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# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of EDWARD (ED) J. KAZMIRSKI



June 20, 1921 - December 31, 2007

Started modeling in the late 1920s

AMA #690746

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Information supplied by EJK (02/2003), Also writing by DW (08/2010); Written & Edited by SS (03/2003), Reformatted by JS (10/2009), Updated by JS (12/2010, 05/2011)

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## Career:

- Won the 1960 Internationals with his Orion plane, a Radio Control model
  - Won the 1961 Nationals with a variation on his Orion plane
  - His Tauri, Orion and Taurus were kitted by Top Flite Models in Chicago
  - Directed a contest in Japan for the United States Air Force
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*The following biography is based upon a phone interview between Ed Kazmirski and Stacey Shannon for the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program). The interview was conducted on February 10, 2003.*

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## The Beginning

Edward J. Kazmirski began building models as a child and continued throughout much of his life. Ed started out with Free Flight models then later ventured into Radio Control models. His love for modeling grew out of his excitement and fascination over being able to build something that would fly.

Ed's very first model came not from a kit, but instead was something he put together on his own without any help. The rubber band-powered model was made of 1/16-square balsa and covered with silk, very fragile and very light. Ed enjoyed flying that plane immensely. His thrill with model design would later pay off through the kitting of three Radio Control models.

It wasn't until the 1950s, though, that Ed joined his first modeling club in Chicago. It was called the Chicago Radio Control Modelers club and he stayed with the club for 12 years. Ed got into Radio Control models instead of Free Flight because of the frustration of losing Free Flight models. He wanted to have control of his model and not lose it.

## Competition

Ed's competition activities began later in life after he was involved with Radio Control modeling. First, he competed in many local contests and found that competition added a new element to modeling, which he enjoyed. Soon enough Ed was competing at the national and international level.

In 1960, Ed won the Internationals in Zurich, Switzerland, flying his Orion, which is now in possession of the National Model Aviation Museum. The experience of competing internationally is something that Ed will never forget. The 1960s Internationals were the first in which the United States competed, so the U.S. team was interested to see what other countries

were building and other countries were interested to see the models coming from the United States. According to Ed, Dr. Walt Good was the team manager.

When Ed and the rest of the United States team were checking in, some of the German, Swedish and French competitors came over to check out their planes. They began shaking their heads at the American models with good finishes telling people that the models would not do well because they obviously had not been test flown. The other teams thought the Americans had brought only showpieces, not real competitive models.

The tables turned, though, when the Americans won the Internationals. After that, the designs and finishes on the American planes were accepted internationally. This win also led to other opportunities for Ed. He began getting requests from all over the world to fly demonstrations. Ed went to South Africa to Rhodesia, as it was at that time, and flew demonstrations at rugby fields and cricket fields.

Of all the events surrounding the 1960 Internationals, though, Ed particularly remembers an event that happened while he was traveling. He flew into the London airport on his way to Switzerland and had a layover before he caught his connecting flight. After he landed, an announcement came over the P.A. system: "Will Ed Kazmirski please report to the telephone?" Ed was scared something had happened back at home and hurried to the phone. He dialed the number he was given and a gentleman answered. He said, "My name is Ronnie Moulton and I'm the editor of Aeromodeller" – a modeling magazine published in Britain – "You've got a six-hour layover, what would you like to do?"

Ed was relieved that nothing was amiss at home and asked to meet some of the modelers in the area. He enjoyed the time spent there and said that everyone was nice to him, as if he were part of a big fraternity.

National competition went well for Ed also. He designed and built a new plane each year for competition and in 1961, at age 40, he won the Nationals with a variation of his Orion model, which was successful at the 1960 Internationals.

### **Designs and Experiments**

Three of Ed's Radio Control planes were kitted by Top Flite Models in Chicago. The first was the Orion, then the Taurus and, finally, the Tauri, a trainer. All three were quite successful because they were designed for contest work, but were also smooth flyers. Though all three planes were kitted in the early to mid 1960s, Ed still gets calls about them today (2003).

Ed was featured on the cover of the January 1963 issue of Model Airplane News magazine with one of his planes. He is unsure how many kits were sold, but said they dominated the market for quite some time.

Throughout his years in modeling, including a break for work obligations, Ed has designed approximately 10 models. He is proud to have been a pioneer in Radio Control. He said that he and other designers from about 1955 to 1965 helped develop designs and ideas that changed

flight characteristics of airplanes. The basic design developed then is still being used today (2003). Prior to this period of design and innovation, many model airplane designs were cruder, according to Ed.

### **Leadership**

Ed has been an active member in the model clubs he has belonged to in the Chicago area though never took on a position such as president. He said that there were always plenty of other modelers willing to lead and he enjoyed being on the flying field the most. Ed's work also prohibited him from spending too much time on modeling. After spending three years in the service, Ed started a machine shop with his father, which grew to have 150 employees and run 24 hours a day. Being so involved in the business allowed Ed little time for modeling and he eventually gave it up for a while.

He has directed contests held by his club and once was asked to go to Japan to direct a modeling contest held by the United State Air Force.

### **The Present**

Currently (2003), Ed has tried to get back into flying a bit at the age of 81. He has found that he isn't able to fly as he used to because his reflexes have changed. He looks back fondly on his modeling days and still enjoys talking with people who call about his models.

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*The following biography was published in the August 2010 issue of Model Aviation magazine, written by Duane Wilson.*

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### **Kaz!**

By: Duane Wilson

**IT STARTED AS** a simple announcement on an RC Universe (RCU) forum that a model was being auctioned. But it wasn't just *any* airplane; it was arguably the most famous sport and RC Aerobatics (Pattern) aircraft designed in the more than 50 years of RC history: Ed Kazmirski's legendary Taurus.

More than a year later, modelers around the world are still talking about the Taurus and his other designs. If you have never heard of him, the Taurus, or his other creations, read on; you might want to fly them someday soon.

**The Taurus is** perhaps the first modern Pattern airplane. It was originally designed to fly on a .45 two-stroke engine and old toggle-switch reed radio system of the early 1960s. Many of today's aeromodelers who have piloted it say that the Taurus flies even better with today's proportional radios and a .45- to .61-size two-stroke or equivalent four-stroke engine.

The Taurus also makes a great electric-powered model. With a 70-inch wingspan, and designed for precision aerobatics, it is still a great Pattern trainer or super-smooth-flying sport aircraft.

There were many pioneers of early RC Pattern, each with his own contribution to the hobby, but Ed Kazmirski (often referred to as “Kaz”) was easily, the most famous. He emerged on the national scene just as Pattern competition was starting to hit its stride. Before long, everyone at the field seemed to be flying a trainer, a Cub, or a Taurus.

Even as a newcomer to competition, his ability to master reed radios allowed him to claim his first victory at the prestigious Detroit Invitational the first time he entered. Kaz quickly established himself as the man to beat among the leading pilots of the day. Not only a superb competitor, he was also an influential leader, a trendsetter, and a self-taught designer.

Kaz was not only the best-known pilot in the US, but he became a worldwide RC celebrity because of his extensive travels overseas. Those trips included RC aerobatic demonstration tours to the African nation of Rhodesia and to Japan.

He was named to the US Pattern team for the World Championships twice, traveling to Switzerland and Belgium. He managed the team in 1965.

Kaz was a true “rock star” in RC circles, with many contributions to the hobby and an amazing number of activities and accomplishments concentrated into a relatively short span of time. He flew off of the USS *Lexington* aircraft carrier for US Navy sailors and demonstrated RC in a Major League baseball park in front of thousands of Chicago White Sox fans. Those are only a couple of the many experiences Kaz had during his extraordinary RC career.

But almost as quickly as he appeared on the aerobatic competition scene, he withdrew from it, in the late 1960s, citing primarily the need to spend more time tending to the family business. However, there might have been other factors, including the rise of (then-new and easier to fly) proportional radios and the tremendous influx of competitive pilots as Pattern competition quickly grew in popularity.

After leaving RC, Kaz turned his talents to other interests including photography, in which he created a nationally recognized name for himself. He had published many award-winning photos in travel publications such as *National Geographic Travel*.

Although Kaz left RC behind, he had made a permanent mark on RC and Pattern competition as a man ahead of his time. He has many innovations to his credit, shaping the sport for years to come.

Similar to a national founding father, Kaz hasn’t been forgotten. He later said that the 11 years spent in RC were the best of his life.

**The Taurus Puzzle:** Few people knew what had become of Kaz’s models, or if they even existed decades later. But speculation ended with that one-sentence announcement on RCU’s Classic RC Pattern Flying forum in June 2008.

Those of us who were interested in the designer and his airplanes were amazed to see the pictures of his two remaining personal Tauruses that were offered by Chuck Noble, who was the owner of the auction house that handled Kaz's estate.

The aircraft had not only survived, but they had been carefully preserved in the travel crate that was built for his first overseas trip 47 years earlier. The models were in surprisingly good condition, considering their age and their extensive flight histories, and required only minimal restoration and cleanup. The painted finishes looked better than those on most of the models you typically see today at the flying field.

In time, Chuck released new information about, photos of, and details of the aircraft. What at first was an object of curiosity quickly turned into an international investigation. Taurus fans, like "aircraft archeologists," went through their RC magazine archives, contributing rare photos, specifications, and data as Kaz's RC career was put under the microscope.

The story was much more complicated (and interesting), than we had imagined. A nucleus of five of us from diverse locations worldwide (including Germany, Netherlands, Ireland, and New Zealand) contributed hard facts and ideas, as well as lots of speculation and educated guesses.

These discussions were, at times, "frank" (as they say in diplomatic circles); however, we had the common goal of wanting to find the true history of the Taurus along with the proper sequence of events that led to each of Kaz's designs.

The first Taurus auctioned (which started the forum thread) was the most famous of Kaz's two models and the inspiration for the Top Flite kit released in 1963. The Vintage Radio Control Society (VR/CS) purchased the aircraft for donation to the AMA museum in Muncie, Indiana.

A fellow VR/CS member and I purchased the second of Ed's Tauruses (which I had seen him fly as a young teen). The Taurus 2, as it is now known, has since been restored to its original flying condition and has been flown a handful of times at special events.

In spite of the risks of flying it, we think that at least one of Kaz's airplanes deserves to test its wings and take to the air once more as a living memorial to him. It still flies beautifully.

**Legendary models** are great for a reason: they have withstood the test of time. After nearly 50 years, the Taurus's excellent flying characteristics continue to make it a favorite.

Even during the period when the Taurus was the world's premier Pattern aircraft, Kaz noted that it was so stable he had to develop a special kickup elevator with the reed radio to get it to spin. With its moderate and consistent airspeed throughout maneuvers, the Taurus remains so easy to fly that the average aerobatic pilot can concentrate on performing maneuvers—not on fighting the model through them.

At well more than 80 pages and 80,000-plus hits, the Ed Kazmirski's Taurus thread on RCU's Classic RC Pattern Flying forum is long to wade through, but there is a reward in the form of much solid historical documentation among all the opinions and theories.

When exploring the Taurus's evolution, we developed a sense of what Kaz was trying to achieve and how this special airplane influenced aircraft design for years.

We think we have a good timeline for many of the highlights of Kaz's career, but several questions remain unanswered. What about a nearly finished variant that was discovered and preserved with the other two models for more than 40 years? When was it built?

What happened to the pusher Taurus and other prototypes? Was Kaz truly satisfied with the final Taurus 2? If not, what would he have changed? I hope we can continue to learn, from new sources, about what is arguably the most famous RC model.

For those who want to fly something different while flying a piece of history, Jeff Petroski of Home and Hobby Solutions (see "Sources" for contact information) has a reasonable laser-cut kit of the Taurus. He has kits for Kaz's Orion, Taurus 2, and large-scale Simla designs in the works.

I believe that many answers are still out there and hope that aeromodelers who knew and flew with Kaz can add to, or correct, the reconstructed history we have to help us complete the story.

### **Kazmirski: The Innovator**

When Ed "Kaz" Kazmirski of Chicago, Illinois, emerged on the national scene, it was obvious that he had an extraordinary talent for flying with "reed" radio equipment. He also had a drive for excellence and a natural gift for experimentation.

Following is a description of Kaz from an issue of Grid Leaks (an aeromodeling magazine of the time).

"He's a guy who ponders, who does not accept the satisfactory as the ultimate, who visits airports to study real-estate details, or consults with full-scale authorities who have broken ground in fresh areas..."

Other descriptions of him were similar. Kaz seemed to always be looking for a better design, by means of research and intuition. He flew RC in an age before computer-assisted design, when designing Pattern aircraft was as much trial and error as it was engineering.

From the beginning, Kaz chose not to compete with a stock-built airplane. The earliest information we have reports his competing in 1959 with a "modified" Astro-Hog (a leading design of the time). He was in his late 30s, as were most of the pioneers of Pattern.

Early success led Kaz to create his first original design, the Orion, for the following season. He proved the effectiveness of his earliest modifications and made his Orion famous by consistently

winning contest with it, including the 1960 World Championships, held that year in Switzerland. Top Flite kitted the design shortly thereafter.

Almost immediately after his win at the World Championships, Kaz started work on a radically different Pattern concept he called the “Taurus.” During what became a four-year development period, he produced at least two prototypes of which we are aware.

The first was derived from the Orion, but it wouldn’t have been recognizable to us today as a Taurus. The long nose moment and stubby tail proved to be a disappointment, as Ed said in an interview.

Learning from that effort, Kaz developed the second prototype on the concept of smooth flying, higher drag, and slower, more constant speed. The flight characteristics resulted from an attempt to build as light of a model as possible that employed a relatively thick airfoil, short nose, and long tail moment. These design features became the benchmark for all Taurus models.

From all of the evidence we have obtained while studying the evolution of the several Taurus variants, it appears that Kaz never drew formal plans for this designs. The earliest plans we have were the second prototype; Frank Myers drew it, and it was labeled the “Prototype Contest Model.”

That version was dated December 6, 1961, and it was drawn *after the fact* from the completed model. The plans provide a first-flight date of Thanksgiving 1961. This model sports a pilot figure named “F.U. Kilroy” (who greatly resembles Kaz), smoking a cigar.

Dennis Hunt, who is originally from what is now the African nation of Zimbabwe, coordinated Kaz’s first overseas tour in April 1962 to promote RC in general and precision aerobatics in particular. Dennis later relocated to the US and is currently a leader in the Senior Pattern Association (SPA).

With his South African accent, soft-spoken Dennis recalls that as part of the tour arrangements, he built a duplicate of Kaz’s Taurus in case he was unable to transport his airplanes to South Africa. (This was before the Top Flite kit or even the prototype plans.)

As described in *the Model Airplane News* article, “Our Mr. K. Goes to Africa,” Kaz sent Dennis letters and audiotapes describing the details of his new prototype. Some of the sketches were drawn on “crude brown paper.” In the end, Kaz was able to ship his own aircraft for the three-week tour.

Two months after returning home, Kaz flew his Taurus to a Nats win and plans were made for a second kit. During the summer of 1962, his friends and fellow competitors flew many Taurus prototypes. That gave the new design an impressive contest record before it was even released.

That was a great marketing technique, but the Taurus legend was firmly established for another reason. The fresh, new design had to be a superior aircraft that could out-fly the competition, which it convincingly did.

The Taurus was not a single model, but more of an evolution spanning several years. It began with the first Orion hybrid and changed with each successive version. It is now clear that Kaz never built two identical models, but continued to experiment as the design evolved.

He experimented with two airfoils and changed the wing shape and position, stabilizer thickness, and tail-moment length. However, all versions adhered to the same successful formula. The second-generation Taurus, which was flown during the 1964 season, employed a tapered LE and straight TE, which are found on most subsequent Pattern airplanes.

Kaz borrowed a new airfoil from Fritz Bosch: a German pilot he met at the 1963 World Championships. The Bosch airfoil was symmetrical and had a sharper LE for a better spin, yet it retained its thickness for the increased drag that Kaz wanted.

A new feature was a large, thick-sectioned horizontal stabilizer, again to presumably increase drag. The fuselage was also sleeker in appearance and had the longest tail moment of the series.

Magazine clips and photos featuring Kaz and his projects continued to surface on the RCU thread, revealing previously unknown-about models. We were surprised to learn that several Taurus variants were built during a relatively short span of years; even the jet-like pusher Taurus was built for the 1964 Toledo model show.

The biggest surprise to the aeromodeling world was in 1965, when Kaz turned in a new direction again, with an ambitious project based on the Taurus: a large-scale, 102-inch-wingspan model that was designed to fly better and smoother than the conventional-size Pattern aircraft of the time.

By May of that year, Kaz unveiled what proved to be an exciting but troubled airplane that was decades ahead of the large-scale and 2-meter aerobatic aircraft that are common today. The “Simla,” named after a town in the Himalaya mountains, served as an experimental design.

It had adjustable wing positions (shoulder, mid, and low), adjustable dihedral and incidence, and, most innovative of all, plug-in wings, which was unheard of in the mid-1960s. As did all of Kaz’s designs, this model drew a crowd wherever it went.

I interviewed Kaz by phone about the Simla (read about it in the October 2007 *MA*’s “In the Air”) shortly before his death in 2007. It had generated a great deal of renewed interest when its picture was published in the July *MA*.

Kaz told me that before the first flight, a photographic floodlight fell on the Simla during a professional photo shoot. According to him, the light landed “right on the CG...”

Flight performance suffered from the extra 12 ounces of weight added during repairs on this airplane (with a .60 two-stroke engine), which was already much larger and heavier than other models of the time. Still, the Simla flew well in several contests and underwent two modifications in an effort to improve performance before competing in the 1965 Nats.

Unfortunately, the Simla's life was short. It mysteriously disappeared from its storage place in the crawlspace of Kaz's home and was permanently lost. It was a difficult loss for him and, as with all of his designs, there were no plans.

This incident might have hastened Kaz's early departure from RC. You could hear the sense of loss in his voice while telling the Simla's story after all those years, but he was gratified to learn of the modeling public's renewed interest in his last design.

The story isn't over, though. After Kaz's passing, previously unknown-about photographs of the Simla were found in his estate, making it possible, for the first time, to reconstruct his final creation.

There is now a Simla re-creation project underway; I'm sure Kaz would have loved to see it fly again.

The Taurus legend lives on as people rediscover its gentle but distinctively Pattern flight characteristics. The VR/CS has named it its "theme model" for 2010.

### **Kaz's Achievements**

- September 1957: Kaz's first 1<sup>st</sup> place finish
- August 1959: Participated in Nats with modified Astro-Hog
- June 1960: Orion plans published
- July 1960: FAI Championships in Switzerland, Orion takes win
- November 1960: Orion kit released
- August 1961: Participated in Nats with modified Orion.
- November 1961: First flight of "contest prototype" Taurus
- December 1961: First formal Taurus plans drawn
- April 1962: Kaz's three-week tour of Africa
- August 1962: Taurus wins at Nats
- October 1962: Taurus plans published in *Radio Control Models and Electronics* magazine
- December 1962: Top Flite releases Taurus kit
- January 1963: Taurus plans/article published in *Model Airplane News* magazine
- August 1963: Kaz's USS *Lexington* carrier demonstration
- August 1963: Taurus takes 3<sup>rd</sup> at FAI Championships in Belgium
- Early 1964: *R/C Expert* article about Japanese tour with Taurus 2
- March-April 1964: *Grid Leaks* publishes article about the Kazmirski pusher
- April 1964: Tauri (high-winged trainer) plans published
- August 1964: Kaz participates in Nats with Taurus 2
- May 1965: Simla debuts
- August 1965: *Radio Control Modeler* ad shows Simla
- August 1965: Kaz participates in Nats with Simla
- Kaz is captain of 1965 US team at FAI World Championships

**Sources:**

Kazmirski RCU thread:

[www.rcuniverse.com/forum/forumid\\_379/tt.htm](http://www.rcuniverse.com/forum/forumid_379/tt.htm)

Home and Hobby Solutions, Inc

2076 Mountain Laurel Rd.

Lancaster, SC. 29720

[www.homeandhobbysolutions.net](http://www.homeandhobbysolutions.net)

Vintage Radio Control Society

(607) 754-5279 (President Bob Noll)

[www.vintagercsociety.org](http://www.vintagercsociety.org)

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**AMA History Project**

National Model Aviation Museum

5151 E. Memorial Dr.

Muncie IN 47302

(765) 287-1256, ext. 511

historyproject@modelaircraft.org

