

## THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN GAS MODEL CLUB

By members  
Bob Bradford, Earl Bradford, Don Langohr, Jr., Dick Sheppard, and Fred Staudaher, Jr.  
As told to  
Nick Shrauger

November 8, 1997

### The Club

Prior to and after World War II there existed in Bozeman a unique and enterprising model airplane club. Members of this club confidently chose The Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club as their name. They were not about to identify themselves as just from Bozeman or the Gallatin Valley and before the club disbanded members indeed experience journeys far beyond the Rocky Mountains. This is the story of the Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club (RMGMC) as told by several of its members.

During the 1920's and 30's model airplane flying became increasingly popular. The first National Model Airplane Meet was held in 1926, 23 years after the Wright brothers made the first sustained manned flight in a controlled gasoline-powered aircraft.<sup>1</sup> The airplane age was young and people were fascinated by them. Models propelled by gas engines became an important sport in the 1930s.

Bozeman's Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club started in 1938. Most members were students attending Gallatin County High School or Montana State College. This is a listing of those who were members during the Club's existence:

Ole Bemis	Bob Bradford	Earl Bradford	Paul Christiansen
Wally Christiansen	Joe Copenhaver	Donald Davis	Harry Fletcher, Jr.
Wilbur Garver	Elmer Harding	Dean Hauseman	Don Heck
Buster Hoyt	Joe Huff	Don Jacobs	Don Langohr, Jr.
Paul Milam	Orville Oma	Herbert Pasha	Jack Penwell
Paul Poirier	Bob Poor	Jack Ratzlaff	Bill Riggert
Dick Sandberg	Lloyd Sandiland	Dick Sheppard	Radford Smith
Fred Staudaher, Jr.	Bill Stotesbury	Bob Thompson	Albert Truitt

How the Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club started is not clear. Bob Bradford credits Harrel Wrenn of Bozeman, locally known for building fancy box kites, as the first to build and fly gas engines models in this area. This may have sparked the interest of these youngsters. Airplanes were popular and were often in the news. Model flying clubs were popular throughout the country and there were several clubs in Montana, including Butte, Helena, Missoula, Great Falls. Many flying clubs were organized by Exchange Clubs or other organizations. However, according to Fred Staudaher, "this group was both ambitious and independent. They did not have nor did they desire a sponsoring organization." Fred goes on to say "It seemed that the stronger the sponsoring organization, the weaker the club." The Club met at members homes such as the Bradfords, Langohrs and Staudahers. Parents were very supportive as it "kept youngsters busy and out of trouble" according to Earl Bradford. Club members elected officers but it was run in an open and friendly manner. All interested in flying were welcome to join, and members helped each other even though they competed against one another during contests. As Earl Bradford said, "Everyone helped everyone because they just wanted to see the planes fly." Club dues were 75 cents per year and members received membership cards.

Members of Bozeman's RMGMC were soon busy building, testing, modifying and improving their planes. Money was an issue with this sport. Members needed funds to buy supplies and equip models with engines. Batteries, gas and oil were also needed to fly them. A bad landing could quickly cause damage requiring new parts or even a complete rebuilding of the model. Motors cost from \$7 to \$20 and kits from \$2 to \$10, not to mention other equipment and materials needed.<sup>2</sup> Dick Sheppard said "I delivered the local paper and worked on local farms, etc. to get enough money to buy model airplane supplies".

Originally model supplies were purchased locally. According to Fred Staudaher, there were two model hobby dealers in Bozeman both having sons who were club members. They were Smith Furniture owned by Radford Smith's father (located where Universal Athletics is now) and Hauseman's Office Supply owned by Dean Hauseman's father (located just east of present day Miller's Jewelry). These stores stocked a small inventory of model parts, but dealing with special orders was a secondary priority. Club members wanted faster service so they decided to start their own store. Comet Model Airplane and Supply Company was their favorite so they wrote for a dealership. Comet refused saying that Smith Furniture was their dealer, and offered to bring concerns about timely special orders to Mr. Smith. In the meantime, RMGMC contacted another firm called Skyway. That firm agreed to a dealership but only if a \$100 order was placed in the next few weeks. One-hundred dollars was a large sum to youngsters in the late 1930s. But members placed advanced orders and even put money into an account in order to meet the minimum. With this accomplished, they were then able to obtain a dealership from Comet and other suppliers as well.

The RMGMC Store was quartered in member homes including Bradfords, Poors, and Staudahers. At that time the standard dealer margin was 40% of retail price. Things were fair traded in those days and a \$3.95 kit sold the same at all dealers and catalog stores. Members decided to sell to club members at a 20% discount with the balance of the profit after shipping to go to the club.

The store stocked the most popular kits and engines, as well as balsa wood and critical parts. Special orders went out immediately. They bought clear airplane dope in gallon cans from a supplier in Butte. The Consolidated Freightways driver would pick up and deliver to Bozeman for about 25 cents. The dope was sold to buyers who furnished their own glass containers. When a contest occurred, the store would obtain inventory items that would sell well at the meet. This included critical parts propellers, condensers, coils as well as some flashy items like spinners. (Spinners were small colorful covers that dress up and hide the propeller shaft and nut. The smooth and shaped surface also protected the plane during crash landings). They usually sold out at the meets, netting a nice profit for the club. This money financed travel to other contests and prizes for meets in Bozeman. RMGMC members were noted for their white coveralls with the Club name on the back and the member's name in front embroidered in blue. White pith helmets were also worn by some members.

## Contests

The first contest in Bozeman was held in 1938.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Gordon Mandeville gave permission to hold it on his farm which is still operated by his son John. (The Mandeville ranch is north and west of where of the motels on the north side of the freeway at the Seventh Avenue interchange.) According to John Mandeville, the northwest boundary of Bozeman at that time was near Beall Street). Members stenciled airplane silhouettes on light paper for tickets and sold them for ten cents admission to raise money for the Club. One individual, Charles Vandenhook, was an enthusiastic supporter of the organization and paid \$10 for his admission. Members recall making \$30-40 on the first meet. Earl Bradford won first with a 74 second flight and received a gas engine. Don Langohr, Jr. was second and won a Comet Zipper model plane kit. Radford Smith placed third. John Mandeville was given a model to build as a thank you for the use of their farm. (According to John, he never built the model, and although he was friends with the club members, he often had to milk during the time members were flying their planes.)

Later in 1938 the first annual RMGMC meet was held, again at Mandevilles.<sup>4</sup> Model clubs from Livingston, Big Timber and Belgrade participated. The public was invited free and an estimated 500 attended. First place received an Ohlsson motor, and second place a Brown 'E' motor. Third and fourth places received model kits. Twenty five seconds was the motor running time. Club President Bob Bradford

flying a Zipper won first with at 3 minute 49.4 second average. Earl Bradford flying a revised Clipper logged 2:55.5. Albert Truitt flew a Clipper 2:15.1 for third and Donald Davis with a Lancer was forth at 2:7.3 minutes. (Wallace Christiansen was noted as Vice President, and Bob Poor as Secretary/Treasurer).

Contests consisted of timing how long models stayed in the air after a timed motor run. There were nine possible categories in which to compete. These were Junior (contestants to age 15), Senior (age 16-20) and open (21 and above). Within each age group there were three model classifications depending upon cubic inch engine displacement. These engine categories were A (.19 cubic inches), B (.20-.34 cubic inches) and C (.35 cubic inches or more.) Members could fly the same plane in different categories by changing the engine. Most members joined the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA). They marked their planes with their AMA registration number.

Each contestant flew three times, and the average time was used for scoring. Engines were two-cycle, and burned a mixture of about 2:1 white gas and SAE 70W motor oil. The idea was to get the plane as high as possible within the allotted run time. Hopefully the plane would catch a thermal and remain aloft for a longer time. Several times planes went out of sight and were never found. Others were found and returned because members placed addresses on the model and offered rewards for return. They also placed ads in the newspaper and on the radio asking for found planes to be returned.

Contests continued with increasing frequency and by 1941 RMGMC members were consistently winning. In May of 1941 more than 50 planes were expected at the RMGMC contest held at Mandeville's ranch<sup>5</sup>. However bad weather limited the number of entries and flights. Earl Bradford lost a plane which flew toward the Bridgers. By this time RMGMC members were also flying exhibitions with their models. Don Jacobs flew a tail-first pusher. Bob Bradford had a model dummy which was to eject and parachute out of the plane, while Earl Bradford's model provided a smoke screen. One feature was a simultaneous flight of ten Comet Clippers by RMGMC members including Paul and Wally Christiansen, Dick Sheppard, Bob Thompson, Dick Sandberg, Earl and Bob Bradford, Don Jacobs, Fred Staudaher and Wilbur Garver.

The state meet was held at the airport in Butte on June 8, 1941.<sup>6</sup> Prizes of \$200 in cash and merchandise were provided, and Bozeman won all six 1<sup>st</sup> places. In addition, Don Jacobs won the grand prize of an all-expense trip to the 15<sup>th</sup> National Model Airplane Championships held in Chicago on July 1-5, 1941.

The Chicago trip was perhaps the high point of Bozeman's Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club. Don Jacobs was supposed to fly to Chicago as a part of his grand prize. But, according to a news account:

“he couldn't bear to think of leaving his flying pals behind. The Exchange Club of Butte who were putting up the airplane ride and free trip, agreed to give the same amount, \$160 in cash, to help send four Bozeman boys to Chicago. Putting their best pencils to paper, the incipient flyers found that barring serious trouble, they could all make the two-weeks' trip on \$267.50”<sup>7</sup>

Besides the prize money that had won, they raised money for the trip in other ways. Bob Bradford requested \$100 from Henry Gay, President of the Bozeman Chamber of Commerce. The directors gave \$25.<sup>8</sup> The four members drove to Chicago and back in a 1937 Chrysler sedan belonging to the Bradford family. They were Bob and Earl Bradford, Don Jacobs and Dick Sheppard. In addition, Don Langohr and Bob Poor went by train. (After the meet Bob and Don went to Duluth, Minnesota where Bob picked up a new, 1941 Plymouth car for his father and the two drove back to Montana.)

It was a full car that went to Chicago. In addition to the four boys and their luggage, they had seven planes with all the attendant equipment needed to fly. The boys built a car top carrier to give them more space. The drive took 3 days. Along the way they saw lots of corn and hogs. The boys had fun calling the hogs and watch them run to the barn. Farmers probably didn't find that amusing!

There were 1500 contestants from all over the U.S. and 5000 model planes at the Chicago meet.<sup>9</sup> The Bozeman contingent stayed at the Hotel Sherman which also served as contest headquarters. Bob Bradford had two excellent flights which put him in position to win. However, his plane went out of sight and was lost during the third flight. Even so he placed 4<sup>th</sup> on only two flights. (The next day a black

youngster brought back his plane. Bob had wisely put his hotel address on it with a \$5 reward which he gladly paid). Earl Bradford placed among the top 40 flyers. Dick Sheppard recalls that the trip to Chicago was a “real treat” for him. In his words, “ Unfortunately my engine gave up and my chance for fame ended!”. He goes on to say: “ I should have bought a backup engine fore the important contest.”

Bozeman’s RMGMC continued active modeling, contesting and winning during the remainder of 1941 and 1942. Mr. Jim Spier of the Helena Exchange club donated a traveling trophy to be given the State Championship club each year. It was to be retired when it was won three times by the same club. Bozeman won it both in 1941 and 1942. (Bob Bradford received a \$100 Defense Bond for being the 1942 Montana State Meet Grand Sweepstakes winner.)

## Technical

Building models and flying airplanes is a sport for the technically minded. Where did these youngsters, typically of high school age, get their information? One source was from monthly magazines devoted to flying. Don Langohr has a collection of these early publications and the range of topics is informative.

The earliest issue Don has is Model Airplane News dated November, 1938.<sup>10</sup> This was the 10<sup>th</sup> year of its publication. Contents included stories on The Mass Production of Flying Forces, The Physics of the Airplane, The Messerschmitt BF-109 Fighter (including model plans), Designing Your Gas Model “Prop”, More Power for Your “KG” Gas Job, How to Build A Universal One Wheeler and others. This publication also contains the official news of the National Aeronautic Association. There were also kit plans. It is interesting to note that both full scale and model airplane articles were included.

In addition to the many advertisements for model planes, engines and parts, there were full page ads for careers in aviation. The Curtiss-Wright Technical Institute was one. Another was Parks Air College of East St. Louis, Illinois. It offered a curriculum of Flight Training -300 hours, Meteorology-285 hours, Navigation-92 hours, Radio Communications-420 hours, Air Line Operations-480 hours, and Aviation Mechanics-1123 hours. Earl Bradford said he wanted to attend this school in the worst way.

Another publication, Air Trails, was also popular. The March, 1940 issue was also a mix of model and full-scale airplanes articles, many with photos and stories about military subjects.<sup>11</sup> By 1940 early radio control models were being built according to another story.

There were many styles, sizes and types of models. One of the most popular for club members was the Comet Zipper which cost \$3.95. (Bob Bradford still has an original Zipper kit.) This plane had the following specifications:

Wing span: 54 inches	Overall length: 34.5 inches	Wing area: 495 square inches
Total weight: 30 oz	Wing load: 8.7 oz per sq. foot	Wing airfoil: Goldberg G5
Power plant: 1/5-1/6 hp	Climb: 2000 feet per minute	

Another plane favored by RCGMC modelers was the Comet Clipper. It had a wing span of 72 inches and weighed a hefty 3 1/2 pounds. It had a climb of 2000 feet per minute. Fred Staudaher built one in 1940 when he was a Freshman at Gallatin County High School. Another model was the Lancer (wing span of 45 inches). According to Don Langohr, Jr., Dean Hauseman and Don Jacobs built Cleveland Cloudsters which had wingspans of 64 ½ inches.

While several makes of engines were popular with RMGMC members, those manufactured by the Ohlsson and Rice company were most popular. In 1940 the Ohlsson 19 cost \$14.50. The Bantam was popular and cost \$16.50 for a .1999 cubic inch class A model. (It developed 1/7 HP and weighed 3.17 oz). Engines built by the Junior Motors Corporation called “Brownies” were often used by members as well as Cannon and Dennyrite engines. The Thor and the Herkimer were not as good according to Fred Staudaher, although the Bradford brothers recall the Herkimer as a good and powerful engine.

These one cylinder engines had a spark plug, and thus a battery and points were needed for operation. The points were right behind the propeller and the shaft was formed as a cam shaft to open points at the proper time. A coil and condenser was also required. This added weight to the plane. Prop speeds were about 8000 rpm. After the war, glow plug style motors using a more volatile fuel mix became popular, thus eliminating the weight of the electrical system.

Engine running time for contests was done with simple mechanical timers. One of the more popular brands was the Austin-Craft flight timer. It consisted of a cylinder 2 1/2 inches long, 5/8 inches in diameter and weighed 5/8 oz. An adjustable spring loaded shaft connected to a small piston extends out the end. The shaft was spring loaded causing the piston to be pulled in. Air trapped in the cylinder is forced to evacuate by the spring. A small valve is adjusted to vary the rate the air escapes and thus the amount of time the piston travels to reach the end of the cylinder. At the end of travel the electrical circuit to the spark plug opens and the engine stops running. Engine power time for contests was typically either 20 or 25 seconds.

There are many reasons why RMGMC members were successful model flyers. Earl Bradford said many club members were excellent builders and flyers. He singled out Bill Riggert and Don Jacobs as being exceptional. Earl himself was excellent and he as well as many others designed their own fuselages which performed well. (As a result of his flying in Chicago he was offered a job as a model maker at Langley Field, Hampton, Virginia. The salary offer was \$1260 per month.)<sup>12</sup> Several also carved their own propellers. Those that paid close attention to detail and were consistent in their flying were often the winners according to Bob Bradford. While members tried many different models and engine combinations, they found those that worked and used them at contests. They also understood the mechanics of flight and adjusted settings to make use of thermals.

The Bradford brothers paid close attention to details to become so successful. They made the wings of the Comet Zipper according to plans. The body was their own design. When they found the best position to mount the wing, they made little stops so the wing was placed exactly in the same place. Engines were "broken in" for five hours using castor oil to seat the pistons. Mechanical connections using clips were not reliable so wires connecting the coil and batteries were as short as possible and soldered. Small two prong plugs were used to connect starting batteries to the plane, thus making it quick and easy to correctly connect and disconnect batteries. Bob Bradford had way to test batteries (small AA cells), and as soon as one showed a slight discharge, it was replaced. (They bought batteries from Montgomery-Ward by the box, and returned any that were not fully charged.) Since the same plane could be flown with different motors, a simple, effective way of replacing the whole motor assembly including the fire wall was developed. This made engine changes, fast, accurate and easy. Once they determined the best gas/oil mixture, they stayed with it.

Fuel flow on early engines was gravity flow. Fuel tanks were normally mounted behind the cylinder between the cylinder and the air frame. Earl Bradford developed a fuel tank out of a pill box that was mounted the propeller and the cylinder. Fuel would flow to the motor even when the plane was climbing at a steep angle. Earl also preferred using thin tires to reduce drag rather than the stylish fat styles. He carved his own propellers before suitable ones could be conveniently purchased. It is no wonder they were successful competitors.

## World War II

**Model Aeronauts To Defend State Title At Missoula** is the title of a front page story in the Avant Courier dated August 9, 1946.<sup>13</sup> It goes on to say:

Five members of the Rocky Mountain Gas Model club in Bozeman will attend the state model airplane championship contest in Missoula this Sunday. Gasoline powered models will be entered by Bob Bradford, Fred Staudaher, Earl Bradford, Dick Sheppard and Don Langohr.

Bob Bradford, president of the club, will enter three planes, one in each of the free flight classes. Club Secretary Fred Staudaher will enter two ships, Earl Bradford and Dick Sheppard will have entries in the three free flight classes and Don Langohr will enter his speedy class C Control-line model in the speed event.

All the models have been built by their owners. **The club in Bozeman was completely inactive during the war as all of the 27 members were in the service. Five of the boys were killed.** (Authors' emphasis)

World War II had a major impact on the club and its members. The five members who gave their lives were Donald Davis, Joe Copenhaver, Buster Hoyt, Joe Huff, and Dick Sandberg. Copenhaver, Hoyt and Huff were pilots.

How did events of those dark days leading to war effect the club and its members? Did their participation in the club have an effect on their awareness of current events and their choices in joining the military? The authors agreed that their model airplane interest contributed to their curiosity and understanding of events leading to WWII. They must have learned from Model Airplane News and other periodicals on flying which they avidly read. The cover of the November 1938 Model Airplane News was a painting of the German Messerschmitt BF-109 fighter. An article on The Mass Production of Flying Forces had photos of both British and German fighters and transports. It also included a photo of General Herman Goering, Director of German aviation, in military uniform. Fred Staudaher pointed out other events that made him aware. He said that the high school stressed current affairs and recalls Montana's Representative Jeanette Rankin address at the high school when she "told us that the Boy Scouts could stop an invasion of the USA." He also remembers listening to speeches by Churchill, Hitler, Chamberlain and Roosevelt on the radio.

Other events occurred due to the war that effected model flying. In 1942 model planes were supposed to have timers which deployed automatic flaps to bring them down after four or five minutes of flight. This was to prevent models from causing false reports from defense spotters. Montana modelers never used these as they flew so far from sensitive areas such as on the coasts or near large cities.

Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club members also went on record in 1942 expressing disapproval that the model plane industry was considered non-essential to the war effort. Their argument was that modeling was educational and that many people learned about flying which was an essential war need. Because of this designation it became harder to get modeling supplies. There was some basis for their argument for the Navy asked Montana model builders to build 2,000 non-flying, solid models to be used for training and spotting airplanes.<sup>14</sup> These models, of every type of plane from all countries would be built on a 72:1 scale. (At this scale the model at 30 feet would look like a real plane at 1/2 mile.)

The 1942 National Meet was canceled and then re-scheduled in an off-again on-again fashion. Club members continued to compete and the 5<sup>th</sup> annual RMGMC meet was held in May of 1942. Contestants came from Coeur d'Alene, Butte, Helena, Missoula. (There were 750 spectators. Club members took advantage of this opportunity to sell concessions of snacks and candy in their typical enterprising ways.)

Nineteen forty-two was the last fully active year of the Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club until World War II ended. The Montana State championship meet was not held in 1943 as many modelers from Montana and elsewhere were serving in the armed forces by that time.

Twenty seven RCGMC members served during the war as noted above. Twenty seven stories among the millions produced during those grim times. The experience of the authors serves to illustrate the range of technical service which may have been typical of Club members.

**Bob Bradford** served as an Electrician's mate in the Navy. He entered the war in 1943 and was discharged in 1945. Before going to the service, Bob was foreman of the machine shop of Lovelace Motor Supply (present day location of Poor Richard's on Main Street) which was owned by John Lovelace. The shop was contracted to machine and build 100 brass gate valves per week for the Navy. Bob had a crew of 24 men and women who were able to machine and assemble 100 valves per day. He recalls finding his initials on several of these valves used on ships he served on during his active duty.

**Earl Bradford** was a sophomore at Montana State College studying Mechanical Engineering (aviation option) when he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1943. He received flight training in Texas and Oklahoma and was sent overseas in 1944. He flew combat over Italy and Germany in a P-47 and was shot down over Germany in 1944. He was discharged in 1946 and returned to college in Bozeman.

**Don Langohr** joined the Navy in June 1943. He became an Aviation Electronics Technician based on his score in the Eddy test.<sup>15</sup> He served in Arizona where he installed top-secret radar, identification (IFF) and jamming equipment on Navy Liberators (PB4Y). Don returned to Bozeman in 1946 and attended MSC. He was recalled in 1951 for one year during the Korean War and served on the USS Antietam, the first U.S. Navy jet carrier.

**Dick Sheppard** spent 33 months in the Navy as a Motor Machinist in the South Pacific (Saipan.)

**Fred Staudaher** quit high school to join the Navy in December of 1942. He was given the direct rating of Radio Technician 3<sup>rd</sup> Class as a result of passing the Eddy test. He became an Aviation Electronics Technician and air gunner in a PBY (Catalina) squadron in the South Pacific. He returned to Bozeman in 1946 and entered college. Fred also was recalled to active duty during the Korean War.

Information was found for three of those five Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club members who lost their lives in World War II. Here is what happened to these Bozeman natives.<sup>16</sup>

**Joe Copenhaver**, a member of the National Guard, left Bozeman in September 1940. He later transferred to the Army Air Corps and received his pilot wings in August, of 1942. He volunteered for photo reconnaissance and took special training at Peterson Field near Colorado Springs, Colorado. During that time he flew his P-38 to Bozeman on two occasions. He landed at Belgrade and stayed overnight with his parents on one of these flights. He was lost over New Guinea on a photo reconnaissance mission on March 5, 1944. Joe was 25.

Capt. Copenhaver attended the Monforton grade school and graduated class of 1939 from Gallatin County High School. He worked his way through school and a considerable portion of his income came from the sale of model airplanes he had built. After he was in the Air Corps he began carving tiny models from tooth brush handles. Two of these tiny models were presented to Bing Crosby and Bob Hope when they were at Peterson Field. Joe was survived by his parents Mr. and Mrs. Roy Copenhaver, and his wife Roena (Batterman) Copenhaver.

**Joe Huff** entered gunnery school in February 1942. He then transferred to the Army Air Corps and began flight training. He was killed on July 6, 1944 when he attempted to parachute to safety from a training plane northeast of Cheyenne, WY. His unopened parachute indicated that he attempted to jump from the distressed ship at too low an altitude. This was to be his last training flight before receiving his commission. Joe's parents were Gladys and Elmer Huff. He was 21.

**Donald Davis** joined the Army in June of 1943 and went overseas in November, 1944. He was a member of the tank corps serving under General Patton. Corporal Davis was fatally wounded by small arms fire near Pasel, Germany on April 13, 1945 just three weeks before the war ended in Europe. Don was laid to rest in the U.S. Military Cemetery at Breuna, Germany with full military honors. He was the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Archie Davis. He was 20.

An interesting part of this narrative concerns the Ohta Family of Livingston. Don Langohr relates that two outstanding builders and flyers were brothers Mashashi and Hiroshi Ohta. Their father, a Japanese immigrant worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad. "Mush" and "Ose" were Livingston club members who often were involved with the Bozeman model club. Ose injured his back in a training jump while in the military and returned to college in Bozeman. . Mush fought in Italy and later became an eminent ophthalmologist who practiced in California. He and his family were murdered by an intruder at their home during the 1970s.

As the news story above relates, the club became active again after the war. Of prime interest to modelers throughout Montana was whether or not Bozeman's Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club would win the state title for the third time and retire the Jim Spier trophy. About 4,000 people attended the meet which was held in Missoula. Bozeman won by a scant 2 points. They retired the trophy (which is in the possession of Bob Bradford), and thus continued with their winning ways. The club remained active until 1950 or 1951.

## Stories

The authors told several stories of their days of model flying. They enjoyed telling about the time Fred Staudaher cut off the brim of his pith helmet with the propeller of his plane. According to Fred he was starting his plane when a Spook 72 spiraled in under power and knocked him over from behind. The prop chewed up the helmet, thus preventing a probable head wound. Another time they had to stop and wait for Fred when he fell off the running board of the car while they were chasing planes.

At one of the first meets a plane came down near the spectators. It was heading right for Mrs. Christiansen who dived under a car to escape. Spectators had to be wary as planes were not cable or radio controlled.

Some crashes were spectacular. At the 5<sup>th</sup> annual RCGMC show held in May, 1942 the plane flown by Paul Christiansen failed to gain altitude. It came in along a row of parked cars. The first car it hit cost the plane its tail, the second car took a wing before it crashed into the third auto. That same day Mr. Hoyt, the contest recorder, was hit by the wing of another plane which then proceeded to land on a parked model. Both planes were totaled.

Losing planes on long flights due to thermals was a problem. These authors all recall having lost one or more models, some of which were never found. The cost of parts and engines, as well as the hours of work in building planes made losses less than desirable and they would put ads on the radio or in newspapers offering rewards for returned planes. In the summer of 1942 Fred Staudaher lost a plane he designed and built which used a Comet Zipper Wing. It was a good flying plane powered by an Ohlsson 23. That fall a local farmer brought the mangled plane to his Dad's store (Staudaher's Shoes) and apologized profusely for not catching it before it went into his combine. Fred said he was happy to get the motor back!

Bob Bradford lost a plane at a meet in Marysville (near Helena). A couple of weeks later he received a letter from Vincent Hohn of East Helena who had found the missing airplane near Canyon Ferry.<sup>17</sup> When Bob went to pick up the plane Mr. Hohn said he had tried to start the motor with no success. He asked Bob if it would run. Bob said it would, so Mr. Hohn asked him to start it. Bob headed outside, but the Mr. Hohn said it was ok to start it in the kitchen. Bob argued against this, but Mr. Hohn prevailed. When started, the motor blew papers all over and filled the place with smoke. Needless to say, Vincent Hohn was surprised at the power of those motors. The kitchen was a mess!

Earl Bradford made a model while stationed in Germany. The first time it flew it caught a thermal and started a long flight. Two friends had bicycles and chased it for several hours and never did retrieve it. They were exhausted when they returned.

Dick Sheppard said that after the war Earl Bradford would take a Piper Cub up to break up strong thermals over the flying area. Dick also recalls flying at the Thompson ranch (which was located on land north and south of present day Kay east of Wilson and South Third). Several times the sheriff and local police would come by to investigate reports that a plane had gone down near the ranch. The police finally suggested that maybe they should be notified when members were flying.

Members liked flying at Great Falls. The flat where the commercial airport is was an excellent place to fly. Unfortunately rattlesnakes were abundant there. It was funny to watch flyers hopping and jumping as they ran across the field to retrieve their models.

Raffling a model which had been built by members was another way the club raised money. Don Langohr and Earl Bradford recall working on one such model in the basement of the Langohr home. Don had purchased an old radio-record player which the boys brought home in a wheelbarrow. They only had one record which was the Hungarian Rhapsody #5. They played it over and over as loud as they could. Earl said, "it was so loud the dust was jumping from the floor upstairs". Both Don and Earl remarked how patient Don's parents were. Mrs. Langohr often fed them juice and cookies.

The club became active again after the World War II, but not with the same intensity. Members were older, going to college, and working to prepare for careers. Other interests, including courting, competed with flying planes. Changing technology also played a part in this hobby. Cable controlled planes made flying maneuvers possible, and then radio controls provided free flight. Contests changed accordingly. One of the hardest parts of the early contests was chasing planes. They would often land many miles away. Parents and friends were called on to follow the planes. Much open space was needed. Now, with so much urban growth, field cultivation, and fences, it would be difficult to chase planes. Radio control also eliminated the need.

Members went on to a variety of careers. Authors Bob Bradford and Don Langohr, Jr. obtained Electrical Engineering degrees, but stayed in Bozeman as merchants. Bob was a partner in the Powder Horn, and Don managed Langohr's Greenhouse. Earl Bradford found a career in retail and wholesale sales. Dick Sheppard worked as a project engineer in California, and Fred Staudaher, Jr. worked for General Electric and retired as an engineer for the Navy doing signal research in Washington D.C. Fred is the only author currently building models and plans to fly in contests held by the Society of Antique Modelers.

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Bozeman's Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club was an unusually successful organization that contributed much to the education and pleasure of those youth who participated. The cooperative, experiential learning of the members without a sponsoring organization is a testimony to members themselves and should serve as blueprint for youth activities today. The creativity and industry of the club members carried over to their service in World War II. This story is dedicated to all RMGMC members who served, and especially to those five who did not return.

Members of the Rocky Mountain Gas Model Club were indeed visionary in naming their club. But the name was not as descriptive as it could have been given the world expanse of their experiences

## **About Nick Shrauger**

Born in Butte and raised in Deer Lodge, Nick enjoys Montana history and is researching his family's contributions in Alder Gulch during the 1860s. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps in the 1950s. Nick is a retired Associate Professor who taught electrical engineering at MSU. While in grade school, he remembers seeing "huge" model airplanes built by his cousin when he visited at the home of his Aunt and Uncle Kathryn and Fred Staudaher .

## ENDNOTES

1. Trager, James, *The People's Chronology*, Henry Holt and Company, NY, 1994, p. 651.

2. *Model Airplane News*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3., Jay Publishing Corporation, Mount Morris, Illinois, September, 1940.

This range of prices is typical of those found in advertisements in this issue.

3. Bradford Scrapbook, news clipping, p3.

Mrs. Bradford, Mother of Bob and Earl, maintained a scrapbook of photos, newspaper clippings and club memorabilia for the period 1938-1942. The scrapbook now belongs to Bob Bradford.

4. Bradford Scrapbook, clipping, p4.

5. Bradford Scrapbook, clipping, p5.

6. Bradford Scrapbook, clipping, p11.

7. Bradford Scrapbook, clipping, June 27, 1941, p 12.

8. *ibid.*

9. Bradford Scrapbook, clipping, p15.

10. *Model Airplane News*, Vol. XIX, No. 5., Jay Publishing Corporation, Mount Morris, Illinois, November, 1938.

11. *Air Trails*, Vol. 8, No.6, Street and Smith Publications, Inc. New York, NY, March, 1940.

Many military plane photos were in this issue. One story told how to escape from a parachute when landing in water. The complete 1940 Rules and Regulations for flying model aircraft in the United States as adopted by the National Aeronautic Association are given on page 28.

12. Bradford Scrapbook, letter, p17.

13. *Avant Courier*, August 9. 1946.

It is completely coincidental that the five club members who contested in Missoula are also the authors of this paper.

14. Bradford Scrapbook, clipping, p20

15. The Eddy test was a military test for technical proficiency. It was used to help select candidates schools such as electronics.

16. Records of Gallatin County Servicemen of WWII, Gallatin County Historical Society.

Induction lists, obituaries and other information about men and women who served in WWII are contained in several volumes in the library.

17. Bradford Scrapbook, letter, p.41