ride at age 15, took flying lessons and soloed for the first time right after he turned 16
- Joined the Navy after high school and started building engine-powered models; won many prizes competing with these models after being discharged from the Navy
- Designed his own Radio Controlled (RC) racers
- Built and successfully competed with a Gee Bee Model Y Senior Sportster
- Built and flew many Gee Bee models built by the information provided by Robert Granville; won numerous contests with these models
- His ¼-scale Gee Bee Model Y won numerous contests as well as many best of show awards
- Received the top static score at the 1985 Nationals with his Gee Bee Model Y
- Researched and wrote the story of the Gee Bees and the men who built them

The following information about and by Henry Haffke ran in a publication called Air Wars in June 1987.

Modeling the Gee Bees (With the Help of the Granvilles)

By Henry A. Haffke

Editor's Note: The following account presents the many successes and of ¼-scale modeler Henry Haffke. And while the article is unabashedly sentimental and very heavy on self-congratulations (modest, it ain't), one has to admit great models win many prizes. Our thanks to Henry for reintroducing the Granville brothers to scale modeling and for letting us all enjoy "the other" Gee-Bees. AC.

I was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1927 and grew up in Chicopee Falls about a mile from the Springfield Airport where the Granville brothers built their famous aircraft. I was too young at the time to appreciate what was going on so nearby, but can vividly remember our evening trips to the airport after supper to watch the airplanes fly. My dad would drive me and my three brothers and my mother to the airport where we would watch the activity at the busy field.

I started building model airplanes when I was about six or seven and made the usual mess in the process. My models weren't very good but I enjoyed building them. It was a long time before I built one that would fly very well also. I guess my first efforts were pretty bad. This didn't discourage me, however, and within a few years I was doing a good enough job on them so that stores selling model kits had me build models for them to display in their windows. I frequently visited the airport in town on my bicycle as I still enjoyed seeing the real ones fly. I got to know the operator of the airport and built a model of his Piper Cruiser, which he wanted, and he offered me a rise in an airplane for it. I had my first ride at 15 and decided to take flying lessons. I soloed a few days after my 16th birthday in a 1939 Taylor Craft. I also had some time in the Cruiser and in a new Aeronca Champ.

I graduated from high school a year later and went into the Navy where I was assigned to the Naval Aviation Technical Training School in Norman, Oklahoma. The school was moved to Jacksonville, Florida, during my training and I graduated from the school in Jacksonville.

During this time I became involved in building engine-powered models and after my discharge from the Navy, I got to fly in some contests where I was frequently a prizewinner.

A move to New Jersey involved me with some Radio Control (RC) model builders and I got into flying that type of model. After a few simple models, I decided to build a scale model, as these are the models that I really enjoy. My favorite subjects were racing aircraft of the Golden Era and my first RC scale model was a shelf-designed model of Art Chester's Jeep, which had been one of my early Control Line original designs. There weren't many kits available for racers, so I always had to design my own. The Jeep was an excellent flying model and I got to fly it in some contests and found it a winner. It won many prizes over a period of several years of flying and is still intact after 15 years.

I had always loved the Gee Bee airplanes and decided, for my next design, to build one of them. I had in my collection of air racing material two small pictures of a Gee Bee that was my impression of the classic Golden Era aircraft. With its bumped cowl, big landing gear fairings and racy looks, it had been on the top of my list of things to build for a long time. The problem was that I had never seen much about it, but finally located a poor three-view of the aircraft, which enabled me to do a set of plans for a .40-powered RC model of it. This was the Gee Bee Model Y Senior Sportster. I built the model and found that I had the best flying model I had ever flown. It would be a great contest ship, except I didn't have suitable documentation for contest flying.

This started me on a search for photos and other information on this classic aircraft. As my family still lived in our home in Chicopee Falls, I had them search around with the hopes that I could locate a member of the Granville family that might still be in the area. Nothing turned up for quite some time, although I did find two photos available from the National Air and Space Museum, and they suggested I contact the Connecticut Aeronautical Historical Society from which I also got two more good photos. It wasn't a lot, but it was a start and did enable me to enter the model in some contests and the Model Y became a familiar in the winner's circle in many contests in the eastern and northeastern area of our country.

I continued my search for material and finally got my big break when, through the EAA of which I am a member, I located Robert H. Granville, one of the five famous brothers who had designed and built the Gee Bees. I sent him some pictures of my Model Y and told him of my problem in locating good photos necessary for documentation for contest flying. He answered immediately and enclosed some photos of the Model Y and also one of the Model D for me to copy. I had them copied and immediately returned his originals, and we corresponded with each other as fast as the postal system would carry our letters. Bob had been completely away from aviation for 35 years, but was very interested in my modeling activities and wanted to see my Gee Bee model. I designed another Gee Bee as I did the Model D Sportster and bob supplied me with a wealth of information on this aircraft. As the 1977 contest season was near, Bob expressed a desire to see

me fly the Gee Bees if I was to fly in a contest near enough for him to attend. I sent him a list of the contests that I planned to fly in during the season, which included a new contest at Rhinebeck, New York, which would be a contest just for models of the Golden Era. This was a contest I really looked forward to as I had the models for it. Bob expressed a desire to attend this meet as he had always wanted to visit the Rhinebeck Aerodrome where the contest would be held and he would get to see my Gee Bees fly at the same time.

Bob and his family arrived on Friday afternoon and I drove up to the contest early Saturday morning and set up my models with a photo display I had put together for the event. The photo display included a photo of each of the different Gee Bee aircraft that were built by the Granvilles that Bob had supplied me with. I had also borrowed two models of Gee Bees that had been built from my plans by other club members and also got a long-time friend, Bert Williams of Westfield, Massachusetts, to bring his models of the Gee Bee bi-plane he had designed several years previously and his Model Y from my plans. Bob enjoyed meeting all of the modelers and was really enthused at seeing the RC models fly. He had never seen one before. He called my flights for me and was very excited at seeing a model of one of his family's creations fly.

We had a great weekend, which is one I will never forget, and the most rewarding part of it for me was Bob's remark when we parted after the meet's end when he told me, "Henry, this has been the most enjoyable weekend of my life."

This really made my weekend and I realized I had rekindled his interest in the great aircraft that he and his brothers had designed and built nearly 50 years ago.

My next model project was one of the Gee Bee racers. Bob supplied me with the information and photos necessary to do a model of the R-1/R-2 Long Tail Racer, which was the final race plane built by the Granville brothers. It was built late in 1933 after the accidents of the R-1 and R-2 racers. It was a combination of parts of the two aircraft as it had the original wing of the R-2, which had been mated to the repaired and elongated fuselage of the R-1. That is the reason for the R-1/R-2 designation. It carried the registration of the R-2 (NR2101) and its race number, seven. This was caused by the rush to get it finished and as the original wing of the R-2 (a new wing had been installed on it before its accident) was intact and needed not to be refinished, it was quicker to use the registration on the wing and just paint the fuselage to correspond with it.

I finished the model in time to bring it with me when I attended the surprise 45th anniversary party for Bob and Eva Granville, held in Cornville, Maine, during the winter months of 1978. My model was used as a centerpiece at the party and, as you can well imagine, was a big hit at the party. On the return trip back to New Jersey, I stopped in Manchester, Connecticut, and visited with Howell W. (Pete) Miller so that he could see the model of the aircraft he helped create. He was very impressed with it and signed my drawings for the model (as had Bob Granville), verifying the accuracy of the model plans.

A few months later, Bob and his wife, along with their other son and his family attended the Rhinebeck Classic model meet and we had another super weekend together. My R-1/R-2 was a sensation at the meet, as no one thought it would fly. It was the first public appearance of the

model, so no one had seen it before except for the few club members who had seen it fly at home. Bob again acted as my caller on my flights.

After my success with the first three Gee Bee models, I decided to build another Model Y. Not just another Model Y, but a very special one. Since my first one in 1975, I had gathered a lot of photos and information on the aircraft and could now build a much better one. The new Model Y would be built in ¼-scale. The plans were worked up and the model was built. It was a far better flying model than the smaller one and that had been the best flying model I had ever flown. It was really something special and would win for me many outstanding awards over the next few years. It took best of show in its first contest and followed that with a first at the WRAM Show in New York. Then it won the giant scale event at the big Bealton, Virginia, meet and was awarded the grand champion award of the meet by virtue of getting the highest scores of the meet in all events. It topped that off by being selected the best of show by the Bealton pilots. Later in the season it took first place in the District II scale championships, and the following season it took top honors in scale at the Toledo show. It was a real winner.

My next Gee Bee was another ¼-scale model of the Model E Sportster, which has also won many contests, and this was followed by a ¼-scale version of the Model D Sportster. The Model D has also been a big winner for several years now. Next it was time to do a ¼-scale R-1. This was completed and was flown for the first time in public at the Bealton meet in 1981. It won first place getting the highest flight scores of the meet.

Next was a ¼-scale model of the Gee Bee Model Z. This was built in 1983 specifically to be flown in the National Championships (the Nats) in Chicopee. It wasn't quite finished for the meet, but was done enough to fly. It flew very well in its first event, earning high flight scores. It was finished after the Nats and has many wins to its credit in the past four seasons of flying. My last Gee Bee was a 1/5th-scale model of the Model Y. It was built to fly in the 1985 Nats at Chicopee where it was awarded the top static score of the meet.

The other model that I designed was another of Pete Miller's masterpieces, a well-known aircraft that few realize was built by the Granville organization in Springfield. This was the beautiful Time Flies, built for Frank Hawks. The model was done in 1/5th-scale and like all the others is consistently in the winner's circle.

I can remember at one of the Rhinebeck contests when one of my Gee Bees had a balky engine that just would not run consistently. After the day's flying I made an engine change from one of my other Gee Bees that I had with me but wasn't flying at the meet. My helpers in making the change? Bob Granville, his son and his grandson. Zantford Granville's son, Robert, has been to many contests with me as a helper. During the Gee Bee celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Gee Bee Company in Springfield a few years ago, an evening of model flying was arranged during the event and I flew my Model D Sportster at the event. It was also flown by Don Foster who had done most of the arranging for the weeklong events and Zantford's son, Robert, who is a very accomplished RC pilot, was with us and he flew my Model D Sportster. This was the second Gee Bee that I had built and was a winner of many contests. After Bob flew the model, I

felt it was time it was retired and Bob was the last one to fly it and I feel it has been retired with very high honors. It will not be flown again.

My time right now is being devoted to writing the real story about the Gee Bees and the men who built them. Research for this book has been underway for close to 15 years and the monumental amount of material that I have acquired in unbelievable. My material has been gained directly from the individuals involved rather than from what has been written in the past by writers who gave no consideration to accuracy of their writings. The information I have compiled has come directly from the men and women who were actually involved with the design, building, flying and racing of these spectacular aircraft.

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