
Autobiography of FRANK ZAIC

Modeler since 1926

Lifespan: August 1, 1912 – May 27,

AMA Number: F1

Compiled & Submitted by JB (4/01)

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Career:

- Formed the a model club called Aeronuts in New York City
- Started writing his famous books in 1935 called *Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- He and Lt. H.W. Alden started the publication, *Model Aviation*, in 1935
- A founder of the AMA in 1936
- A member of the AMA's first executive committee
- In 1933, created a company called JASCO with his brother, John, and sister, Christine
- Wakefield team member in 1934, 1935 and 1937
- Set a Class D open class outdoor cabin record of 17 minutes and six seconds at the 1938 Nationals
- Wrote technical research papers for the *NFFS Symposium Reports*
- His designs have appeared in *Air Trails*, *Model Craftsman* and *Popular Science* magazines
- Designed the red, white and blue elliptical emblem of the AMA, enclosing the torch of learning and the golden wings; the name and the trademark have been with the organization ever since
- His aerodynamic research data and text presented over the years in his books and articles could have been compiled into a college text for first year aerospace engineering students

Honors:

- 1956 – (FAI) Paul Tissandier Diploma (first American to receive that)
- 1960 – AMA Fellow
- 1969 – Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1978 – National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1989 – Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 1987 – Kits and Plans Antiquious Hall of Fame
- 1998 – AMA Pioneer award

Jim Bennett, Junior, compiled this biography on Frank Zaic. He wrote the preface for the autobiography written by Frank Zaic.

Preface

By Jim Bennett, Jr.

Frank Zaic had five careers in model airplanes. Building and flying as a national and international contestant, author and publisher, supply business operator, designer and producer of kits and researcher in the science of aerodynamics and the design.

Zaic was one of the first named to the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Four others share the honor. He was next named to the National Free Fight Society (NFFS) Hall of Fame and the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Hall of Fame. In 1956, he became the first U.S. citizen in model aeronautics to win the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) Paul Tissandier Diploma, an award in memory of an early French Airman, for outstanding accomplishment and service. NFFS honored Frank for a quarter century of *Model Aeronautics Yearbooks*.

He was born in 1912 in Slovenia near the city of Ljubljana. The city name, “The Loved One,” was a crossroads for Napoleon. Charlemagne, centuries ago held meetings not far from the Zaic ancestral ground. Turkish armies used the plains and the passes in the Alps on the way to Vienna. The language is Slav.

Frank has blue eyes, but he says, “an anthropologist might say his features are Mediterranean.” Zaic’s family home ground is 45 miles from Trieste on the Adriatic Sea, 40 miles from the Italian border, 25 miles from the Austrian border and 140 miles southwest of Wiener-Neustadt, Austria, probably the world’s most beautiful Free Flight site.

His father, mother and sister Christine arrived in New York City before he did. At age 10, he made the crossing from Hamburg to New York City without family members or friends on a relatively small ship, 10,000-ton class. Twelve days and a rough ride in stormy seas brought him to Ellis Island and then Manhattan. Frank says he traveled from, “The valleys of the Alps to the canyons of Manhattan.” He lived in an area now called the East Village and his years from 1922 until his entry in the U.S. Army Air Force were there working primarily in model aeronautics.

After the war, Frank was at Cornell University in Ithaca. Frank and Carmen were married in 1959. They moved to California near Los Angeles in 1962.

Frank and his brother John started building model airplanes in 1926. The following year and five years after Frank’s arrival in New York City, Charles Lindbergh landed at Curtiss Field outside Minneola on Long Island. Richard Byrd and Clarence Chamberlin were waiting to make their Paris flight. Excitement was high. Frank did not get to Roosevelt Field the morning of the takeoff. However, he was encouraged to begin his life in aeronautics.

He gained knowledge reading *American Boy* magazine. *American Boy* incorporated model airplane design news and contest results of the Airplane Model League of America (AMLA). Later he and his brother John used aviation data available at the New York Library. Frank and John formed a club and Frank coined the name Aeronuts.

Frank and John started a supply company for the builders in early 1933. They called it the Aeronut Supply Depot. In 1934, the company was named the Junior Aeronautical Supplies Company (JASCO) on 328 East 6th Street. Next, they moved to 83 East 10th. In 1940, the name was Junior Aeronautical Supply Company located at 100 East Tenth Street. JASCO was a premier supplier of balsa particularly indoor. However, JASCO furnished a complete line of supplies including engines. Microfilm was invented and the name coined there by one of his associates.

Another associate founded model Research Laboratory (MRL) and Brown rubber began and later sold to US Rubber Co. The JASCO Beam Scale Kit was an important contribution to the art of indoor. Frank’s JASCO catalogue was a premium booklet listing supplies available with descriptions and explanations of balsa, tissue, microfilm and all the other materials and

components along with construction and assembly hints.

In 1932, Frank was a draftsman for the patent office. Patent drafting is a specialized skill to illustrate inventions as clearly as possible. Frank used the techniques for drawing his yearbook model designs. He used the American Amateur Radio Relay League's handbook and monthly's as a guide for his yearbooks. He had been flying full size gliders too and began a logbook. He decided along with help from brother John to start a book for model airplanes with design, flight data, and commentary. He called it the *1932 Model Airplane Guide & Logbook*, a book on model airplane design and aerodynamic theory.

In 1934, the book became the *Junior Aeronautics Yearbook*. The *Model Aeronautics Yearbook* name began in 1935. Frank was living alone when he began the book on Sixth Street near Second Avenue in a two-room, walkup flat. A chimney for a coal-fired boiler passed outside a kitchen wall warming the room slightly. Hot water was available. The bathtub was next to the kitchen sink. Filling the tub gave a little extra warmth in cold weather.

He and Lt. H.W. Alden started the AMA publication *Model Aviation* in 1935. The yearbooks continued with the 1935/1936, 1937 (5,000 copies sold), 1938 (10,000 copies sold) and in 1939 a book of pictures and comments of the Detroit Nationals was prepared and published later. *Model Glider Design* was published in 1943 after Frank had entered the U.S. Army Air Force. The books resumed after the war: *Model Aeronautics Encyclopedia* Volume I and Volume II; the yearbook issues in 1950/51, 1953, 1955/56, 1957/58, 1959/61, 1964/65, 1968 and *Circular Airflow and Design* in 1964. In 1982, reissues of the 1927 through 1934 model airplane data in *American Boy* were published in a volume called *Model Airplanes and the American Boy*. *Frankly Speaking*, a book of poems, witticisms, philosophy, anecdotes, and autobiographical records of Frank's life from memory and diaries was published in 1991.

JASCO continued through the 1941 to 1945 war years with Frank's sister, Christine, and their father carrying on. Frank served in a U.S. Air Force B-24 Liberator Group and was in Italy when the war ended.

Frank's design and contest career included all facets of model aeronautics and his specialty was outdoor rubber. He was a Wakefield team member in 1934, 1935 and 1937. He placed third in 1934. His 1937 Wakefield entry, a double ellipse wing, elliptical cross-section planked fuselage twin fin model was detailed in the August 1938 issue of *Model Airplane News*.

Frank won open outdoor rubber cabin in 1938 at the Detroit Nationals with his New Yorker IV design. He set a class D open class outdoor cabin record at that meet of 17 minutes, six seconds. The design was featured in an article in the June 1939 issue of *Model Airplane News*.

The July 1977 issue of *Model Builder* magazine presented New Yorker IV as "Old-Timer Model of the Month." Frank, with his New Yorker IV, appears in color on the front cover. Zaic was U.S. Wakefield team manager in 1937 as well as team member. He managed the team again in 1949.

Frank designed a series of towline and hand launched gliders. His *Wolf Wing Thermic* gliders included a 100-inch wingspan, a 72-inch wingspan, a 50-inch wingspan and all balsa 36-, 20- and 18-inch wingspan designs. Two simpler towline designs were the *Floater* and the *Trooper*. The Thermics and the Floater were produced in kit form by JASCO and were popular designs.

Zaic flew full-scale gliders at the Aero Club Albatross (ACA) in New Jersey and later at Elmira, New York, then the soaring center of the U.S. In 1933, Frank earned a glider license signed by Orville Wright. Frank met German designers and engineers Wolf Hirth and Alexander Lippisch and aviator, test pilot and glider pilot Hanna Reitsch

He wrote technical research papers for the *NFFS Symposium Reports*. Frank's designs have also appeared in *Air Trails*, *Model Craftsman* and *Popular Science* magazines.

His designs are considered masterpieces of classical design in engineering and aesthetics by many model airplane and full-scale aeronautical engineers.

Zaic's aerodynamic research data and text presented over the years in his books and articles could have been compiled into a college text for first year aerospace engineering students.

Frank, one of the founders of the AMA, was a member of the executive council of the AMA in 1935 when they met in Saint Louis during the National meet. Lt. H.W.Alden originated the name Academy of Model Aeronautics, called in the first meeting, American Academy for Model Aeronautics. Frank designed the red, white and blue elliptical emblem of the Academy, enclosing the torch of learning and the golden wings. The name and the trademark have been with the organization the 66 (2001) years of its life and great growth.

Frank Zaic's model aeronautics career started before the Lindbergh flight. Seventy-five years later his interest and research continues. Frank is talking of another publication. His name is known worldwide. Founders, creators and pioneers of model aviation were friends. They were his co-creators in beginning the science, art and sport of the hobby.

The following is the autobiography that Frank Zaic wrote about himself with information on his two-year's younger brother, John, who was also a modeler.

Our Younger Years

In 1913, my father needed more capital for his coach and wagon shop. Friends in America wrote that he would have no trouble finding work in an auto factory. (Auto bodies were made from wood at that time. Also, my mother could find work in a straw-hat factory. She knew how to make straw-hats from straw braids as her father had a hat shop.) My father and mother, with my sister, Christine, sailed to the States. They felt that I was too young to make the long and uncertain journey and I was left with my maternal grandparents. Besides, they had planned to return as soon as they had accumulated or saved the amount they needed.

World War I started in 1914, preventing the family's return as planned. No word [came] from them for years. Luckily, my grandparents' home was not in the war zone. It was in a small village not too far away from the Julian Alps, which separated Austria from Slovenia. I still remember seeing bi-planes flying once in a while. There was a military airfield near the capital city, Ljubljana. I remember making a small "bi-plane" from thin boards.

As soon as the war was over, the family returned with two additions, Johnny and Albin. Father started his coach shop again and was busy with work, using the ash wood he had stored before leaving. Not sure why, but he and mother decided to return to the States. So [they left] sometime in 1921, taking Christine and Johnny with them. I remained with grandmother while Albin and Tony were entrusted with friends. Again, the idea was to have us follow them after they were established. I did follow them in 1922 with my uncle who was returning to his family in Chicago after stayed at the ancestral home for one year, as specified in my grandfather's will. (I have quite a story to tell about the time I spent in Hamburg, Germany, all alone for two months while recovering from eye injuries incurred by the locomotive cinders.)

I was 10-years-old when I arrived in New York City via Ellis Island. What to do about schooling? I did not know a word of English. Why not put him in the same class as John? (He was in the third grade in parochial school.) In that way, John could tell me what the Sister wanted me to know or do. Starting with kindergarten books, I read phonetically. In a way, I got private instruction in English. I had no trouble with arithmetic as I was ahead of the class in this subject. Gradually, I was able to merge into the class studies. I moved with Johnny into fourth and fifth grades.

It just so happened that the fifth and sixth grades were in the same room with one Sister taking care of both classes. Since I was two years older than the others were in the fourth grade, she decided to let me try for the sixth grade. My arithmetic made it possible. By now, I was able to make sense of the English text. Seventh and eighth grades were also held in the same room with one Sister teaching both. Here again, the Sister skipped me into eighth grade to find out if I could manage it. It worked and I was able to graduate with my own age group at just slightly less than 14 years of age.

Model Planes – A Bonding with our Lifestyle

The main reason why I was able to skip classes, besides having had arithmetic beforehand, was that John and I became avid readers. Besides books from the library, we also managed to buy Frank Merriwell and Nick Carter secondhand paperback books for five to 10 cents. (At that time, you could buy three O'Henry candy bars for 10-cents.) In addition, we also read *Boy Mechanic*, *Boy's Life*, *American Boy* and other magazine we found in the library. Our hobbies changed from chemistry sets, which we got for Christmas, battery electricity, bow and arrows made form umbrella stays and other such pursuits. Somehow, we managed to find something else when we got tired of what we were doing.

Then, sometime in 1926, came model planes. I am not sure how we found model planes. It could have been that we read about them in the magazines, including *Popular Aviation*. Later on, we also found books in the library that had to do with model planes. The designs published were beyond our beginner abilities, so we made our own versions from whatever we had on hand. Soon after, we found Ideal Model and Supply Company that was within walking distance from our building. Not recalling just what kind of models we made, I do remember a Taube-like wing shape, then twin pushers and a bi-plane, which I made from an all-hardwood kit. When I finished it, it was just able to roll across the street. Gradually the models we made were capable of flight and we tried them out in Central Park. We were all alone. I remember that one of the newspapers sponsored a model plane contest in Central Park. We saw Heinrich, Broadfield and some of the other model plane builders whose names we had met in the magazines. Their models flew, but in a mild sort of way. We never saw or heard any mention of a model club in New York, so that we were on our own, more or less, during the 1926 to 1927 years.

It just so happened that I was working by the time I was 15 so that we could afford to make models. This was my own decision. Going to high school at that time was not a basic requirement. Toward the end of the eighth grade, we had a presentation for a business school, which sounded good to me and helped me to decide. Why I told my parents that I wanted to go to business school I do not know. It could have been that I just had no concept of what high school would do for me. In a way, it would have been more economical to go to high school, which was free, than to pay for the business course. However, if that is what you want...

Starting soon after graduation from the eighth grade, I began taking these courses at the business school that was located way up on 45th Street and Fifth Avenue, near the site where the *Model Airplane News* magazine would be operating later on. My family lived on Fifth Street near Second Avenue. Sometimes, to save five-cents on streetcar fare, I used to race the Third Avenue streetcar all the way up to 45th Street to make sure that I would get to school in time for the morning session.

In the school, most of the students were girls, as you would expect. The first few weeks were a novelty as taking shorthand and typing were all new to me. A few weeks into the courses, the instructor asked me if I would like to have a job as an errand boy after school. Why not? Therefore, I got my first job with a dental technician, delivering dental fixtures all over the city. Salary? \$1 for a four-hour day or \$6 per week. I gave this sum to my mother, as it was custom at that time. Then she gave me back what I needed for carfare and lunch.

After several months of business school, I realized that office work was not for me and so informed my parents. Well, do whatever you like, [they said]. There was no suggestion about going to high school, nor did I have any inclination to do so. I roamed the streets for a while looking for "Boy Wanted" signs and found one. It was an embroidery place where I scratched off dried cambric fabric from the base material and also made deliveries. This job lasted only a few weeks. Our friends mentioned that there was an opening for an errand boy in the straw-hat factory where they worked. But, before I could get the position, my father had to take out a

\$1,000 life insurance on me from the foreman who was an insurance agent on the side.

Soon after starting this job, I enrolled in the Washington Irving Evening High School in the mechanical drafting class, which met three nights a week and was not too far from home.

It seemed as if I had natural ability for this course. It was also true that since John and I had been poring over model plans in the magazines that I felt at home in drafting class. Also, when in the seventh and eighth grades, the Sister had photos of sailboats on her desk. I would quite often draw large-sized copies of these boats on the blackboard. I sure hated to see them being wiped away when the class got started after lunch. In 1928, John graduated from the grammar school and enrolled in Peter Stuyvesant High School nearby.

Eventually I became a packer and shipping clerk with a salary of \$15 or a bit more. But, I could not see any future in it. Consequently, when another family friend offered me a job in his fender and radiator repair shop, I took it sight unseen. Maybe I should have looked. The shop was located way over on the west side on the corner of 32nd Street and 10th Avenue, requiring a subway transfer and a long walk. Summer and winter, the cars were parked outside on the street or sidewalk waiting to be repaired. In time, I learned how to bang out heavy gauge car and truck fenders of that time, take off radiators, check for leaks in the water tank and solder the leaks with a gas torch. I must have been on this job for almost 18 months, earning \$27 for a 44-hour week when I decided I had had enough. My hands were getting on the heavy side so that holding a drafting pencil was getting awkward. I gave the usual two-weeks notice.

Would you believe it? On the evening of the Friday on which I left the job, our drafting instructor, Mr. Taylor, asked me if I would be interested in being interviewed for a drafting position. Yes! It looked as if I just was not meant to have a vacation. On the following day, I was interviewed by Mr. Prager and Mr. Kahn. They had a patent drafting office. I do now know if anyone else was interviewed, but they told me to come to work on Monday at 8 a.m. The salary? \$10 for a 44-hour week. Quite a letdown from \$27. Yet, as you know, it eventually turned out to be the best for my yearbooks' publication. The office was located in the Park Row area near city hall. At the start, the work was very mean on my eyes. It took more than a month before the eyes would closely focus on the fine line work. To rest them, I would look out of the window. I had a clear view of a portion of the New York Harbor. Fortunately, the office was heated during the winter.

By the time the *American Boy* magazine made its first announcement of the Airplane Model League of America formation in its September 1927 issue, John and I were familiar with building and flying model planes. Consequently, we were able to merge into the program without hesitation. We ordered the Baby ROG (Rise-off-Ground) kit and had very good results with it. It was the only model we ever built from a kit. (My bi-plane does not count.)

It took about a year before the newspapers and other organizations picked up the movement. During this period, we were flying models on our own. After they flew across the street or veered off when launched straight down the street, we began to fly in Central Park. When the

park became too small, we took the subway to Van Cortlandt Park, which had a much larger field. Also, in Central Park we had interference from the park police. We do not blame them as we used to attract large crowds of spectators, watching us prepare and fly the models.

While working at the radiator place, one of the partners offered to write to the Parks Department about getting a permit to fly models in Central Park. Not being sure how he presented the need, but sure enough, he got a permit for me [*the original permit is on file in the Zaic Collection of the National Model Aviation Museum Archives*]. It was number one and dated March 2, 1929, good for one year. We tried it. As the crowd gathered around us, as usual, a policeman came. "Keep moving," he said. "You will have to get off the field." I pulled out the permit. He looked at it then at me. He had no choice. He cleared the crowd away from us and we flew our twin pushers.

At the beginning, we had Van Cortlandt Park all to ourselves. So, you can imagine our surprise when we saw someone else trying a twin pusher on the other side. The flyer's name was Tom Boland. He and his father had to make a two-hour subway ride from Brooklyn to find a place to fly. We became close friends.

In the 1928 to 1929 years, the model activities reached a high peak nationally with many local contests. The newspapers and the stores played it big with photos and stories appearing weekly. We went to as many meets that could be reached by public transportation. Locally, we were able to fly in armories and, by having them available, we tended to favor indoor models. We could hardly wait for the next issue of *American Boy* magazine to find out what was going on and what kind of a model would be featured that month. Our building time was limited. John was attending full-time at Stuyvesant High School while I worked and had three night classes. (Later on, when my three-year course in drafting was completed I took up a full five nights and three periods of academic high school study.)

We, naturally, tried to improve our flight time by trying out different designs or layouts. But, we really had no idea what the changes would do or why we were doing it. Just hoping. Or, if a design flew well, we may not have known why it did. To find the answers, we started to visit the main library on 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. It very likely had the most complete available collection of aviation books, pamphlets and NACA reports. Can you just imagine or picture two youngsters—just with grammar school background—trying to make sense out of textbooks used by aero-engineers, especially since the information was strictly for full-sized planes, which had pilots to control them throughout the flight while our models were on their own when released from our hands?

This contradictory fact was not obvious at that time as the models tended to follow the full-scale layout with respect to proportion between the surfaces, dihedral, center of gravity location, etc. There were books devoted to model planes, but they did not have any hints on how to fly them aside from moving the wing back and forth until the model had a good glide. It could be that the power used on the old designs was on the mild side. Many contests held in the pre-1928 years were for distance. Gradually, by trial and crash, the overall flight capabilities of models

improved with time. This may also have caused us to have a policy of never flying the same model in two contests, always have a new one that had greater expectations, even if it meant staying up all night before the contest and testing it in the morning of the meet.

(NOTE: Not sure whether it was a wish to repay the library for the time I spent there or just a case of vanity, but be it as it may, I used to send a dozen copies of every new yearbook that I published until about 1955. And you can just imagine my feeling when I checked the aviation card files to find my name on one of the cards. Later on, I wanted to reprint the old copies and I wrote to the library to find out if I could borrow one of my books. The library replied that it had only one. Some of the readers failed to return them.)

In 1929, my father, who was now a naturalized citizen, and mother decided to have another try for "home." Father made crates to hold disassembled beds and other house furnishings. These crates provided space in which to pack our model supplies. While at "home," I made a twin tractor fuselage model. It flew very nicely. After being there for several months, Christine and I decided that there was no future for us in the old country and sailed back to New York. We started housekeeping with \$100 by buying secondhand furniture and house wares in Woolworth's five and dime store. I got my job back in the patent drafting office while Christine began work in a hat factory. Later, my father, mother and Johnny returned then Albin and Tony, the youngest. And thus, John and I were back in the model game.

Although our "spare" time was limited from 1930 onward, we still managed to enter all of the local and nearby contests. John placed or won several firsts. He was especially good with hand-launched gliders. He developed a sweepback wing design and the side arm launch, which enabled him to place the glider in a circling pattern to hold on to any wandering thermal. Since we had access to the armories, we tended to concentrate on more indoor models and flying than others who had flying fields available. This situation was also evident in other large cities, such as Boston, Chicago and many others. We formed, with others in the New York City area, an informal club for which I coined the name Aeronuts. Although we had no formal meetings, we did group together at the contests.

Quite often, the armory roof struss works would snag the models. The only way to get them down was to climb along the sides and along the beams. I had this experience in the Kingsbridge Armory with its works 100 feet above the floor. It was obvious that a tethered balloon would do the job. But, where to get a hydrogen-filled balloon? They just did not have them around the corner at the time. I do not recall just how we got the idea to make our own hydrogen, but it must have been John who always came up with solutions when needed. Of course, it could be that our chemistry experiments led us to make it. We had no trouble getting muriatic acid, which is what I used to solder radiator leaks with a gas torch. (Heat the area, with it with a brush soaked with muriatic acid and the area of "silver" ready for the appliance of new solder.) But where to get the metal for the hydrogen generation? I found that the strips used to hold down linoleum edges were made from zinc, so bottle, balloon, muriatic acid, and zinc strip, generated enough hydrogen pressure to fill a balloon. Thus, we developed the model "nudger." There is no record of anyone falling off the girders while retrieving a model plane.

With the Great Depression in full swing by 1932, father and mother decided to move or return “home.” Home was now a villa with an extensive garden or buildings in the suburb of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. (In the past, this city was a meeting place for many historical events. Some of the famous personages present at such meetings were Charlemagne and Napoleon.) They had purchased this new home in 1930 before returning to the States at that time. John and I opted to remain in New York. We held on to two rooms of the apartment—kitchen and a bedroom. Our meals were basic. John did most of the cooking as he was home while I worked. For more information on this period of our time, see *1934 Junior Aero Yearbook* on the history of JASCO and the yearbooks.

In the April 1931 issue of *American Boy* magazine, there was a notice that the magazine would be unable to sponsor the 1931 Nationals. The Depression was affecting the magazine’s advertising and circulation. Other sponsors, especially the Detroit Chamber of Commerce, which used to contribute \$7,000 annually, were also unable to continue. The May 1931 issue announced that the 1931 Nationals would be held in Dayton, Ohio, during June 29 and 30. That was the beginning of the trend to have the Nationals in different locations every year. In 1932, L. Bamberger Department Store sponsored the Nationals in Atlantic City. This was close enough to enter our first Nationals.

The gala occasions of the previous Nationals were not repeated, but the competitive atmosphere was there.

Locally, the Evening Graphic newspaper sponsored several contests, indoor and outdoor. They also presented good write-ups. At one of the indoor meets, John accumulated enough winning points to be awarded the three-foot Howard Hughes Trophy. The individual winners were also treated to a trip to Washington, D.C. Stern Department Store also had a club and held contests. One particular contest was held in Central Park with a dignitary platform in the middle of the Sheep Meadow where Mayor Walker and others could watch the action. They got action when the speed event was held. The models were hand-launched from this platform. One of my friends, Ted Bellak, was sure he would win this event, as his model was rocket-powered. So, you can imagine the excitement when Ted’s model exploded just a bit beyond the official stand. I won first place with a speed of 99 mph with a hardwood wing twin pusher over a 100-foot course.

Always Exploring

It could be said that the 1928 to 1934 years were an era of continuous development in the Free Flight activity. Very likely, it was the beginning of Free Flight, as we know it today. Although the magazines did publish Free Flight models, the details were more or less picked up at the meets or in correspondence. For a while, we used to send postal cards to each other on any new discovery. Still, the basics were not known so that when we started to use higher power, we faced problems. But, in time, this was solved by using larger stabilizers, moving the center of gravity back, generous and polydiheral wing. All in all, it was fun – always looking forward to

making a model that would win. If it did, we may not know just why it won, but we would build another with improvements that did not come close to the winner. Improvement in the supplies or material also helped. Balsa became standard and available. This is especially true for indoor models when the microfilm was developed.

John's first sight of the microfilm was on Jerry Kittel's model at one of the contests. The film was on the thick side. Jerry explained that he could not make it thinner as the film would tear when lifted out of the water. When John visited Jerry, he noted that Jerry used a round hoop under the film to remove the film from the water. Since a certain size of film was needed to cover a wing, half the diameter of the hoop had to be on the large size. As you can imagine, the surface tension on the film was strong enough at the center of the hoop to cause the film to break if the film was too thin under the circumstances. John's solution was to make the loop long and narrow. Thus, the surface tension of the water would be acting on a relatively short "thord" of the loop.

(For background, see *Microfilm History*, page 146 of the 1964 to 1965 *Yearbook* and also catalog sections in the 1934 *Yearbook*.)

Early in 1932, Ted Bellak talked me into joining his full-sized glider club. Sounded good. It meant getting up at four on Sunday mornings, taking the subway to the Hudson Tubes, bus number 28, to a street where the club car would pick me up. If we got to the field, about 25 miles away, without a flat tire, we felt the day was with us. I soloed on the day I joined. After the homemade primary was assembled, they had me sit, facing the breeze with someone at the tip to prevent tipping. I tried to keep it level with ailerons. Almost at the end of the day when everyone had a chance to fly several times, I was belted on the plank seat, the towrope slipped into the glider's release hook. My wing tip holder coordinated that take-off with Gus Scheurer, the founder of the Albatross Glider Club, on the tow car facing me. The car started gradually picking up speed until the wingman could no longer keep up. Then it was up to me to keep the sliding primary level. I managed to do so on two tows. On the third tow, the speed was a bit faster. Gus motioned and called, "Up!" Slight backpressure on the stick and the primary eased off the ground. It must have been all of three feet. Then Gus called, "Cut!" I pulled the release and I was free from the tow. The free glide must have been all of 50-feet and a bit more. So, as far as I was concerned, I had soloed.

It was a great treat to get away from the city and out in to country where one could yell as loud as one wanted for whatever reason. There is more to the gliding effort—the company of others. Trips to Elmira took place during the Gliding Nationals. Being in the beginning of the formation of the Soaring Society of America, meeting some of the top glider pilots of the day and the sheer excitement of being up there, all alone, with the wind hissing along the ears provided some memorable moments. Judging the lift of the glider by the proverbial "seat" and the unknown of what could happen during a flight were challenging.

This period is still very special to me and I do not hesitate to bring it up for the slightest reason. It is my FAI class B glider license, signed by Orville Wright. (He was the president of the NAA

at that time.) I earned it by making a minute flight out and back to the take-off area. The maneuver was considered the required 360-degree flight. Class C required a flight of five minutes. I kept a flight log. I think that it took over 80 take-offs and landings to accumulate a total flight time of one hour.

There was the experience with McMillan Cadet that Ted talked me into a partnership. We paid \$125 for it with trailer. I do not remember how he got it from Erie. This was a glider far out of our flying experience. Heavy steel tubing fuselage, no instruments, low cockpit so that it was difficult to judge air speed. Almost had it on the second flight when the controls felt sloppy while attempting a left turn, nose high. Following the basic rule of shoving the stick forward and to the right, it was just in time as the Cadet sort of plunked hard, but level. Thus, the 16th year youngster and fellow member, whom we had let fly the glider because we were using his father's car for towing, wiped the single wheel landing gear on landing. Ted and I spent a whole week substituting a skid for the wheel. Both Ted and I were able to control the Cadet by now. But, luckily, the youngster crunched a wing during landing. Why luckily? Well, Ted and I had planned to tow the Cadet to Elmira, take out our C license test and fly in the Nationals. Ted repaired the tip in time to come. He found a buyer. One of the better-known pilots took it up on aero tow, high enough to execute 50 loops. While being towed, the trailer slipped off the road, or whatever, and the Cadet was again damaged. Not long ago, while reading the Bungee Cord, I noted that someone was rebuilding a Cadet. My letter to the magazine advised that whoever was doing it should make sure that he flew it fast, etc. I got a reply from the builder. Yes, the bill of sale had Ted's name on it, so that our Cadet is still alive. Of interest here is that Ted followed the soaring scene and that he glided across Lake Superior from Michigan to Canada in a Mimimoa.

After John left, it was a matter of adjusting to being alone, preparing meals and generally working out a daily routine. There is no doubt that being in the model game, having model supplies and publishing books, making models and competing made it impossible to have a normal lifestyle – or feel that I was out of phase to the period. Five evenings of night school also helped me on the social scale. The Newman Club, of which I was a member, had socials or dances once a month. The evenings during summer vacation time usually found me in a movie house after supper. Of course, there is more of my “outside” of model time, but that does not seem to belong to the subject.

Here again, the “Yearbook Story” in the *1934 Yearbook* should cover some of this period. It should mention that, at the time, I met Lippisch, Ann Reich and many others known in the aviation circle. I also had many visitors who were Yearbook readers.

My earliest memories of Lieutenant Alden were meeting him at contests where he coached a boy from his neighborhood (I just cannot recall his name). Later on, we found that he was behind the Junior NAA series in *Model Airplane News* magazine. We found out how much influence he had in the aviation sphere during the 1934 Nationals, which were held in Akron, Ohio. When we arrived there, we found out that we could not fly in the dirigible hangar because the whole floor was covered with rubber latex. When this situation was brought to Lt. Alden's attention, he went

to the headquarters offices. In no time, enough floor space was cleared for us. In fact, I made a record flight of over 12 minutes with a pusher. It flew from one end to the other in a straight line. The reason that I was able to make a record is that the open class had just been established.

I would see Lt. Alden more often after 1934. It seemed that he sort of took over the official position of the model presentation at the NAA. I am not sure why, but at one time he took me to Washington, paid the fare and the hotel and we visited the NAA office. Also, during the evening we visited one of his shipmates, Admiral McIntyre, who was the private physician to President Roosevelt at that time. So, that in many ways we had direct connections to some of the most influential people of the time, which could be of help in the organization. But there was an undercurrent between Lt. Alden and William Enyart [director of the NAA]. Enyart was also a visionary, in a way, but more to benefit the NAA. His idea of junior aero activity was to go along with the plan that was followed by the Germans – form squadrons, etc. At least that is the way it appeared. There were a great many organizations, which catered to the air youth, but that is a history in itself and should be collected. In the model field, all we were interested in was having as many contests as possible. The Nationals were now established, showing no sign that they would stop. I saw Lt. Alden for the last time in 1937 when I visited him on a Navy receiving ship in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I am not sure why he was there, only that he may have had some problems. See NAA in model airplane activities, first page in my one and only issue of *Model Aeronautic* magazine in the *1934 Yearbook*. Come to think of it, I am just wondering what would have happened if I did get a better response from readers to the magazine.

While on the subject, Enyart at one time did ask if I would be interested in taking a job with NAA to look after the AAMA interests, but I had no special reason to do so. In a way, it was for the best, as we could not find a better man for the job than Albert Lewis.

A New Family Business

All this time, in 1932, the family in Slovenia was well established. Father was very resourceful. Instead of making coaches and wagon, he started a wine garden and distillery. The large garden and other facilities fitted into the plan very nicely. How did he know about distilling? He learned by practical experience while in the States. The Prohibition Era did not prohibit making wine for personal consumption. Although I am not sure if the same was true for spirits.

Be that as it may, every fall, father bought quite a large number of grapes. The building in which we lived at that time had no heat or hot water and the basement still had a clay floor. This kept the year-round temperature just right for wine and wine making. We crushed the grapes with a device that had two rollers rolling inward into which the grapes were fed. The resulting liquid mix was poured into open-end barrels or butter tubs. (The wood from the boxes we saved for use in the stove.)

When the skins from the grapes floated to the top, it was time to transfer the fermenting liquid into barrels where it kept on sputtering sediment through the top opening. When it subsided, it

was time to siphon the “wine” into another barrel being very careful to lead the rubber tube down gradually so that it would not suck out the sediment at the bottom.

Well, it would have been a waste to throw away this alcoholic mixture into the drain, so why not distill it. Five-gallon copper distillation units were sold on the open market. I used to set up the unit in the washtub in the kitchen near the sink so that it would be almost “dropping” when he came home from work. I might also mention that this activity made our family very popular and we had friends visiting us quite often. We remember those days when friends were leaving they used to give us nickels, dimes and, once in a while, even quarters. Soon as they left, mother would collect the change and she marked the amounts on the back of a closet door where each of us had an account. Eventually father would make a deposit of what we had saved and deposit our collection.

In 1939, the American Consul warned all Americans that the future in Europe did not look good. So, the family decided to heed his warning and, gradually, all returned to the States. It was hard to leave as the family had it made just as they had hoped in the past. John had finished his apprenticeship with a dental technician and had also made models during the stay. I have an idea that he was glad to get back to the States. As noted in the *1934 Yearbook*, adjustments had to be made all around.

It might be opportune to note that during the war period, Albin tried to work for others, but eventually joined me at JASCO. But, not for long. He was one of the first to be called in on the Selective Service Act before World War II was declared. Tony, the youngest, like Albin was a very avid skier and competed in downhill racing and ski jumping. When the mountain infantry division was being formed, he volunteered, as did many of his fellow skiers and sportsmen. A short time before the division was shipped overseas; Tony had a serious accident resulting in a medical discharge. In a way, this may have been for the best as his battalion suffered a very high rate of casualties. Albin became an instructor as a field artillery spotter and had six months of service in France to get firsthand experience. John was on the light side, so he was not accepted until almost at the war’s end.

Before that time, John was making scale models that were used as prototypes for productions of models for visual identification. My time in the service is noted in the *1934 Yearbook*.

Not sure just how much more to add at this time. When viewing the past, I wonder at the influence the model plane activity had on my life. In a way, it may not have brought in riches that could have been banked, but I think I had the better of it all in knowing as many people as I did and still do and getting letters from readers who let me know that the books had an influence for the best in their lives.

Books by Frank Zaic

- *1934 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*

- *1935/1936 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1937 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1938 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1939 The National Meet in Pictures*
- *Model Glider Design*
- *Model Aeronautics Encyclopedia Volume I*
- *Model Aeronautics Encyclopedia Volume II*
- *1951/1952 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1953 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1955/1956 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1957/1958 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1959/1961 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1964/1965 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *1968 Model Aeronautics Yearbook*
- *Circular Airflow*
- *Model Airplanes and the American Boy 1927 to 1934*
- *Frankly Speaking, 1991*

For further information on Frank Zaic, please see his manuscript collection in the National Model Aviation Museum Archives. The collection includes many original documents such as letters to and from Frank Zaic, as well as much information pertaining to model aviation that he has gathered.

For a history of JASCO and the yearbooks, please see his 1934 Yearbook, specifically pages 34, 113 to 114, and 179 to 189.

The following addendums were made by Frank Zaic in 2003.

My First Model Plane and World War I

I was 4-years-old when I assembled my first model plane. It was in 1916. At that time, I was living with my grandparents in Slovenia when it was part of Austria. I was left with them when Mother, Father and sister, Christine, went to America in 1913.

There was an airport near the capital city, Ljubjana. It was used by the Austrian Air Force for practice flying while the pilots were waiting to be transferred to the action areas. Many flights were flown over our area everyday. So, you can imagine how much attention they received from the “groundlings.” Could it be that my watching the planes made me want to make a model?

I talked to my grandfather and asked if I could have a board of wood. I told him why. He looked at me then he took me to the shed where he had a stock of old boards. I looked for a thin one. I found one that looked good. “Can I have this one?” I asked. “Yes,” he answered.

I drew two wings and tail surfaces on the board. Grandfather helped quite a bit. I do not remember how I determined the sizes. I think the wings were about 12 inches long.

Luckily, we had a carpenter across the road. I used to spend a lot of time there. He would let us kids play with the odds and ends that were on the floor. He looked at me when I presented what I had laid on the floor from which to cut the wings and tailpieces for me. I pleaded with him to make me the fuselage to fit the surfaces. I was glad to hear that he would cut the parts when he had the time.

He cut the wings and tailpieces to the sizes that I asked. He determined the fuselage shape and size. It all looked very good to me. I borrowed nails and a hammer from my grandfather and nailed the parts together.

I placed the glider model outside during the day so that neighbors and Army men could see it. I have no memory of what happened to the model glider. It could be that it did instill in me the urge to make model planes after I arrived in New York in 1922.

Austrian Infantry in World War I

It could have been 1915 when the Austrian Infantry arrived and established its base not too far away from our village. Soon after its arrival, five officers came to our house. They looked it over. It met their needs. They commandeered the largest bedroom, a room at its entry and the living room. They told us that they would be back in four days and they wanted the rooms cleared of our personal items.

Well, there were two small bedrooms, a kitchen and a storage room. There was also a room in the attic. We cleared the rooms as best as we could. In the meantime, my grandfather also started to make two bunks in the stable for him and me. It was done in time. By the time the officers returned, we had the area under control.

Luckily, the stable was on the generous side. On the wall opposite of the entrance, he built two bunks – the top one for him and the lower one for me. The stable was large enough. There were two cows. They warmed the place up during the winter. Their bedding was dried leafs which were changed often and saved for the fertilizer. On the other side of the wide walkway was an expecting mare. I used to brush her now and then. Her “time” came and I was presented with a baby!

The foal and I became friends right from the start. I do not remember how old I was when I attempted to mount. I started just by sitting on its back. Gradually, it moved with me on its back. I did not try to place reins in its mouth. Eventually, from a slow walk, we got to the trot. At one time, I took it to a stream where it widened so that it was on a shallow side. I gave it a good washing. On the way home, it got into a good trot. For some reason I did not look ahead

when we were approaching a tree branch over the road. When we got to it, I was swept off its back. It just stopped and looked back at me as I was lying on the ground. Luckily, no harm was done to me. Both of us walked to our home that was close by.

As soon as the foal was on its feet, the Austrian Army took its mother away. My grandfather had two horses before the war. Soon after the war started, they took one away. It could be that he left the one that was expecting. Or it could be they left horses that did not meet the Army standards. And those who had them were willing to let their neighbors use them. I might mention that my parents' home was one of five that straddled the main road.

During the war, Grandfather was still able to carry on with his business and take care of his farm. The two pigs were fed until their special days. Apples and other fruit trees supplied the fruit. Our family was not in such a critical position as the people who lived in the cities.

Special World War I Incident

Perhaps the reason I remember that particular time so well is that the officers did not mind having me with them in the living room when they came back from duties. They spent their time just sitting, talking and smoking. I do not remember just how it got started. Time came when one of them gave me a lighted cigarette. I liked it. I do not remember it having any effect on me. It became a habit. As I noted, I may have been 5 or younger at the beginning of smoking. So, I did not mind being with them. The problem came when they left. No cigarettes. Luckily, I was used to smoking just one cigarette per day.

I solved the problem by "borrowing" money from my grandfather when he was not around. He kept some change on the shelf in his room. The store did not mind selling me cigarettes. They were not in packages, so I could buy just one. I also had a friend who "borrowed" a cigarette from me and shared it with others. So, actually we did not need a lot of money to play with the smoke.

There came a time when I wondered how a cigar would taste. I got one cigar. After finishing our daily cigarette, I started the cigar. I had to take a deep breath to get it started. Finally, I had it lit and after taking another breath, I passed it to my friends. Suddenly I had a "swirl" in my head and I fell down. The other two followed me down. Cigar smoke got us! When we recovered, we looked at each other. I do not know how the other two passed the stage. All I know is that I never smoked in the future. Maybe just a puff when the cigarette was given to me in company. The urge to smoke disappeared from within me.

Just wondering how much money I saved by this particular incident in my childhood!

Sheep Meadow in Central Park

I was just about to launch my twin pusher into its first flight when the man in blue came up and

in a loud voice said, “Everybody off the field!” The temptation to swing the arms forward and release the model was there, but I thought better of it and lowered the twin down. And while my brother, John, and I were disassembling and packing the models into our carrying cases, the policeman dispersed the crowd that had gathered around us during the flight preparation. Well, better luck next Sunday.

After our street became too small for our models, we found that the only open space for flying in New York City was located in Central Park. It is in the middle of the park, near the rowboat lake and it is known as the Sheep Meadow. You may have seen it many times in T.V. programs.

At that time, we lived on the lowered east side. Not exactly, the east side that is/was featured in the films, but in the area where Pete Stuyvesant lived and not too far away from the Village. To reach the Meadow, it meant a 15-minute walk to the Astor Place Subway station, a five-cent fare and a ride to 72nd Street and Lexington Avenue. And then about half an hour or more of walking with our model boxes.

Since I worked during the week – which at that time meant four hours on Saturdays – our flying was restricted to Sundays. As you can imagine, Sunday was one day when Central Park was loaded with strollers. So that by the time we set our boxes down in the middle of the Meadow, we were in the center of a spectator ring several persons thick. It was a very cooperative assemblage.

The ring would open up in front of us when we were ready to launch the twin pushers. The flights were on the gentle side as they were not overpowered. Just a gentle or rambling circling around. But we were seldom able to get in more than two or three flights before the park police broke up the crowd and shooed us off the meadow. We could not blame the park management. They were trying to preserve the Meadow as a green area and did not allow loitering, sitting, lying, or any other group activity.

Then came a special Sunday. We brought our models out as usual. The spectators’ ring seemed a bit larger than usual. But, before we had a chance to get one flight, the police were already in action. Normally, we would be in a hurry to pack up and leave, but this time we just stopped assembling and waited for the police to come directly to us. We did not move when we were told to get moving. Instead, I pulled out a slip of paper and handed it to the policeman. He read the paper, looked at us for a moment, handed the paper back without a word, then turned around, and told the spectators to get moving. And we were now left alone to fly as much as we wanted with police protection, so to speak. The piece of paper I handed to the policeman was permit number one to fly model airplanes in Sheep Meadow, Central Park.

The address on it placed us on the west side, while actually we lived on the east side. The address shown was of the place where I worked as a radiator and fender repairman. (It was not uncommon for many of us at that time to start working at 15 and go to night school. I had a bit of business school but did not like it.) I talked about our flying problems with our salesman. He decided to write to the Park Department about it. I do not know what he wrote, but he must have

made a good case or he may have implied that we were small children playing with model airplane toys.

We did not take advantage of our special privilege any more as our models were out-flying the area. We had to move our flying to Corlandt Park, which meant two subway changes and round trip of at least three hours. But the wide-open spaces!

Incidentally, the Sheep Meadow was used many times as a contest site for the Junior Birdman contests and others. And there were thermals at times that dropped the models atop skyscrapers. In one particular contest, which was managed by Ben Shereshaw while he was director of the model club at Stern Brothers department store, we had Mayor Jimmy Walker as a visitor. He was sitting on the platform from which we also launched our speed models. Since there was no restriction on power, one of my friends, Ted Bellak, made rocket-powered models. I have no idea how fast they would have covered the 100-foot distance because they exploded about 10 feet after launch. You can imagine the commotion on the stand! I won first place with a twin pusher design that clocked 9 mph. Do not ask for the design. It was all chunky hard wood wings and propellers with about a three-second motor run. Please do not do any calculations, as I want to believe the timers were right and that I really did 9 mph!

My Air Force Days

Too old to be drafted prior to U.S. involvement in World War II, I wrote to my friend, Herb Weiss, who was working for Coast Artillery at that time, wondering what to do. I could easily find employment in some defense industry, but felt that it was an easy way to stay out. Instead of his reply, I received a letter from the Coast Artillery Board asking me if I would be interested in working for it. At that time, it was logical for me to answer yes. I might also add that the draft age did not come up to my age at that time.

Before leaving, I told the boy who was helping me after school to keep the place open as long as he could and pay himself with the sales of the model supplies. But, it did not work that way. A few days after I left, my sister Christine came to the shop and told the boy that she would take care of it. She also asked my father if he would come and cut the balsa stock and also hard wood later on when balsa was no longer available for modeling. (Later on, it was available at places that used it for defense, but only in leftovers.) My father had experience with wood. In the early days, he had a wagon and coach business in Slovenia. And so, JASCO was kept alive.

I moved to Virginia where there were many model builders working on war projects so that I would feel at home. Also, I would be with a friend who would help me get settled. As it turned out, the working atmosphere was special. Herb was close by on the floor. My window overlooked the bay on which the ships and convoys were sailing. The work was also special. I was put in charge of projects that needed changed or corrected. This meant moving some distance. Like the time when I was sent to the coast artillery location to do some work. I wondered how I would be able to accomplish what was expected from me, because I had no

particular experience in the armament and other phases of the Army.

When the draft age reached mine, the board gave me a choice of staying with it after a few weeks of basic training at the beach. After basic training, I could be back with the board, continuing the work I was doing, but would be a soldier under military standards. This also explained why there were so many enlisted men in the building with fairly high rankings. This would be an easy and safe way out for me. But, I was curious to find out what was going on outside. I decided to go home to New York where I applied at the draft board. I was sent to Fort Dixie for Army entry exams.

The Air Force was building up at that time. So, if there was any indication on the entry form that a person had any experience with aeroplanes, the form was closely scrutinized. Since I had model planes and full-sized glider experience, as well as being a writer, I was a natural for the position as squadron draftsman, which they had on their list. So they assigned me that position.

During the basic training in the south, I strained the ligaments of my feet. I was excused from the usual daily marches and exercises, but did attend other classes. I could not let this free time pass. I wrote to my brother John to send me my portable typewriter and a small drawing board with odds and ends. Then, on a furlough, I went to New York for more odds and ends that I needed to prepare a book for the printer. Back in the basic training camp, I typed inside and outside of our dormitory building. Then I was sent to a squadron in Salt Lake City, Utah. Here again I had no duties and was able to keep working on the book, Model Glider Design.

When the B-24 group squadrons completed their training, the personnel were sent to the East Coast. I was assigned to a squadron so that I was now among other ground crew members and began to feel at home.

I was now able to write notes on individuals to send to their hometown newspapers. But, I still had time to write the book. I found a typesetter not too far away and they sent me print copies. And thus, I was able to complete pages of the new book, Model Glider Design. I finished this just in time. I mailed it to my brother John a day before all outgoing mail and phones were out of business for security reasons. When John received the material, he arranged for its printing after doing some preparations. He advertised in the model magazines that it was ready for readers during the war.

The main reason for the security to close down was that we left the Virginian base and were taken to the wharfs on the Atlantic Coast to be near the convoy ships that would take us to Italy. The light crews would fly to Italy in their B-24s after the ground personnel arrived there and had the area prepared for flying missions.

Convoy Sail to Italy

It took the convoy 30 days to reach Italy. We were on small ships. In a way, we were on our

own. I am not sure if we had to sleep on our blankets or had small bunks. It was like a camp. We were free to roam all over the ship. There were no time schedules or classes. In fact, it was so quiet that after 64 years I do not remember in detail how we managed the days. But you can imagine what was in our minds as we were steaming over areas filled with submarines all the way to Italy. Most of us spent our days playing cards or doing something else to keep our minds off the potential. We finally reached Italy. What now?

We disembarked in the southern port of Italy. I am not sure if we spent a night there, but I do remember that we were sent in trucks and busses up the east coast of Italy to a farm near Bari. All the land around us was flat. The only sign of civilization were two buildings by the road. They were empty, so they were used to prepare food and also overnight sleeping on our blankets. Gradually the area became ours. We got some trucks with which to go to some warehouse somewhere. And we got tents. It was very crowded before we had enough of them to have the routine number of beds. All this time we were eating dried food that was served by our cooks. Luckily, there was a poor spring nearby so that we had no water problem. Gradually the area was livable. The buildings were taken over – one for cooking and eating and the other for the office. So, it looked like a civilized place. We got the area in shape by the time the B-24 bombers began to arrive from the States.

This area had been selected for bomber operation a while back, as there was an area nearby which was cleared of all vegetation and trees to create a runway good enough for heavy bombers. And, it was not long after our arrival that the squadron was in operation with all members of the squadron present.

My position was now assigned; I was the squadron's public relations writer. I worked from the tent that I shared with five others. It was on a bit of high ground. I was given a table and a chair. I raised the side of the tent high enough to get light for typing. Later on, we got electric power so I was able to have a lamp. Also, we had six-foot high brick walls built with the tent over the top and several windows at our expense. So that in time we were living in a homemade house. I might mention that some others did have a complete house built on their area. The costs of bricks and labor were on the low side – the value of the dollar versus the lira was in our favor. In time, we felt at home and carried on our individual "careers" in comfortable manner.

Somehow, my work helped the squadron members live through that time. Every once in a while I was stopped and thanked for the paragraph I wrote about him and had sent to his hometown newspaper. So, in a way, my position was being a reporter and letting the world know what was happening to particular citizens. This position gave me a feeling that I was contributing to the victory without being in the action.

Talking about action. Every once in a while I was asked if I would like to fly with the crew on a bombing mission. I was tempted, but did not have enough nerve to take the offer. It could be because when I walked to the field to pick up special stories as the squadron was landing I found that some of the B-24s did not return. But I did not refuse to fly with them when they had practice missions into which I was invited. I enjoyed such flights because I was assigned the

bombdier's place – the front of the bomber. Not only did I have the front seat, but also I was in the front plane with the rest of the squadron behind. This sure made me feel like I was part of the group.

Squadron members were beginning to receive newspaper clippings from their homes. Clippings were copies of the news I sent to the individual's newspaper about the accomplishment the individual did while with us. Other news was also sent to the entire squadron's families about accomplishments of its members. Whatever I wrote was sent to a place that sent the notes to the newspapers in an individual's area.

In time, we felt like a family and helped each other when needed. Living conditions were fair. The weather as a whole was good when compared with what others had. Personnel kept the planes in top condition so that they were fulfilling their function. Yet we ground members somehow felt cowardly when compared to what the infantry and others had to go through. Still, their efforts to keep the planes flying in all conditions may have saved them from the end by clearing the areas in front of them. I feel that I helped them be where they were.

I could cover more about the squadron and its members, but it seems time to let World War II end. The squadron and its three "cousins" were relaxing. No engines were running. In fact, it was so quiet that I have a problem remembering what did happen. All I can remember is that orders came to pack up and get ready to leave the area. I do not know why, but I was taken to the airport, placed in a plane, which for some unknown reason at that time, flew to Africa. From there it flew to Brazil's capital. There an Air Force sergeant met me. It seems that I was selected to write about the Air Force members and send the text to their hometown newspapers. I kind of wonder if my work in Italy had something to do with it. The demand was on the low side so that I had quite a bit of time to myself.

I took part of the time in a painting class where there were some women who kept looking at me. Also, I had time to see the capital and its area. Somehow, the time came for me to be flown home.

I still wonder how much influence my yearbook writing had on getting me to that phase of my life. One never knows what may come up in his life if he lets circumstances have their way.

NOTE: When we arrived at our base on the east side Italy, the Germans were already on the west side below our eastern position. The distance between the eastern and western shores of Italy at our location was about 175 miles. So, you can imagine how I felt when I was on the night guard duty.

NOTE: The squadron was made up of about 375 men.

*(signed) Frank Zaic
May 16, 2003*