
Biography of ROY MORIHIRO

Birth to Death

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Career:

- Worked for Jim Walker in 1940 and helped him develop U-Control
 - Won a Free Flight contest at Fort Lewis, Washington, in June 1940
 - Continued to fly Control Line models while in a U.S. internment camp in Hunt, Idaho during the early 1940s
 - Before serving in World War II, worked for Cleveland Model Airplane Company designing kits
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Remembering Roy Morihoro – The Way it was 60 years ago

By David Katagiri

Roy, a dedicated modeler and an American of Japanese ancestry, was evacuated from his farm in Troutdale, Oregon, to an internment camp in Hunt, Idaho, in 1941. This action, following Pearl Harbor, was done under martial law by our government. General DeWitt, who was commander of West Coast defenses, declared that it was necessary for national security reasons. Roy was about 19 years of age at that time and fully involved as a model airplane hobbyist and designer.

I first met Roy at Fort Lewis, Washington at a Free Flight contest. At that time (about June 1940), he was employed by Jim Walker of U-Control fame. The contestants were flying Comet Clippers, Zippers, New Rulers, Modelcraft Spooks and the new Comet Interceptors. Roy entered a new event called the marathon event where the objective was to accumulate as much airtime as possible within a limited elapsed time. Roy's tactic was to fly five-second engine flights running back and forth to re-launch. His little American Ace, powered by an Elf twin, performed flawlessly to earn Roy a win. I can still remember Roy bounding through grass almost as tall as he was to retrieve his model. Several of his competitors didn't return before dark, because they chose long engine runs and were blown downwind. Roy was also helping Jim Walker (American Junior) demonstrate a tiny all-balsa Ohlsson 23-powered model tethered by a pair of wires. Jim was holding the control handle while Roy would run through the tall grass and hand launch the small model. Little did we realize at the time that we were witnessing the birth of U-Control. Roy was an initial investigator of the concept while in Walker's employ. Roy, being an American born of Japanese ancestry, was swept into a U.S. "concentration camp" as a result of Pearl Harbor. Roy continued Control Line flying in the Hunt, Idaho, camp though handicapped by the lack of materials due to the "War Effort."

By 1943 many American boys of Japanese ancestry either volunteered for U.S. Army service (yes, from within the internment camps) or obtained employment out of the restricted West Coast area. In separate ways, Roy and I were destined to meet again in Italy while assigned to the segregated Japanese-American 442nd ("Go For Broke") Infantry Combat Team.

It was early April 1945 and the combat team was laying low in an olive grove by the Italian village of Pietrasanta and Alpine Azzano. The 442nd was assigned the mission to break through the German "Gothic Line," which was the last Nazi defense line of the Italian Campaign of

World War II. Before we jumped off to attack the German stronghold (lead by Africa Corps' General Kesselring), Roy and I spent several pleasant hours talking about model airplanes. I learned that Roy had married Alice and obtained a job with the Cleveland Model Airplane Company in Cleveland, Ohio. He was designing model kits until he joined the Army to eventually become a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) gunner in G Company of the famed 442nd "Go For Broke" Regimental Combat Team. On April 5, 1945, in the dark of early morning, the 442nd Combat Team launched an assault on the west flank of the "Gothic Line" to engage the enemy at the top of little-known mountains named Carchio and Folgorito. Soon the entire western flank of the "Gothic Line" erupted into a blazing battle, which pushed the Kesselring Machine Gun Battalion out of their hardened mountaintop emplacements in less than two hours. We pressed on – village after village – to the marble quarries of Carrara where each conquest was paid for with many killed and wounded on both sides. I was wounded weeks later by mortar shrapnel (known as a million dollar wound) and was taken to the Pisa Hospital. The team pressed on past La Spezia and to Aulla. The enemy finally yelled "Comrade" and surrendered.

After a couple of months following the surrender of the enemy in Italy, I set out to find Roy. I found G Company and was saddened by the news that Roy did not make it. I learned many years later from a chance meeting with Roy's BAR partner that he was killed while in an assault on Fort Bastione above the marble quarries of Carrara. It was luck of war as the fort was the last enemy stronghold before their defeat and surrender of the Germany Army in Italy.

Over the years I have tried to learn more about Roy and his modeling ventures, but with little success. I did find an article Air Trails magazine published for Roy about his ambitious project of a large sailplane-like Free Flight model powered by a retracting Ohlsson 60 engine.

*(signed) David Katagiri
July 2002*

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