



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CHARLIE BARRON



Written by AL (10/2010); Reformatted and edited by JS (10/2010)

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## Charlie Barron

Charlie was born in California, so he cannot be a Texan. To offset this great loss, he moved to San Antonio, Texas at an early age to live with his aunt and uncle on Rigby Street. I called them, as did Charlie, Unk and Auntie. They were very good people...

Charlie and I met while attending Brackenridge High in the late thirties. During lunch, we would compare the glider and rubber model designs we worked on during the morning periods. We also discussed the Chares H. Grant articles on model design currently running in *Model Airplane News*. As I recall, our major disagreement with this gentleman was his "rule" producing short tail movements, for we preferred longer. We only had praise for each other's designs, for they were all based on the same reasoning, or "school," of aerodynamics.

We and Hilton Mollenhauer, another BHS student, soon found ourselves frequent winners in the rubber and hand launch glider events sponsored by Bill and Oliver Priel's Model Airplane Shop and *The Express and Evening News*, a local newspaper. *The Light*, a rather conservative newspaper, was no longer sponsoring the Hearst Junior Birdman events. We three were vicious competitors with each other on the field of rubber, green soap, and glycerin. We were called the "Unholy Trio." However, if an outsider appeared competitive, we worked as a group to overcome the upstart. I lost points with Charlie when I was given a Bunch *Warrior* for Christmas in 1937. He said I had gone over to the "other side" with the stinkpots. When he won an Ohlsson 19 at a rubber event sponsored, as I recall, by the two Pfeils, he quickly turned his coat inside out and designed the Class A model *Blipo*. When Charlie showed me the finished plans, I said "Pretty nice. Whatcha gonna call it?" (or something to that effect.) He pointed to the name on the bottom line. "Can't ya read? *Blipo*." He pronounced it *Blippo*, as we called our swept forward vertical stabilizers with large sub areas. I corrected his spelling error.

"Look! It's my design and I will name it any damn thing I want!" he said.

Charlie is an excellent designer, a superb draftsman and an outstanding builder... He must have been designing models when spellin', larnin' was bein' shined up in the hallowed hall of Brackenridge High.

About two years ago, Charlie sent me overlay 3-views of *Blipo* and my *Feather Merchant 46*. When designing the aircraft, the designers had no contact but the two designs are almost identical! A difference consists of a slightly lower thrust line in *Blipo*. Another difference was the use of a tapered wing in the *Feather merchant 46* – instead of the elliptical *Blipo* wing. You know, my fingers just don't like spelling that name!

To my knowledge, Charlie's designs have all been very successful. They have included rubber models (both stick and fuselage, hand launch gliders, sailplanes (his *Park Ranger* should be published), and Free Flight competition in all-internal-combustion classes. For some reason, he was never excited about Radio Control. He says when equipment gets small enough to put in a Wakefield, his interest will increase. Another odd fact about Charlie is that he has never become interested in Indoor. When Charlie is interested in something, he develops it to perfection. If he isn't interested, he leaves it alone. Perhaps, just perhaps, he isn't interested in spelling...

I left San Antonio and Charlie went to work at Duncan Field, an Air Corps Repair Center across the Frio City Road from Kelly Field, as a draftsman. A large runway connected the two facilities the San Antonio Gas Model Airplane Association used prior to WWII. Very shortly after the way, the two fields were merged into the largest repair center in the world and named Kelly Field. The Army Air Corps wound up as the U.S. Air Force.

Charlie became a designer, specializing in exotic materials and special castings. His drawings were faultless, except for spelling, of course. He retired some years ago and, in addition to his model activities, worked as a material consultant in that specialty he developed at Kelly. Several years ago, I visited him for the SAM Champs at Seguin. We had a full week of good times. I even saw Hilton Mollenhauer, but failed to get his address. I am so very glad I made the visit. For many years, we kept in touch, mostly by telephone, and traded ideas. In January 1993, I sent him a photo of an airplane I designed in 1941 and named *Hobo*, asking if he could verify it as an Old Timer. He did so with a neatly typed letter dated January 26, with all words correctly spelled. I received it with a note dated February 1 from a mutual friend, Don McCluskey, who typed it for Charlie. The note said Charlie was in a nursing home and was failing fast. He died before I got the confirmation.

I look back on our early days of modeling with true nostalgia. Charlie Barron is a part of my life I will always remember with deep affection. The idyllic period with my *Blipo* buddy, covering those years just before WWII was, indeed, a time to remember.

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