



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CHESTER (CHET) LANZO

1914 – 1989 Started modeling around 1922
AMA #2670



Written & Submitted by JB (05/2000) & TM (05/1999); Transcribed by NR (06/2000); Edited by SS (2002), Updated by JS (10/2008), Reformatted by JS (10/2009)

Career:

- A charter member of the Cleveland Balsa Butchers
- An early pioneer in Radio Control models
- June 1941: Set a national record in Class E Cabin Rubber
- 1937: Lanzo's won the first Radio Control championship event at the Detroit Nationals
- A researcher, an inventor, a leader in design, and an outstanding contestant
- Held records in Outdoor Stick, Cabin, and Rubber Speed
- 1942: Chester began a career at NACA-NASA, National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics-National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Honors:

- 1976: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
 - 1978: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
 - 1989: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
 - 2000: Kits and Plans Antiquitous Hall of Fame
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Mr. Lanzo passed away in 1989. Trying to document the life and modeling career 10 years later is not easy task. Fortunately, two friends of his have come forth with some biographic material to document his life. These people are Mr. James H. Bennett and Mr. Tom McCoy. The following biography was written and submitted by biographer Jim Bennett in May of 2000.

Chester Lanzo

Chester Lanzo was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on June 11, 1914. He was a lifelong resident of Cleveland. Lanzo lived 75 years dying August 13, 1989.

Lanzo was one of the earliest members elected to the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. He was also elected to the National Free Flight Society (NFFS) Hall of Fame and the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Hall of Fame. He was a charter member of the Cleveland Balsa Butchers.

Lanzo built indoor and outdoor rubber models and gasoline engine powered models. He was an early pioneer in Radio Control models and was the first to successfully radio control a gasoline engine powered model plane. Chet was the first to win the national meet in the Radio Control event in 1937. Lanzo was a national champion in outdoor rubber and a record holder in those events. His later years were spent in Radio Control, primarily gliders and scale.

His first big win was at the 1936 Detroit National meet. He won the Open Outdoor Cabin Rubber event and set a record of 48 minutes. His design, using 200 square inches of wing with a three-

panel dihedral, had a simple box fuselage with a small windshield. The propeller was an 18-inch diameter free wheeler. Undercarriage was made of bamboo. The design was featured in Air Trails later that year. It was called the Duplex because it included a Stick fuselage that could be interchanged with the Cabin. The model was able to fly in both stick and cabin events. A multi-spar structure was used with several 1/16 square balsa strips. Dick Korda followed with the same basic design winning the 1937 Nationals Open Fuselage event and setting the 54-minute record.

Lanzo won the Open Outdoor Stick Rubber event at the 1940 Chicago Nationals and set a national record. His three-flight total was 44-1/2 minutes. One flight was 32 minutes. The design incorporated a 300 square inch wing, a box built up fuselage and a two bladed folding 18-inch diameter, 28-inch pitch propeller. The 300 square inch rubber design was an innovation gaining aerodynamic scale effect increasing wing efficiency. Mainly, he wanted to produce a lighter wing loading closer to that required by the rules. Lanzo's stick article was in the December 1940 Air Trails. His design included a rudder tab controlled by an Austin timer allowing the tab to be actuated after a long while in the thermal. Some called this the first dethermalizer. Lanzo, in the December 1940 Air Trails said it was to allow a model to stick in a thermal. Later Burd Models Corporation produced the model as a kit. His design is an all time favorite and is one of the most popular in SAM events.

Lanzo set a national record in Class E Cabin Rubber in June 1941 with a 350 square inch model. He made flights of 63 and 30 minutes. The model featured an Austin timer operated dethermalizer, which was a large flap comprising the upper superstructure including the windshield of the cockpit over the wing root. The wing was of the Wolf (after the Wolf Hirth, Wolf G1 sailplane design) outline, similar to that used by Frank Zaic and the Thermic gliders. Other plan forms are straight tapered in the outer panel. Lanzo's design was featured in the August 1942 Air Trails Pictorial. The design was also in the 1953 Model Aeronautic Yearbook by Frank Zaic. Century Models produce a kit in 1945.

Lanzo's postwar Wakefield design was in Bill Winter's Plan Book. In 1948, his Puss Moth Flying Scale Rubber was a large model of contest Cabin model size. It has a two bladed folding propeller. Lanzo placed third in Flying Scale in the 1940 Chicago Nationals. The model was featured in a 1947 Air World, an interim magazine between Flying Aces and Flying Models.

Chet produced several gas designs. The Burd Company produced a 1947-diamond cross section fuselage Class A/B design. Lanzo built designs for the original large bore Brown's. The design is flown in the SAM events.

Lanzo's 1937 [won the] Radio Control championship [event] at the Detroit Nationals. Lanzo was a licensed radio amateur. He designed and built the radio system. He is credited with being the first to conceive radio control of models and had the honor of being the first to do it successfully. He simplified the design over a four-year development. He decided rudder control was a practical way to begin the quest of model flight Radio Control. Equipment was heavy and the tube was the main ingredient. The rudder control receiving set required one tube. The Good brothers won three successive years after Chet's win. Jim Walker was the next winner in 1941. Lanzo, in the

1938 Zaic's Yearbook, presented some circuits for Radio Control. He mentions a radio transmitter on board a gas model for tracking and finding.

He flew rubber speed in the Scripps-Howard Junior Aviator Nationals. His design was a twin fuselage, twin motor with counter-rotating propellers. Frank Zaic's 1937 Model Aeronautic Yearbook includes a three-view drawing. The model flew at speeds up to 75 miles per hour.

Chet flew indoor stick in National events in prewar Nationals. He was an all around champion, outdoor, and indoor rubber, gas, and Radio Control. He built Radio Control sailplanes and gas-powered scale after leaving competition flying.

He was a researcher, an inventor, a leader in design and an outstanding contestant. He produced amazing records in outdoor rubber in the days before flight time limits. Lanzo designs go on in history as all-time favorites with SAM flyers. He became an aviation and radio enthusiast in the late 1920s. In his life, he saw major advances in full scale and model aviation and electronics. Chet was a contributor and one of the best liked.

-Prepared by Jim Bennett, Saint Louis 1999

The following biographical material was compiled and supplied by Mr. Tom McCoy

Chester D. Lanzo was a great model airplane pioneer, who started building model airplanes in 1922 at the age of eight. His modeling career extended over a period of 65 years, until the time of his death on August 13, 1989. Chester was well known world wide for his expertise in model airplanes.

He was a member of the 1936 Wakefield Team. The following year, 1937, Chester won first place in the first National Radio Control Contest ever held.

Chester started designing and building his own Radio Control system about 1933. His first Radio Control model, built and flown in 1934, was a 7-foot span cabin model. Chester called it Radio Control No. 1. It is now commonly known as the RC-1. This model proved too fast to be controlled with his primitive radio control system. His second Radio Control model had a 12-foot span, which flew very slowly. Chester named it the Racer. Unfortunately, he crashed it prior to the 1936 Nationals in which he planned to enter the model. The 1937 Radio Control Champion model, known as the Radio Control Stick was his third Radio Control model. In 1938, Chester designed a 9-foot span Radio Control glider, which he flew in the 1939 Nationals. It was the first Radio Control glider to compete in a National Radio Control Contest. He named it Airborn.

An outstanding band model airplane designer, Chester was winner of the outdoor stick event in 1940. He has held records in outdoor stick, cabin, and rubber speed. Chester's designs are in Air World, Flying Models, Air Trails, Model Airplane News, and the Model Aeronautics Yearbooks by Frank Zaic. Burd Models kitted several of Chester's Free Flight designs.

Chester was born in Cleveland, Ohio and, after graduating from high school, became a draftsman

for a local printing press manufacturer during the late 1930s. In the early 1940s, he became the chief tool designer at Cleveland Pneumatic Tool Co., where he designed a landing gear for a bomber used in World War II. During this period, he took night courses at various colleges around Cleveland and became a certified engineer. In 1942 Chester began a career at NACA-NASA, National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics-National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Lewis Research Center until he retired in 1974. Chester worked in various fields of engineering such as electrical, instrumentation, heat transfer, nuclear and lasers. He authored numerous reports for the Lewis Research Center.

However, according to Chester's wife, Peggy, his hobby and joy was model airplanes. In the early 1930s, Chester had a 30-inch wingspan cabin rubber model fly away. A young boy returned it. The young boy asked Chester to help him get started building model airplanes. That young boy was Richard Korda!

Chester was inducted into the following Halls of Fames:

- Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame

Chester was a founding member of the famous Balsa Butchers Club of Cleveland, Ohio, which also had Richard Korda and George Reich as members. In recent years, he was a member of the Valley City Radio Control Club and the Society of Antique Modelers, Chapter 39. Chester had numerous model airplane designs published and unpublished.

His most famous designs include:

1937 Radio Control Champion (RC-Stick)

Lanzo Stick - Rubber Powered

Puss Moth - Rubber Powered

Record Breaker Gas Model

Duplex - Rubber Powered

Lanzo Bomber - Gas Powered

The Bomber has been the dominant winner in recent years in the Society of Antique Modelers contests. The Bomber won many contests, mainly in the Radio Control Assist contests.

Chester D. Lanzo was a gentle man with a pleasant personality and a mild manner. Above all, he was a great competitor!

The following appeared in the July/August issue of SAM Speaks.

Chet Lanzo 1914-1989

By Tom McCoy

It is with a heavy heart my sad duty to report to the Society, the death of Chester Lanzo. Chet died on Sunday, August 13 of heart failure. He was 75-years-old.

To properly list all of Chet's accomplishments would take this entire journal. He was an

electrical, instrumental, nuclear and laser engineer. He worked at NASA's Lewis Research Center as a nuclear engineer until he retired in 1974.

As modelers, we all will remember him for his outstanding model designs and contributions to aeromodeling. Chet's memory will live on in the hearts of all modelers. His gift to us is the pleasure we derive from modeling and flying one of his designs.

Chet was a modest, soft-spoken, gentle man. The closest I ever heard Chet come to bragging was his little saying when he saw one of his designs being flown by another modeler – “a beautifully engineered model,” he would say and just beam.

Chet had literally hundreds of friends and acquaintances who were model enthusiasts. He was easy to meet and made everyone feel at ease.

I was privileged to attend the 50th Anniversary Wakefield at Taft, California with Chet and he literally spent half his time meeting new people and posing for pictures with different modelers – a great memory for him and all of us.

Chet had built a new 4-ounce Duplex and was test flying it with just a few turns. An unidentified modeler, who did not know him, was giving him advice on trimming the model. Chet was very courteous and said, “Well, I may try your idea. Thanks for your help.” I thought at the time, “What a gentleman.”

(From Tom McCoy's cover letter – “As you know, Chet and I were flying buddies and this has been a tough job for me. I guess we all lost a good friend.”)

The following is an article that appeared in the January 1951 issue of The Cleveland Press, by Aviation Editor Tom Blackiston.

Years of experience in model aviation activities are represented in the contest officials of the fifth annual National Model Plane exhibit to be held in Higbee's auditorium Feb. 23.

Two officials, veteran modelers and long prominent leaders in model aviation circles, are Chester Lanzo and George Reich. Both are employees of the Lewis Flight Propulsion Laboratory at Cleveland Hopkins Airport.

Lanzo is an engineer in the instrument division. He works with specialized instruments, which are used to measure temperatures in experimental Jet engine research.

Reich is a toolmaker at Lewis Laboratory. He too does specialized instrumentation work. In last year's Higbee contest, Reich was a member of the technical committee and has been appointed chair of the judge's committee for the fifth annual event.

Lanzo holds the record of being one of the oldest model plane builders in Greater Cleveland, in

point of service. He began his activities in the hobby more than 20 years ago.

Lanzo is a pioneer in radio control for model airplanes. In 1935, his work was given national recognition in several magazine publications. He also is credited with building one of the first dethermalizers for model planes.

He was one of the nation's strongest contenders before World War II in many national model plane contests. He always came out on top, or very near to it, in the competitions.

Last year Lanzo was a member of the technical committee for the National Model Plane Exhibit. He will serve as chair of the technical committee in this year's meet.

As chair of the judge's committee, Reich will assign his 50 to 75 committee members to the event categories, which they are best qualified to judge. He will work closely with his colleague Lanzo, who will have charge of placing all model planes entered in the contest in their proper events.

Both of the young "old timers" also will assist the women contest officials who register entrants for the meet. Registration will be held on Higbee's 10th floor on Thursday, Feb. 21 from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., and Friday, Feb.22 from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

The following obituary ran in the Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper on Oct. 14, 1989.

Chester Lanzo, Engineer, model airplane inventor

Model airplane enthusiasts know Chester D. Lanzo as the man who invented the radio controlled model airplane when Free Flight planes operated by rubber band motors were popular.

Mr. Lanzo, 75, died yesterday at Medina Community Hospital, apparently of heart failure.

Born in Cleveland, Lanzo attended East Tech High School. He was a draftsman for Chandler and Price, a local printing press manufacturer, during the late 1930s.

As the chief tool designer at Cleveland Pneumatic Tool Co. in the early 1940s, he designed the landing gear for a bomber used in World War II.

Mr. Lanzo took night courses at Fenn College, Case Institute of Technology and Baldwin-Wallace College in the late 1930s and early 1940s to become a certified engineer.

In 1942, he began a career at NASA's Lewis Research Center that ended when he retired in 1974. At NASA, Mr. Lanzo did electrical, instrumental, nuclear and laser engineering.

But his hobby and joy was model airplaning, according to his wife, Peggy.

She said he won an award from the Wakefield Model Airplane Competition, one of the most prestigious in the field, in the late 1930s.

“But he never got to accept it, because there was a Depression and he had a wife and a baby to take care of,” she said.

Albert Seidowski, a local model airplane enthusiast, said Mr. Lanzo was known nationally for the Radio Control airplane, invented in 1937, and a model bomber he invented that still is used in competitions.

Mr. Lanzo was a member of the Cleveland Balsa-Butchers Club, the Valley City Radio Control Club, the Wakefield Competition, and the Academy of Model Aeronautics.

Besides his wife, Mr. Lanzo is survived by a daughter, Sylvia Jane Bell. Services are private.

The following information comes from the invitation to a banquet to honor Chester Lanzo after his death.

In the spirit of “Cloud Nine,”
you are invited to attend
a banquet honoring
The Memory Of

CHESTER LANZO

Guest Speakers

Dr. Walter Good, Mr. Hal deBolt,
Dr. Bill McCallie, Mr. Fred Mulholland
Mr. Don Lowe and Carl Schmaedig as
Master of Ceremonies

Saturday, December 16, 1989

Daedalian Room

Officers’ Open Mess

MacDill AFB, Florida

Cocktails 6:30 p.m.

Dinner 7:30 p.m.

“Cloud Nine” 8:30 p.m.

Please Respond by December 10
With full cost of \$14.00 per person

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Tampa, FL 33611
(813) 839-1491



*Chet in July 1940. Photo taken
by Jim Alaback.*

*1989: Chet and Tim McCoy
at the 50th Wakefield
Anniversary held in Taft,
California.*



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Chester D. Lanzo



CHESTER D. LANZO

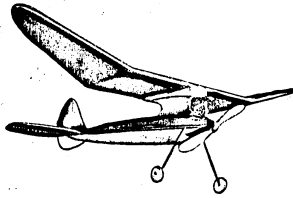
Peer of model builders and designers! Chester D. Lanzo has proven himself worthy of this title. His consistent winning at all contests is due solely to his genius in design. Model builders never best Chester Lanzo in important contests. As proof of his amazing genius in designing models, one has only to hear the praises sung him by some of the best model builders in the country. Many were novices who immediately became experts using his basic designs, these models being so simple to construct, anyone could duplicate them. His record of achievement is numerous and varied. Below we list just a few to give you some idea of his versatility.

AMONG CHESTER D. LANZO'S ACHIEVEMENTS

- ★ 1936 Wakefield team member.
- ★ 1936 World's record outdoor cabin fuselage, 48 min. 45 sec.
- ★ 1936 World's record outdoor stick model, 18 min. 10 sec.
- ★ 1937 World's record outdoor stick model, 7 min. 55 sec.
- ★ 1937 Radio control model competition winner. First to successfully control a gas model by radio.
- ★ 1937 \$500 Al Williams Trophy award for being outstanding model flier.
- ★ 1938 Acrobatic champion (Scripps Howard)
- ★ 1938 Cleveland Balsa Butchers Perpetual Trophy for outstanding model builder of year.
- ★ 1939 Gas model champion trophy award from Cleveland Balsa Butchers.

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designed by **CHESTER D. LANZO**

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CONTEST WINNERS

Announcement of Chet Lanzo being hired by the Burd Model Airplane Company.

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