



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CAPTAIN GEORGE J. YATSKO



July 3, 1927 - June 3, 2002 AMA #11758

Information submitted by PY (07/2003); Written by PY (07/2003) and CT (04/2002); Transcribed & Edited by SS (09/2003), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Career:

- Was a volunteer at the 2001 Kid Venture held in Oshkosh
- Was an air show judge
- Had a lifetime career on the sea through the Navy and Merchant Marines; served in World War II, the Korean conflict, Desert Shield and Desert Storm
- Developed a model flight program for local youth which was the first all-electric Control Line club in the United States; received grants from the AMA for this Program
- Was a glider pilot

In July 2003, Pat Yatsko submitted a packet of information on her late husband to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program). The following is an excerpt of the letter she sent with the packet.

I hope reading about him may inspire others. He loved life and airplanes and was always willing to do the hard work needed to achieve goals, and he provided outstanding leadership in every endeavor. I know he was always tremendously appreciative of all the help all of you at the AMA gave him and was very proud to be a member. He also belonged to the Soaring Society of America, the Garden State Circle Burners (Rookie of the Year 2000 award), Precision Aerobatics Model Pilots Association (PAMPA) and Bergen County Silent Flyers.

He began building model airplanes as a youth during the World War II era. His older brother was a pilot in World War II and that was a great influence also. He had our children flying Control Line planes he and they would build, from age 5 years, and he never stopped building and flying planes of all sizes. In the summer of 2001, he was one of the volunteers helping with Kid Venture at the big air show in Oshkosh. He also has been a judge at air shows.

*(signed) Mrs. Pat Yatsko
July 30, 2003*

The following is a newspaper article that ran in the Pascack Valley Community Life newspaper on April 17, 2002. It was submitted by George's wife, Pat, and gives a good overview of his life.

Man of Action Accepts Life's Final Challenge with Quiet Dignity

By Carolyn Turkstra
Of Community Life

Hillsdale, New Jersey – While many people celebrate the arrival of spring, with its promise of new life unfolding from the ground and overhead, borough resident George J. Yatsko, 74, is reflecting on a life well lived as he accepts that his time on earth is growing shorter.

Yatsko was diagnosed 10 years ago with prostate cancer and was told at that time that he had approximately two more years to live. But Yatsko, who has adapted the motto, “Say ‘yes’ to life!” kept on going. He admits to having grappled with denial following his diagnosis, which ultimately gave way to anger and, finally, to a place of acceptance where he feels he is blessed by each new day and is prepared for “whatever God brings.”

This is a far cry from a man who has been on the go his entire life. Born to immigrant parents, Yatsko was greatly influenced by his mother and father who enthusiastically embraced their new homeland and taught him to love his country. Growing up in Guttenberg, he began an early love affair with the water and knew from the age of 14 that he wanted to go to sea. He enlisted in the Navy at the age of 17 and served during World War II. Following his service, he enrolled in the State University of New York Maritime College, which trains officers for the Merchant Marine, and so began a lifetime career on the sea.

Yatsko is proud of his contributions to the day-to-day commerce of his country and the world, sailing on vessels carrying everything from fruit to vehicles, from fuel to ammunition. He was serving in the Merchant Marine during the Korean conflict and went on to participate in Desert Storm and Desert Shield, having achieved the rank of chief mate and master mariner.

Yatsko’s love of the sea met its match only once, in 1958, when, on a blind date, he met “the woman he couldn’t live without.” That woman, Pat, became his wife in 1960 and continues to be his greatest supporter and “first mate” on their life’s journey together.

For a number of years following their marriage, Yatsko was a landlubber. Recruited by the U.S. Department of Labor in the Office of Occupational Safety as a maritime safety consultant, he was involved with the agency’s eventual evolution into what is now known as OSHA. Then, at the age of 54, with Pat’s approval, he left OSHA and returned to the sea as a master mariner, chief mate, and navigator onboard U.S. flag oceangoing vessels. This period included his involvement in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Reflecting on those days, Yatsko is emphatic that, if circumstances permitted, he’d “go back tomorrow.”

Although health issues, including bypass surgery three years ago, have curtailed his activities in recent years, Yatsko’s personal philosophy of “you have to have a plan” has kept him far from idle. At the age of 60, while still at sea, he learned to windsurf and even appeared on a “Today” show in a segment highlighting senior citizens who windsurf. He eventually became involved with a company that provided travel services for windsurfers to Europe and the Mediterranean. Only a year ago, he himself suffered cracked ribs while windsurfing. Yatsko admits to being a frustrated pilot and ultimately found great satisfaction in becoming a glider pilot. His most recent accomplishment, however, is much closer to home and satisfies this sailor’s lifelong fascination with flying. It is also an accomplishment that, hopefully, will prove to be an enduring legacy for George Yatsko.

Having been involved over the years with model airplane, or Control Line, flying, Yatsko became inspired to foster a model flight program for Hillsdale youngsters. The plan evolved into The Hillsdale Flyers, the first all-electric Control Line club in the nation. To help finance the

project, Yatsko crafted a detailed developmental plan, relying on his experience with military-type operational plans. The plan was first submitted to the borough's recreation commission that unanimously approved it and was then sent on to the mayor and council, which ultimately supported the idea. His efforts also were rewarded by grants from both the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) and from the Education Committee of the AMA. The club was publicized through local schools and the recreation commission and at the club's first official meeting on May 5, 2001, six brand-new, charter members from the target group of boys and girls from 12- to 14-years-old were present. The club's purpose is not only to teach the elements of model airplane flying, but the intricacies of building the aircraft – and making repairs. Currently, several adults have also joined the Flyers Club, adding their various levels of expertise to mentor the younger members.

The cancer is advancing throughout his body now, but although he admits to being in pain, Yatsko's voice was still strong and vigorous as he recounted this amazing roster of life experiences. His voice grew softer, however, and his words became more lyrical as he remembered how being out on a ship at sea affects him. "I have seen the sun rise and set all over the major bodies of water," he reflected. "Standing on the deck of a ship, surrounded by nothing but the vastness of the ocean as far as the eye can see in any direction, seeing those magnificent sunrises or sunsets is humbling...it is just *humbling*."

The master mariner is now embarked on one last journey whose destination he accepts because he knows it will bring him safely "home." Sadness there may be, but there is no fear, only quiet acceptance.

One is reminded, after meeting this remarkable man, of a poem by the early 17th century poet John Donne:

"Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so,
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me."

-Sonnet 10, "Divine Poems"

This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.

AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

