



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of GEORGE E. SHACKLETT

Born August 28, 1926 Began modeling in 1936
AMA #L-191



Written & Submitted by GS (03/2006), Updated by GS (04/2010, 11/2012); Edited By JS (09/2006), Reformatted by JS (01/2010), Updated (04/2010, 11/2012)

George Shacklett submitted the following autobiography in March of 2006 and has been updated in 2010 and 2012.



***1992: George Shacklett
with his Valkyrie.***

I am a retired physician at almost 80 years of age. My modeling activity began in 1936 at the age of ten. My mother purchased a fifty-cent Comet *Curtiss Robin* kit for me for Christmas. The kit contained a plan, tissue of some sort, banana oil, balsa wood, and a very small tube of glue (but not very good glue.) The instructions on the plan were not very good for a ten-year old. For example, a candle was used to form bamboo tips. Since I lived on the outskirts of a very small town in eastern Tennessee, I did not have mentors or other sources of help. I never completely finished the model and, needless to say, it never flew. It did one thing – it sparked a life-long interest in model airplanes.

I began more serious modeling activities as a freshman in high school. I moved from a three-room country school to the “city” of Rockwood, Tennessee, a town of 5000! There were others there who shared my interest; we formed a group who met regularly. Our principal provided great assistance, furnishing a meeting room, monitoring meetings, and giving advice and insight. We met before regular school hours. We studied what little was available in the library and had a copy of Charles Grant’s book.

As a result of this “study group,” we collectively bought a *Buccaneer* kit and began building it in an abandoned store building. Construction was slow and time passed. Some of the group graduated and left and some were called to duty for World War II. The *Buccaneer*, never finished, was lost.

I later purchased a Comet *Mercury* kit and successfully built it for gas power using a Brownie. The Brownie was \$7.50, which was quite a bit back then. One or two trim flights were okay, so I decided to try a contest fifty miles away in Knoxville. I learned a lot from experienced modelers there. A big disappointment, however, was the Brownie. On contest day, I could not get it started due to my lack of knowledge. I cranked all day, so when a guy offered me \$10...*Sold!*

Not easily discouraged, I bought an Atom for \$15.50 and a *Zipper A*. This combo was a thrill for me to fly, but not competitive without a lucky thermal or two. During this time, I also built a rubber-powered Comet *Gull*. As you can see, I was addicted to Carl Goldberg's designs (more on this later.)

After graduation from high school at age 16, I entered college at the University of Tennessee, majoring in Mechanical Engineering. During this time, I built a Comet *Sailplane* and won a regional contest using an Ohlsson 60 for power. In 1944, after almost two years in engineering, the Navy drafted me. Meanwhile, I became interested in medicine. After my discharge in 1946, I entered a premed program. My models deteriorated in a friend's attic since there was no modeling until after medical school. In 1946, while interning, I built another *Sailplane* in our apartment. It flew well with an Anderson Spitfire. Once, while flying in a pasture field in South Carolina, I went to retrieve the plane but returned to find my new wife frozen, motionless. She was completely surrounded by a herd of black cattle!

Upon going back to my hometown to practice medicine, I built several RC models and did a little competing. I was never good at flying Pattern, so I just flew for fun. It was difficult to work much modeling into my small town family practice. Later, I joined the faculty at the University of Tennessee and began training post-doctoral medical students for their family practice specialty.

With a little more time on my hands, I decided to try old-timers. That is all I do now – just build and fly antique models. I am a life member of the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM). There is great satisfaction in building and flying old free flight, inherently stable models using radio control assist. Many of these I either saw or built in my youth, just the ticket for us older guys.

In SAM, I competed several times in their international contests, called the "SAM Champs." I never placed well, but what fun! These old timers have such graceful lines and beautiful outlines; it is just a joy to watch. I was an official at the SAM Champs in 2004 and was a contest director at fourteen SAM contests in Tennessee.

Currently I have about 15 old-timer models with antique ignition engines and a small collection of antique ignition engines. I do have one favorite, built from a John Pond plan. It is Goldberg's *Valkyrie* (I said I was a Goldberg addict). The *Valkyrie* has built-up ribs a la the original 1937 *Air Trails* article. I built five Goldberg *Sailplanes* and still have three!

Like many folks, I am getting interested in electrics in 2006. You are never too old to try something new! Great progress in electrics is being made!

Magazine Articles

Model Builder, March 1988 – "Goldberg's Comet Sailplane Revisited"

Model Airplane News, December 1972 – "Forum" article (club publicity)

RCM and E (England), May 1994 – “A Work of Art,” page 76
SAM Speaks, January/February 2010, “A Tale of Two Valkyries”, p. 9-10
Model Aviation, Old Timers column, February 2010, p. 131-132 (segment written about George, with photograph)

Honors

Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Hall of Fame Inductee, 2012

Club Activities

Knox County Radio Control Society

- Procured flying site, 1972
- President, 1972 and 1973
- Emeritus member since 1975

Tennessee Eagles Radio Control Club, member since 2007

Other Organizations

- Member, Model Engine Collectors' Association (MECA)
- Life member, Society of Antique Modelers (SAM)



*A Goldberg Gathering:
(Clockwise, from large upper-left model)
Valkyrie, Interceptor, Sailplane,
Clipper and Zipper*



1990: Shacklett's Valkyrie in the bones.



July 2005: Shacklett's Valkyrie in the air

An electric version of the Valkyrie was built in 2009. The same wing was utilized on both the electric and gas versions. A new lighter fuselage and tail was used on the electric version with planking as per the Goldberg original. The electric is believed to be the first full sized electric Valkyrie. Both models demonstrate the really flat glide characteristic of the design.



2009: George Shacklett with his electric Valkyrie

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