



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of DAVID A. KERZIE

Started modeling in the 1940s AMA #5264, then 88480



Written by DK (11/2010); Reformatted by JS (12/2011)

David Kerzie wrote the following in November of 2010.

The Beginning

David Kerzie's very first models were fabricated from dry cereal boxes (possibly Wheaties brand) in the later days of WWII. These were fighter planes where one was required to put a penny in the nose to obtain a flying center of gravity. What does an eight year old know about airplane weight and balance? He learned most readily that a lighter weight tax token would not work.

Later came several years of building non-flying stick scale models. Monogram Speedee-Built, Comet, and Cleveland airplanes of all shapes and sizes were found hanging from the bedroom ceiling. Patience, as well as the elementary skills of assembly, were somewhat accumulated during this early period. Those model airplanes are lost forever, but the many hours of enjoyment in fabricating them remain in a long ago memory.

Control Line flying came next, but this was a brief experience as the Free Flight bug soon caught. A 1/2A Cub-powered *Sniffer* was Dave's first attempt in this endeavor, which resulted in several crashes, as there was no one around to critique the young builder's trim techniques. Success followed with hand launch gliders, a 1/2A *Zeek*, a Bill Winter's *Vagabond*, and a *Mini Hogan*. It needs to be mentioned that Dave and his brother, Donald, received a tremendous amount of encouragement from both their parents. Their father built them a large workbench in the basement and both boys enjoyed sharing the following years with Dad, building and flying models.

There were hand launch gliders, *Zeeks*, *Hogans*, *Spacers*, many Jasco/Jetco models, towline gliders, rubber-powered models of all sizes, and even an RC or two ... you name it and they could be found in the basement or in the family car as a Sunday trip was made to the local flying field or to a contest site.



1956: Dave's father, August, and Dave with Rudderbug

Competition

Dave's first trophy was a junior second place win in the local Plymouth Meet. It was a proud day to bring the award home to Mom. Spare time through junior high school, high school, and

college (when studies permitted) was taken up building and flying competition Free Flight. Lessons were learned from Chuck Wood, a noted rubber flyer at the time. Gene and Millie Combs also became great friends of the family, and a lot of good times were had with them on weekend flying jaunts. Jim Walters was another builder Dave flew with. Twenty years later, Jim represented the USA in international events.

Growing up in Seattle, most of the meets were held in the Pacific Northwest, although a venture to the Nationals at Los Alamitos was accomplished in 1955. Here Dave won the Wakefield event for seniors and also placed in Nordic and hand launch glider (HLG). Plans for his HLG were published in the March 1957 issue of *Flying Models* magazine. He also qualified for the West Coast FAI team semi-final selections three times during this period. The first time as a young pup without a driver's license, yet Dave traveled from home, accompanied by his mother by bus, to Yuba City, California to participate. It was a big thrill to watch names like Joe Bilgri and Hank Cole compete. Graduation from the university, marriage, family, and the military soon reduced the time for a lot of dedicated modeling activity.

Professional Career

Dave graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the University of Washington (1958), USAF Pilot Training in 1960, and the USAF Aerospace Research Pilot School (Test Pilot/Space Pilot School) in 1968. Highlights of his Air Force career include, as a project pilot, flying numerous Zero Gravity and Lunar Gravity profile flights in the Boeing *KC-135* test bed to support the NASA space programs. In 1970, he completed a yearlong tour in Southeast Asia, flying 186 combat missions in the *F-4 Phantom*. Combat decorations include two Distinguished Flying Crosses and ten Air Medals. He later served a five-year tour at the USAF Test Pilot School as a flight and classroom instructor. The last two years at Edwards Air Force Base were devoted to supervising the flying curriculum as the school's Chief of Operations. Dave closed out his Air Force career in 1979 as the Commander of the 4953 Test Squadron at Wright Patterson Air Force Base.

Employed by the Lockheed Company in 1979, Dave was initially assigned as a test pilot on the high technology *L-1011* commercial transport program. He transferred to the Skunk Works in May of 1983 as a company *U2* experimental test pilot and was active on that program for 14 years, with almost 4,000 flying hours in the high flier. He retired from Lockheed as the Chief *U2* Test Pilot in June of 1997. Dave was the 1986 recipient of the Iven C. Kincheloe Award as the industry test pilot of the year for his work in performing extremely high-altitude flutter investigations. Among other contributions to the *U2* program of note were numerous test flights for the successful integration of the GE118 engine and for digital autopilot development. Among his honors was the election by his peers as a Fellow and President of the prestigious Society of Experimental Test Pilots (SETP). Dave has presented technical papers at SETP and American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) symposiums, as well as numerous talks to aviation groups, schools, and civic organizations with respect to various projects and programs.

Personal Life

David claims the best thing he ever did was meet and marry his wife Carol, the same gal he was courting when attending the university. They conceived and raised eleven children (eight boys and three girls), all college graduates, and all doing well as positive contributors to society. Several of the boys are successfully employed in aerospace or are in the military.

Model Airplanes in the Later Years

The kids were introduced to models as soon as they were old enough to hold and handle a razor blade and glue tube. Their first experience was hand launch gliders, followed by towline gliders, and then Free Flight power ships.

Because of the military gypsy life, the family was able to fly in Free Flight contests held in South Dakota, California, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Ohio, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Washington State.

The family was introduced to the Satellite Free Flight Gas design by the Hunters when they lived in California, and all sizes and configurations were built and flown with considerable success. Again, the garage (shop) or basement was filled with everyone's models. Dave remembers well a mid-1970s contest at Taft when he went head to head with Mel Schmidt (Shoccer) in the Class C



1957: The future Mrs. Carol Kerzie with Dave's Class C Power ship.



1972: The Kerzie family at a Wichita contest. Carol took the picture



c. 1978: Dave and sons, Mark and Mike, with Satellites



1976: The Kerzie family at Taft. Carol took the picture.

Power event. Both maxed out (Cat 1) and continued until well past the close of the meet with over twelve maxes (60 minutes) each.

Many of the kids continued their interest in modeling through the years to the present day. A recent satisfying experience was teaching a group of sixth graders, with youngest daughter elementary school teacher Michelle, an introduction to aerodynamics class. Each student successfully built and flew an AMA Cub rubber model. It has to be said that the model airplane hobby was a catalyst in forming a super father son relationship both between Dave and his Dad and later with Dave and his children. Dave's bride Carol was always there for support and model flying really was/is a family activity.



*October 2010: Dave with
NOS Class B and Class C
Zeeks*



*1978: Dave launching a
Satellite at Taft.*

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