



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of FRANK B. BAKER



Written by FBB (07/2015), reformatted by JS (12/2015)

The following was written by Frank B. Baker and submitted to the History Project in 2015.

Frank B. Baker

His first successful building of a model airplane was a Fairchild 22 stick-and-tissue Comet kit. He was seven years old at the time. Building rubber-powered models was all the rage in the 1930s, as nearly every kid in his neighborhood was engaged in the activity. In the late 1930s, he earned enough money as a golf club caddy to purchase a GHQ gas engine. It would pop occasionally but it never ran. After many hours of caddying, he had enough money to purchase an Ohlsson & Rice .23 that ran perfectly. He used it to power several different kit models. It also inspired him to design his own free flight models.

In WWII, the US Navy sponsored a program where high school students carved 1/72 scale models of military airplanes. These were used to train aviation cadets in aircraft identification. The number of models you built determined the Navy rank of the certificate you earned. Fifty models earned the rank of Admiral. He was awarded this rank and was given the certificate by the Governor of Minnesota.

During World War II, he was in the Navy V-5 program. During the Korean War, he flew fifty combat missions as a navigator on Douglas B-26 reconnaissance aircraft. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and an Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters.

During the early 1950s, his attention turned to U-Control models. He flew stunt and scale models. Two of his designs, a Spitfire (1955) and a ME109 (1956) were published as construction articles in *Model Airplane News*. He also attended numerous local contests and collected a number of trophies in stunt events. He flew a scale Curtiss Robin U-Control in one of the NAS Glenview Nationals. He still has the model.

By the late 1950s, radio control was in its infancy. By and large his radio equipment was built from kits based on magazine articles: rudder-only control via escapements or "Mighty Midget" electric motors for proportional rudder control. The publication *Grid Leaks* was a major source of information for those who built their own transmitters, radios, and servos "from scratch." He built a low wing Astro Hog with four controls and proceeded to teach himself to fly "multi-channel". Surprisingly, the model survived the many mishaps.

His pal and AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame member Owen Kampen designed 1/2A R/C models that were sold by Ace R/C in kit form. In many cases, Owen would build the prototype and Frank would test fly it.

In 1962, Frank accepted a faculty position at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Shortly thereafter six modelers, including Frank, got together and organized the Madison Area Radio Control Society (MARCS). Over the years, the membership grew to a maximum of 220 members, and has about 80 at the present time. In the 1970s, he served a three-year term as president. The club was well known for its sailplane symposiums. These were attended by the leaders of the U.S. sailplane community and some Europeans. Proceedings of the symposiums were published.

In 1969, he restored a badly damaged 1946 Piper J-3 Cub to like-new condition. He has flown over 71,695 miles cross-country and accumulated more than 3,600 pilot hours in his Cub. Tales of his flying adventures can be found in his book, Piper Cub Tales.

Over the years, he specialized in designing and constructing R/C scale models. Many of these were published in *Model Aviation* and its predecessors. In college, he had taken two years of engineering drafting classes, so drawing plans was accomplished easily. Overall, he published 19 articles in various magazines. These models ranged in size from .049 (cubic inch displacement engine) powered models to 101-inch wingspan WWII bombers. (See a list of models and photographs below and on the next few pages.)

He received some interesting feedback from several of these articles. A fellow who flew Westland Lysanders in the RAF sent him an email about flying the plane. Frank corresponded for several years with the President of the Short Stirling Association in England. Frank sent him a set of model plans for the Short Stirling. The 2006 B-24 article put Frank in contact with a pilot who flew on the famous Ploesti raid. The pilot sent Frank a large picture of his B-24 flying at low altitude through smoke and fire on the raid.

By the age of 86, in 2013, Frank had an inventory of 58 R/C models, including most of the 19 mentioned below. Due to an abundance of models, he ended up with quite a few that only had a limited number of flights, while another group served as his favorite “every day flyers.”

In 2015, he was inducted into the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

1955-2006 Construction Articles and Design Plans

1. ‘Spitfire Stunter’, *Model Airplane News*, August 1955, p.18. Plan 24637 AMA.
2. ‘Messerschmitt ME 109’, *Model Airplane News*, Nov.1956, p.12. Plan 25501 AMA.
3. ‘B-24’, *Radio Control Modeler*, December 1966, p.23. Plan 195 from RCM.
4. ‘P-51D’, *Radio Control Modeler*, September 1967, p.23. Plan 14029 AMA.
5. ‘Mitchell B-25’, *Model Aviation*, March 1979, p.18. Plan 253.
6. ‘Hare by A. Scidmore and F. Baker’, *Model Aviation*, October 1979, p.45. Plan 279.
7. ‘Varieze’, *Radio Control Modeler*, December 1979, p.49. Plan 784 from RCM.
8. ‘Vicker’s Wellington Mk1’, *Model Aviation*, December 1980, p.10. Plan 320.
9. ‘P-61 Black Widow’, *Model Aviation*, February 1982, p.24. Plan 359.
10. ‘DH 98 Mosquito’, *Model Aviation*, July 1983, p.30. Plan 412.
11. ‘Westland Whirlwind’, *Model Aviation*, June 1986, p.89. Plan 515.
12. ‘Short Sterling’, *Model Aviation*, March 1989, p.24. Plan 613.

13. 'Gipsy Moth', *Model Aviation*, September 1994, p.33. Plan 768.
14. 'Consolidated PT-3', *Model Aviation*, October 1997, p.24. Plan 840.
15. 'Gipsy Moth', *Model Aviation*, January 2001, p.16. Plan 901.
16. 'Westland Lysander', *Model Aviation* July 2002, p.29. Plan 930.
17. 'Northrop A-17', *Model Airplane News*, January 2003, p.124. Plan FSP0103A MAN.
18. 'Douglas O-46A', *Model Aviation*, February 2004, p.29. Plan 951.
19. 'B-24D Liberator', *Model Aviation*, September 2006, p.27. Plan 992.



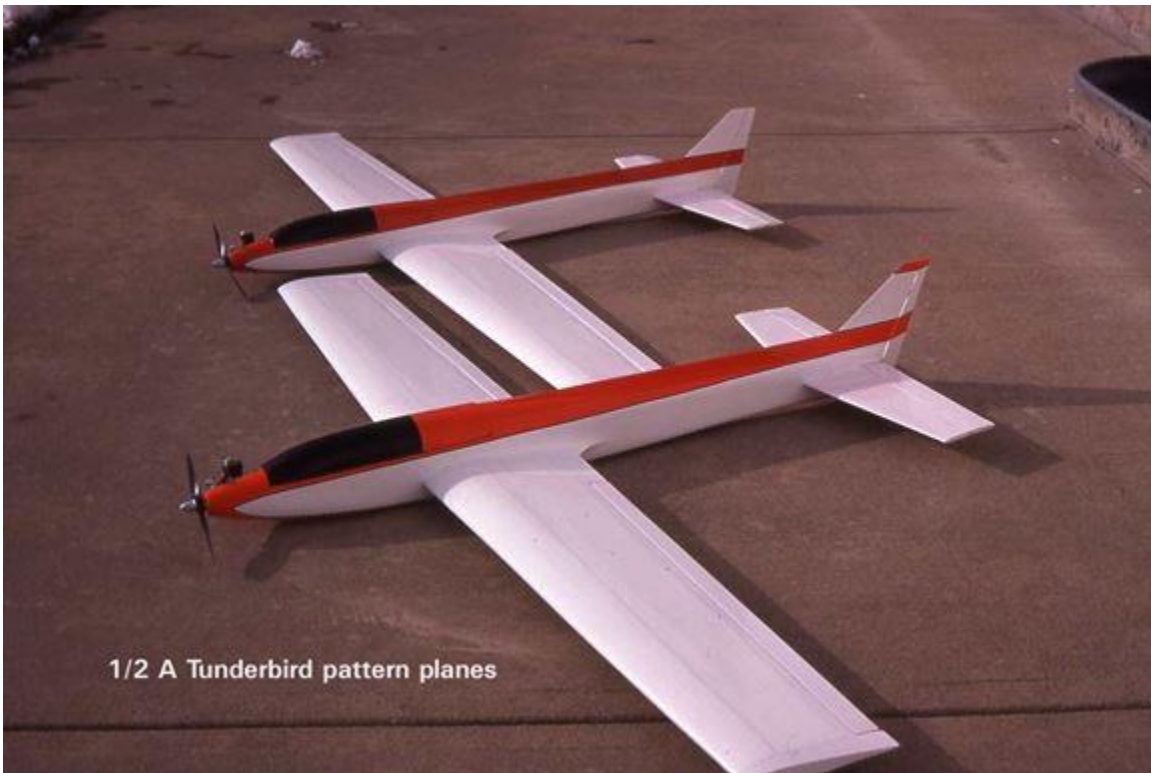
1941 New Cyclone Thunderbird 72"ws OS .26 four cycle
R/C assisted Free Flight



Curtiss Condor, 60'' WS, Magnum .15 engines



Northrop A-17, 54"WS, OS .25 engine



1/2 A Tunderbird pattern planes

Multi-Engine Warbirds (Scale RC)



Short Sterling
British



B-24D Liberator



Vicker's Wellington
British



Westland Whirlwind
British



P-61 Black Widow



DH 98 Mosquito
British

Single Engine (Scale RC)



Gipsy Moth
British



Douglas O-46A



Westland Lysander
British



Northrop A-17
Retractable landing gear



2015: Frank B. Baker in his workshop.

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