



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of (LEWIS) KERMIT WALKER

Born August 2, 1943 AMA #L123



Submitted by PW (08/2008); Edited by JS (12/2008), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Kermit Walker submitted the following autobiography to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) in August of 2008.

Name: (Lewis) Kermit Walker

(I have never used the Lewis, even though it is my legal first name)

Current hometown: Lodi, California

Born: August 2, 1943 near Akron, Ohio

Memberships: AMA Member since 1958 (#5532), Life Member since 1980s (#L123)

Model Aviation and Full Scale Aviation Organizations belonged to:

Organization Name (National/International)	Office(s) held and/or remarks
Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA)	Life Member and Life Museum Patron
National Free Flight Society (NFFS)	Life Member
Society of Antique Modelers (SAM)	Life Member
International Miniature Aircraft Assn. (IMAA)	Life Member
International Miniature Aerobatic Club (IMAC)	President, 1994/1995
National Assn. of Scale Aeromodelers (NASA)	Member
Model Engine Collectors Assn. (MECA)	Member
Flying Aces Club (FAC)	Member
The Wing Is The Thing (TWITT)	Member

Organization Name (Local/Regional)	Office(s) held and/or remarks
Stockton Gas Model Association (SGMA)	Free Flight: President, VP, Sec/Treas.
Northern California Free Flight Council (NCFFC)	Free Flight: President, Sec/Treas.
Oakland Cloud Dusters (OCD)	Free Flight
Lodi Flying Fools	Control Line
Escadrilles Model Airplane Club (EMAC)	Control Line
Stockton Air Devils	Control Line
Western Associated Modelers (WAM)	Control Line

Tokay Radio Control Modelers (TRCM)	Radio Control: President
Delta Valley Modelers (DVM)	Radio Control
Foothill Radio Control Flyers	Radio Control
Lodi Radio Control Modelers (LRCM)	Radio Control, Founding President
Woodland/Davis Aeromodelers (WDA)	Radio Control
Gold Country Flyers (GCF)	Radio Control
Marin Aero Club (MAC)	Free Flight
SAM 27	Radio Control & Free Flight

Awards won and records set:

- Free Flight: Something like 150 or more trophies and awards won in local, regional, and national contests from 1958 to 1973. AMA National Records set in FAI Power (now F1C) Junior in 1959; Nordic A-2 Glider (now F1A) Senior in 1963; Nordic A-2 Glider Open in 1967.
- Control Line: Something like 20 trophies and awards in three seasons of WAM competition flying.
- Radio Control: Numerous local club contest trophies and awards won over a span of 20 years or so.
- IMAC: Over 30 trophies won up to and including Unlimited class over a span of about eight years.

Areas of active modeling interest (competed in or actively participated in):

- Free flight aeromodels, both Outdoors and Indoors
- Control Line aeromodels
- Radio Control aeromodels, both Outdoors (both off land and water) and Indoors
- Slot cars

Types of aeromodels built and flown:

- Airplanes: Free Flight, Radio Control, and Control Line, engine/motor-powered, rubber-powered, gliders, rocket-powered
- Autogyros: Free Flight and Radio Control, engine/motor-powered, rubber-powered
- Helicopters: Free Flight and Radio Control, engine/motor-powered, rubber-powered
- Ornithopters: Free Flight and Radio Control, rubber-powered, motor-powered

Narrative of My Modeling Career

My interest in building models, especially model airplanes, began when I was just a kid. I grew up in Ohio in the 1950s, where I was born and lived until I was 12 years old. My father had grown up in the Akron/Cleveland area of Ohio during the 1920s and 1930s, where there had been a thriving interest in aviation of all kinds, including the large dirigible hangars where the Akron and the Macon were built and where many of the National Air Races were held. He passed on his acquired interest in aviation to me I guess from an early age. He actively encouraged my interest by buying me things like the early Jim Walker/American Junior ready-

to-fly (RTF) models like the *Interceptor* and *Hornet*. I built a few flying models such as the Monogram *Speedee Built* series that were mostly unsuccessful, but the successes I had flying the Jim Walker models maintained my interest in model airplanes. I also bought my first model airplane engine in 1953, a Cox Thimble Drome Space Bug Jr. 049, for \$3.95! I built a simple Control Line model for it and it was somewhat successful. I also built at least one Free Flight model for it, but as I recall it was not really successful as I was just a kid and didn't know the first thing about flying powered Free Flight models.

Around the time I had finished sixth grade, my family pulled up stakes and made a big move to Phoenix, Arizona. It was a major change in culture and climate! I continued to build Control Line models, some of them marginally successful, but lacking any reasonably feasible nearby flying sites, I did not build or fly any Free Flight models.

Then in 1957, when I was about to start the 9th grade in school, my family again moved, this time to Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was kind of like Phoenix, but at a much higher altitude, and windier and colder in winter. We lived there for only 15 months, including two summers, but a couple of things happened there that I guess would affect my modeling career from then on. My Dad and I went out to a local mesa area to fly a couple of sport Free Flight models we had built, and we became acquainted with a group of highly proficient Free Flight competition flyers that called themselves SWAT (South West Aero Team). That group included Buzz Averill and his dad, Leroy Oakley, Don Albert, and several others who were competitive at a very high national level. The expertise, enthusiasm, and performances of that group inspired me and my dad to build some higher-performance Free Flight models, such as a Carl Goldberg *Blazer* powered by a hot Atwood Shriek .049. Also during this period, I became attracted to the idea of Radio Control airplanes, and began to build one.

Unfortunately, just as we were getting our feet wet in flying the higher performance Free Flight models, a job change for my dad meant another family move in late summer 1958. This time it was to Lodi, California, where I still live. As soon as we moved to Lodi, we became aware that one of the then real hotbeds of Free Flight competition flying was right here in Northern California – the Northern California Free Flight Council. The NCFFC consisted of a group of active Free Flight clubs from all over Northern California, which were then holding their contests at a site just east of Sacramento, only 40 miles or less from us. We immediately joined the local club (the Stockton Gas Model Association) and started flying in contests. I was still a Junior class flyer by AMA standards (under 16 years old), but with the experience of flying against some of the best in the country (the world even.) With the mentoring of some of my older and more experienced fellow club members, I was soon competitive with just about anyone.

I went to the 1959 AMA Nationals, which were held at the Los Alamitos Naval Air Station near Los Angeles, and because my 16th birthday was not until after the start of 1959 (on the last day of the Nats, in fact!); I was able to fly in the Junior category of all the events I entered. I entered quite a few events, but due to a whole string of factors (too long and complicated to go into here), by the last two days of the weeklong contest, I had not done any good at all! Not one top-three place! I was really beginning to get discouraged. However, on Friday and Saturday there were going to be two of what I thought would be my best (most competitive events) – FAI Power (now F1C) and Nordic A-2 Glider (now F1A). As it turned out, I won the FAI Power Junior

event, setting a new AMA National Junior record in the process, and placed second in a *very* competitive field of Junior Nordic flyers. So, I came home with two nice big Nats trophies and a new National record! It was very encouraging, inspiring, and energizing for a high school kid just turned 16!

I continued to fly Free Flight competition in local NCFFC contests, a few regional contests, and eventually a number of the regional and national FAI Free Flight World Championship U.S. Team contests. By the early 1960s, I had begun to sort of specialize in the Nordic A-2 Glider event. I think I was pretty successful in flying that event over a period of 10 years or so:

- NCFFC yearly A-2 Glider points champion – every year from 1963 through 1973, inclusive
- World Champs U.S. Team Finalist twice – 1964 (at Bong AFB, Wisconsin - 6th place) and 1966 (near Albuquerque, New Mexico)
- Twice AMA National Record setter - Senior in 1963, Open in 1967

I also finished building that first Radio Control airplane, a DeBolt Live Wire *Rebel*, but after a lot of tinkering with radio gear that I considered not only expensive, but pretty fussy and unreliable, I finally crashed the model and gave up Radio Control, at least for the time being as it turned out!

During this same period, I also continued to fly Control Line models, and eventually spent parts of three seasons competing in a then hotbed of Control Line competition – WAM (Western Associated Modelers), a large group of Northern California Control Line clubs. I flew mostly 10 Mile Race (WAM's version of Rat Race), but I also dabbled some in Combat, Balloon Bust, and Stunt.

Also around that time, I took up slot car racing when that sport was pretty much at its peak. I competed at that for two or three years, and most of the time I won enough cash prizes to pay for my hobby.

However, by the end of the 1960s, I had gotten married and had a family, so I cut back to just competition Free Flight.

In the early 1970s, I began to get burnt out from all of the building, chasing, and traveling involved with flying competition Free Flight. I began to look again at Radio Control, which by that time had begun to become much more reliable, capable and relatively affordable. I bought my first proportional Radio Control set (a Kraft five-channel set) in I believe 1974 or 1975. I then started flying with the local club and taught myself to fly Radio Control, as in those days, there were no real instructor programs in most clubs. You taught yourself to fly, mostly by crashing! I had a leg up though, as I had that earlier single-channel Radio Control experience, and I was soon flying as well as most of the flyers in the local club.

As I had always had an interest in Scale models, my initial goal in flying Radio Control was to get good enough at it to justify putting the money and work involved into building and flying competitive Radio Control Scale models. However, while I was honing my Radio Control flying skills, I attended a number of Radio Control Scale contests as a spectator. I soon became *very*

disenchanted with what I perceived to be a really bad level of judging at those contests. I soon became convinced that a great number of the judges at those contests were either incompetent or prejudiced in favor of the well-known competitors, or *both!* I felt that my competitive spirit would not be able to deal with that kind of poor judging, especially as I would start out as *not* one of those well-known flyers, so I began to lose enthusiasm for competitive Radio Control Scale participation. I did fly one season as the pilot for another club member in the Team Scale event, wherein one person builds the model and another flies it. That experience only served to verify in my mind what I had thought about Scale judging!

About that same time, I began to become aware of another type of competitive Radio Control flying that still involved Scale models, but was primarily an aerobatic competition – IMAC (International Miniature Aerobatic Club). I attended a few IMAC contests and became convinced that although IMAC judging was not perfect, it was a whole lot better than Scale judging. So, in 1986, I started to compete in IMAC contests. At the time, IMAC really only existed largely in Northern California, as it had started here when Jerry Nelson and Glen Carter had created it. I competed in IMAC from 1986 through the early 1990s, and even served as IMAC President in 1994/1995. I spent most of my efforts as IMAC President trying to find some sort of solution to a problem that I perceived to be developing in IMAC: the gradually inexorable increasing size of the models used to compete. I was convinced that without some limitations, this continuing escalation in size would eventually kill the event. I was totally unsuccessful in coming up with a solution that I could get any of the current IMAC flyers to be enthusiastic about. As has been proven since, I was wrong! The current IMAC models have gotten to perfectly *huge* sizes (up to 50% and more!), but the event still exists and, in some areas, is thriving. However, the larger size models, with their exponentially increasing costs and transportation and storage problems, did cause me to personally stop flying the event. I can say with absolute certainty and force that flying IMAC competition did more to improve and increase my Radio Control flying skills than all the other types of Radio Control flying I have ever done, combined!

Around the time I stopped flying IMAC, I became interested in flying Radio Control airplanes off water. There are enough places in Northern California that have locations adaptable to water flying that there are a number of annual float flies held at various venues around the area. I flew in quite a number of those float flies from the early 1990s up until the early 2000s. I have flown at all kinds of water venues from very small ponds to large lakes and even along the edge of the great Sacramento River. Water flying has a charm all its own that is really hard to express. It is not only different, but for some reason more relaxing and just plain fun somehow!

I also eventually became interested in doing some Indoor Free Flight flying. I had done a little bit of it back in the 1970s, but had not stuck with it. Starting about 6 or 7 years ago, I began to fly Indoors with two different groups of Indoor flyers – one in the northern San Francisco Bay area (the Marin Aero Club) and one in Sacramento headed up by Chris Borland. After trying a lot of different types of Indoor models, I've gravitated to the simpler and not-so-extremely-light types such as Peanut Scale and the like. I have tried building and flying the very light competition types of Indoor models, but their extreme fragility, and to me just plain fussiness to build and handle, just isn't my cup of tea. I have also built and flown some really oddball types of Indoor models such as autogyros and ornithopters, with varying amounts of success! All of them have been interesting in their own way though!

Most recently, I have gravitated to flying many electric-powered Radio Control models, both Outdoors and Indoors. Since my retirement just over 2 years ago as I write this, I have built or assembled something over 30 aeromodels. Admittedly, most of them were small and simple models or ARFs, but now that I have so many recently-built/assembled new models, in addition to many of the models left over from the rest of my modeling career, storage space for them is getting to be a very large issue.

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