



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JOSEPH (JOE) DALLAIRE

**Modeler, Model Aircraft Kit Manufacturer, Designer**

Born June 15, 1919    Started modeling in 1927  
AMA #1861



Written & Submitted by EPM (06/1996); Transcribed by NR (03/1997); Edited by SS (2002)

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## Career:

- Dallaire Model Aircraft manufactured machine cut balsa propeller blanks
- Dallaire's made their own Dalloid model airplane cement
- They produced over 60 model airplane kits
- Best known today for the nine foot Dallaire Sportster
- Frank designed and first produced the Asmall bore Pee Wee engine in 1938
- Frank and Joe, during WW II were in the Navy

## Honors:

- 1990: The Cloudbusters Model Airplane Club honored Joe with their Lifetime Achievement Award
- 2002: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame

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### *DALLAIRE MODEL AIRCRAFT 7-4-96*

*I first encountered the Dallaire family about 1937 when my dad and I watched them fly gas models at the old Northwestern Highway field. I was so impressed with the Dallaire Sportster that I had to have one. Quite an undertaking, a nine-foot airplane for a 14-year-old kid. But I built it and it flew great. Fact is I still have it.*

*After I received your letter asking for additional information about Joe I called him and asked if he wanted to fill out the form. He told me to go ahead and do it. So here it is.*

*by author Bud Manning with Joe Dallaire*

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As Joe Dallaire locked the door of Dallaire Models for the last time in 1990, one wonders what thoughts went through his mind. He may have remembered the day in 1927 when as a lad of eight he joined Bill Stout's Airplane Model League of America headed by Detroit manual training teacher, Merrill Hamburg. Under Mr. Hamburg's supervision a group of 20 to 25 youngsters met once a week in a church basement and learned to build model airplanes. Perhaps he thought about the business that was started to supply young Joe and the neighborhood kids with balsa wood and other model supplies. Little did Joe realize then that his interest in model airplanes was to lead to the creation of Dallaire Model Aircraft Company.

The only source of model airplane supplies at the time was Downtown Model Supply, a long trip from the Dallaire's northwest Detroit neighborhood. Young Joe's father, Joseph, and Joe's older brother, Frank, had been in the mill business, Joseph F. Dallaire Millwork. Troubled economic times caused them to close the mill business. With a garage full of wood working equipment they started cutting balsa wood for the neighborhood kids and Dallaire Model Aircraft made its modest beginning.

Dallaire's was a family business consisting of father Joseph, mother Margarete, and sons Frank

and Joe. Their first store was in the basement of the Dallaire home. Bud Manning describes his first visit to that basement store. "As my dad and I walked in the side door and started down the steps we were greeted by the wonderful odor of airplane dope and balsa wood. At the bottom of the stairs we were confronted by a small display case filled with sundry model supplies to quicken the heart of a 13 year old about to purchase his first gas model kit," he said.

Former Sky Guy and present Cloudbuster member, Gordon Hastings, also recalls those early days: "Several kids on the block were building solid and 10-cent tissue and stick models and told me about Dallaire's house and hobby shop. From that point on Dallaire's received a major portion of my 25 cent per week allowance; 5 cent bundles of scrap balsa; 5 cent bottles of that heady smelling glue, banana oil and dope; tissue at 2 cents a sheet and marvelous 10 cent kits."

The early success of Dallaire Model Aircraft was assured by the manufacture of machine cut propeller blanks, using a fixture Frank designed for a band saw and balsa wheels which they used in their own kits and sold to other kit manufacturers. Joe tells a story about his experience with their first wheel cutter, which was mounted in a drill press modified to turn 15,000 to 20,000 RPM. When Joe started the drill press, the cutter broke ricocheting lethally around the garage and was never seen again.

The Dallaire's made their own Dalloid model airplane cement by dissolving scrap nitrate photographic and x-ray film in a crock of acetone which was located in a camping trailer in the back yard. The resulting glue, after the photographic emulsion was skimmed off, was bottled in various sizes from little 1/2 ounce five centers to quarts. It was great cement and there are some 50-year-old models around today that still have sound glue joints. They also sold and distributed Berryloid airplane dope and a full line of model airplane supplies and engines. Dallaire's cut most of the balsa they sold. It was possible to give Frank or Joe a rib template from which they would band saw a set of ribs. The scratch builder could have leading edge, spars and trailing edge all cut from the same log.

They produced over 60 model airplane kits, both solid and flying models, from about 1935 to 1948.

Dallaire Model Aircraft is best known today for the nine foot Dallaire Sportster, the creation of Frank Dallaire. The Sportster has become popular in Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Antique Texaco and LER events.

Frank designed the Dallaire Sportster in 1935 and flew it to second place in open age gas Rise of Ground (ROG) at the 1935 Stix Baer Fuller National Contest in St. Louis. The plane was essentially sold locally in limited numbers. Only about 100 Sportster kits were sold during its production life. There are probably more than that number of Sportsters flying today.

The Dallaire Sportster kit didn't come in a box. When you went to buy one, Frank produced a paper bag about four feet high into which he placed all the necessary wood, band sawed ribs, music wire, bamboo paper, a pair of four and a half inch Voit air wheels and a half pint of Dalloid cement and two sheets of rolled plans – all for \$14.95.

After the Sportster Frank designed a six and a half foot model resembling a Bellanca, called the

Dallaire Cabin Monoplane, which Joe says was a good flyer but never kitted. Joe recently found part of the drawings for this model.

Frank designed and first produced the Asmall bore Pee Wee engine in 1938. As the effort required to manufacture the Pee Wee took too much time away from the rest of the business Frank enlisted the help of Ward Marvin in producing parts. In time, Dallaire's sold the rights to the Pee Wee to Marvin. (*See footnote at the end of the biography.*)

The only kit Dallaire Model Aircraft ever advertised nationally was the 1939 Pee Wee Speedster, which appeared in some of the Pee Wee engine ads.

The store remained in the Dallaire basement for a number of years where, in addition to dispensing model supplies, they also produced their own print wood and assembled kits. About 1938 a move was made to a little store on Wyoming Avenue a few blocks from their home.

Gordon Hastings recalls, "Saturday mornings usually found me hanging around the shop watching 'Pappy' (Joseph) and Frank out back sawing balsa planks into sheets and sticks and Joe out behind the counter waiting on customers. What delicious smells, balsa sawdust in the air and the aroma of dope and banana oil everywhere. Showcases full of motors, austin pump cans and hundreds of other goodies and shelves stocked with 'big kits.'"

Tether racecars became popular around 1939. Frank's interest in the cars started with the Bunch and then the Dooling. The quest for more speed, performance, and reliability prompted Frank to produce a car of his own, which was very successful.

As war rolled over in Europe, America mobilized for the inevitable. In August 1941, Joe enlisted in the Navy and trained at Navy Pier in Chicago. He went to Aviation Machinists Mate School and upon graduation shipped to San Diego, Calif. to acquire practical experience on PB5Y-5 flying boats patrolling the West Coast. After two months in San Diego, he was transferred to Pearl Harbor.

Joe achieved the rank of Chief Petty Officer as an airplane propeller specialist while attached to FAW 14. He served with Fleet Air Wing Two as crew chief in Test Flight Group in the Pacific servicing PBM, PB5Y, 2Y3, B-24, PB4Y, PV2s, and PB5YAs. At wars end, after 50 months of service, Joe returned to civilian life Dallaire Model Aircraft and model aviation.

Frank Dallaire spent three years in the navy as an Aviation Machinists Mate stationed at the Naval Air Station on Grosse Isle near Detroit, Mich.

While Frank and Joe were in the Navy their father, Joseph Sr., kept the business going with the help of neighborhood teenaged model builders.

After the war, trade association regulations prompted the Dallaires to divide the business into two separate companies. Frank moved the wholesale operation to a shop on Joy Road in Detroit and retained the Dallaire name as Dallaire Models. Joe stayed at the old Wyoming Avenue location and changed the name to Joe's. Ten years later Jack and Don Josaitis purchased Joe's and Joe Dallaire re-joined Frank at Dallaire Models. They continued producing rubber and solid

model kits until about 1948 when they ran out of their supply of plans and boxes.

As Joseph Sr. and Margarete grew older, they withdrew from active participation in the business. Joseph Sr. died in 1962 and Margarete in 1968.

The brothers operated the wholesale business together, handling a full line of model supplies, until Frank's death in 1970. Joe and his wife, Anita, and some of their six children continued to operate Dallaire models until early 1990 when Joe retired.

Joe, who is still active in modeling and faithful to Dallaire products, occasionally flies an RC assisted nine-foot Sportster and a six-foot and a four-foot version.

In addition to being model builders and flyers, Joe and Frank were active in model club activities. Both brothers were officers on several occasions, in the old Detroit Junior Chapter of the NAA and the Detroit Sky Guys.

As an ex-Navy man, Joe was drawn back to the water. He has held high office in the Power Squadron and still serves as a race judge.

In 1990, The Clodbusters Model Airplane Club honored Joe with their Lifetime Achievement Award.

Looking back, one realizes what an important part Dallaires played in model airplane activities in the Detroit area. Frank and Joe were always ready to answer our questions when we got stuck with what seemed like an unsolvable problem. They gave generously of contest prizes and their time. Those were wonderful times. They say you can't go back again, but there are a bunch of us old guys out there who are giving it a good try. And now we can afford to build the planes we couldn't as kids.

*(Author) -Bud Manning 7/96*

**Footnote:**

*Karl Spielmaker has written a well-documented history of the Pee Wee and Marvin engines which appeared in the September - October 1966 issue of The Engine Collectors Journal.*

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