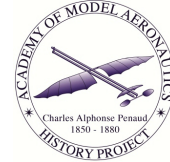




The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of LOUIS ALEXANDER MATUSTIK



November 27, 1930 – March 14, 2022
Started modeling in 1939

Written by LM (02/2012); Transcribed, Edited and Reformatted by JS (03/2012); Updated by JS (02/2023)

The following autobiography was written and sent to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) by Louis in February of 2012.

Model planes have been a part of my life since I was about 9 years old. As I write this in my 81st year, they still play an important part. I can't recall the very first one, but in the late 1930s and 1940s, model kits were sold in many stores. Now when I think of the kits that could be purchased for 10 cents, it is amazing.

I recall going to Parks Hobby Shop on Grand Avenue. Aviation was on most small lads' minds and all boys did some degree of model airplane activity. Living in St. Louis, my hero was Charles Lindbergh and his flight in *The Spirit of St. Louis* plane fascinated me. It was not unusual to run outside to see what plane was flying over.

WWII started at the end of 1941, and I was 11 years old at the time. I remember our Scout troop helping with scrap metal, rubber, and paper collecting. In St. Louis, two Air Scout troops formed, and I joined one. We studied aircraft-related subjects, and I received some merit badges. One of the boys bought a GHQ engine and try as we may, it never ran.

During the war period, the Lambert Airport at St. Louis became a training field for Navy pilots and lots of Stearman biplanes flew around our house. I remember trying to build small solid wood identification models in a school project for the government was effort. Not very well, though.

I finally made enough money selling papers to buy a Forster .29 engine and build some simple U-Control planes. Next were a Bantam .19 and some Free Flight planes that flew fairly well. The librarian at Normandy High School would let me have the old *Model Airplane News* magazines.

After the war ended, Control Line flying really became popular. The Boy Scouts would put on shows in the St. Louis arena, and on several occasions we flew U-Control demonstrations indoors there. There were buildings next to the arena where, during the war, troops carrying Waco gliders had been constructed. I recall seeing *C-47* planes towing the gliders over our house during the war years. There was a tragic incident there; the mayor of St. Louis and a number of dignitaries died when a glider crashed during a demonstration flight at Lambert field.

A group of us Air Scouts traveled to my first Nationals in Wichita, Kansas. It was 1946 and I remember seeing young Dave Slagle fly CL Stunt. We camped near where the Boeing Company had built *B-29* bombers during the war.

In the year 1947, Control Line Speed had reached such popularity that a large contest was held at the St. Louis public school stadium. It was called The Great East-West Model Airplane Circus and featured participants that had qualified by winning contests on the East and West coasts. That is where I saw my first pulse-jet powered model. Also, I remember seeing amazing flying demonstrations by the inventor of Control Line systems, Jim Walker. [Editor's note: Other people have also been said to be the inventors of Control Line, including Oba St. Claire]

I also remember the Nationals in Olathe, Kansas in 1948, hosted by the Navy. Everyone slept and ate on the base, and worked on models in a large hangar. The Plymouth car company also held big meets and I went to club meetings at a local car dealer's shop.

I began to take a serious interest in Control Line Stunt competition and built a design similar to those of a J.C. Yates plane called the *Dragon*. I did fairly well and still have my first trophy from a Stunt contest in Salina, Kansas in 1948. It was interesting that this contest was held at an old Air Force *B-29* flying base and I was able to crawl around inside one.

I flew some Free Flight competition with a *Playboy*, *Ranger*, *Interceptor* and other great designs, but never did as well as flying in Control Line events. One interesting event in Control Line at that time was slow flying. I converted a large Free Flight design called *Quaker* to U-Control and flew slow pretty well.

Eventually I lost interest in contests, but always flew for fun each week with my U-Reely lines and a Drone diesel. By then, the invention of the glow plug and the elimination of ignition systems had made power systems much simpler. And the Drone was even simpler. Gradually, I got into fast cars and other young men's activities for a number of years.

After finding the right girl, I married my present wife of 50 years. I was able to work for Anheuser Busch and did production maintenance work for them for 31 years until retirement in 1990. We had one son born in 1963 and he showed an interest in planes very early. He started flying Control Line balloon busting and then Navy Carrier. The St. Louis area in those years had well attended Carrier meets.

Our flying site at Buder Park had a permanent Carrier deck and we both found that Navy Carrier was a great challenge. We flew together for a number of years. We went to Nats at Lake Charles several times, and also attended the Nats in Lincoln, Nebraska and Dayton, Ohio.

He held a number of Carrier records at times. The challenge of taking off from a carrier deck and getting good high and low speed runs and deck landings is not easy. He has progressed to large IMAC Aerobatics now.

I have been a member of the Lafayette Esquadrielle Control Line club for many years and still like the feel of a Control Line handle in my hands. I've enjoyed attending the Control Line contests at Buder Park, but do not compete anymore. I have flown mostly Sport Radio Control for the last 35 years and enjoy a variety of designs. The development of electric power is so much easier to deal with now. I think of how the old ignition engines were often a problem. When I see what is available ready-to-fly now, it is amazing. I remember all those years of cutting balsa wood parts with a single-edge razor blade and chewing the Ambroid glue off my fingers.

I hope to continue aeromodeling until the day I die. It is really great for AMA to offer this way of remembering and recording our early modeling beginnings.

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